

The use of wordplay in advertisements published in men's magazines. A comparative study in the UK and Spain¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the use of wordplay in advertisements published in the British and Spanish editions of three well-known men's magazines, namely *Esquire*, *GQ*, and *Men's Health*. The function of puns in advertising is explained from the perspective of Relevance Theory. In spite of requiring additional processing effort from the addressee, puns reveal themselves as an economical way of producing additional positive cognitive effects. They also contribute to the creation of a positive attitude towards the promoted product and are useful attention-getting devices. All in all, 208 advertisements were analysed, out of which 49 contained a pun. However, the tendency to use wordplay is higher in the British advertisements than in the Spanish ones, which can be explained by a long tradition of punning in the English-speaking countries and by a higher probability of finding homophones in the English language.

Keywords: advertising, puns, men's magazines, English, Spanish

El uso de los juegos de palabras en los anuncios publicados en revistas masculinas. Un estudio comparado en el Reino Unido y España

RESUMEN

Este trabajo se centra en el uso de los juegos de palabras en los anuncios publicados en las ediciones británicas y españolas de tres conocidas revistas masculinas, a saber, *Esquire*, *GQ* y *Men's Health*. La función que cumplen los juegos de palabras en la publicidad se explica desde la perspectiva de la Teoría de la Relevancia. A pesar de exigir al receptor un mayor esfuerzo de procesamiento, los juegos de palabras se revelan como una manera económica de producir efectos cognitivos positivos adicionales. También contribuyen a generar una actitud positiva hacia el producto anunciado y son recursos útiles

¹ I would like to thank the anonymous referees of this contribution for their valuable comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Needless to say, any remaining shortcomings are my own responsibility.

para captar la atención. Se han analizado en total 208 anuncios, de los cuales 49 incluyen un juego de palabras. Sin embargo, la tendencia a usar juegos de palabras es más acusada en los anuncios británicos que en los españoles, hecho que puede explicarse por la existencia de una larga tradición de juegos de palabras en los países anglófonos y por una probabilidad más elevada de encontrar homófonos en la lengua inglesa.

Palabras clave: publicidad, juegos de palabras, revistas masculinas, inglés, español

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1. INTRODUCTION

The delight that British advertising finds in the use of puns has often been highlighted, to the point that it has been suggested more than once (Redfern 1982, Tanaka 1994) that the British are fonder of wordplay in advertising than any other European people. In this sense, Simon Anholt, who works for the multilingual copywriting service *Translators in Advertising*, says: “The British like humour, especially irony and puns. But you have to change this for the Germans and Swedes, who say that they do not buy from clowns” (quoted in Tanaka 1994: 62). It is evident that in the United Kingdom there is a long wordplay tradition, represented for example by Shakespeare, the Metaphysical Poets or Lewis Carroll. However, it is not only this tradition that explains the extensive use of puns in British advertising, but there are many other factors which account for this fact.

Spain lacks a wordplay tradition which could compare to the English one. In fact, puns were not traditionally considered suitable for serious literary genres in Spain, which contrasts with the situation in England.² This paper intends to investigate the use of wordplay in British and Spanish print advertisements appearing in men’s magazines.³ Therefore, an analysis has been carried out of the advertisements published in the numbers corresponding to the month of July of 2009 of the British and Spanish editions of three well-known men’s magazines, namely, *Esquire*, *GQ*, and *Men’s Health*. The main reason why men’s magazines in general were chosen, apart from the high number of advertisements this type of publication normally contains, was to ensure as much homogeneity as possible in the advertisements which were to constitute the corpus of this study, with respect, for instance, to the products or services being advertised or to the target audience to which these advertisements

² See in this sense Díaz-Pérez (2010).

³ For the use of wordplay in other fields, such as film titles, see Díaz-Pérez (2008), where the problem posed by the translation of puns is also considered.

were addressed. As stated in Gregorio-Godeo (2009: 14), advertising is vital for men's magazines, which include a considerable number of pages containing advertisements for alcohol, technology, male clothing and accessories, grooming, etc. Moreover, this type of publication contains different features dealing with the assumed male lifestyle, is part of the popular-culture genres in the UK and Spain and the combination of language and images is essential in most of the advertisements it contains, which is also important when analysing puns, as will be explained below. Edwards (1997) has defined the target readers of these publications as "a quite specific and often fixed targeting of single, affluent, city-dwelling, high earning and high-spending, primarily heterosexual men to the exclusion of all others: that is all those who do not at least primarily aspire to this way of living or its values" (Edwards 1997: 76; quoted in Gregorio-Godeo 2009: 13-14). The three particular magazines which form the corpus of this study are amongst the most well-known ones within their genre and happen to have editions both in the United Kingdom and in Spain.

The theoretical framework used in this study as the basis for the analysis of puns in advertising has been Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory.⁴ This theory has proved to be useful for the analysis of the advertising register in general (Byrne 1992; Tanaka 1994; Díaz-Pérez 2000). Therefore, this paper attempts to shed some light on the use of puns in advertisements from a relevance-theoretic perspective. Attention will be paid to the motivations for the use of puns in advertising and, consequently, to the effects they may have on potential consumers. The interpretation of wordplay will also be explained from the perspective of Relevance Theory.

2. ON THE DEFINITION OF WORDPLAY

Among the existing definitions of wordplay, that offered by Delabastita (1993) has been adopted here, since it is precise and at the same time general enough to cover all the different types of wordplay:

wordplay is the general name indicating the various textual phenomena (i. e. on the level of performance or parole) in which certain features inherent in the structure of the language used (level of competence or langue) are exploited in such a way as to establish a communicatively significant, (near-)simultaneous confrontation of at least two linguistic structures with more or less dissimilar meanings (signifieds) and more or less similar forms (signifiers). (Delabastita 1993: 57)

This definition is broad enough to refer to a greater or lesser degree of similarity between the signifiers, instead of referring to identity. Therefore, phenomena such as

⁴ For a full account of Relevance Theory see Sperber and Wilson (1986) and for a summary of the theory's fundamentals, see Blakemore (1992), Wilson and Sperber (1994; 2004), or Díaz-Pérez (2000).

paronymy are also covered. As happens with the formal level, in the semantic level the degree of disparity can fluctuate, which implies that for instance the interplay between the accessibility to literal or figurative senses of a word can give rise to a pun. Another important aspect of this definition is related to the fact that the pun is “communicatively significant”, that is to say, it has a communicative effect, which can be humorous or of any other type. Other definitions, such as those by Sherzer (1978), Heller (1980) or Leech (1969) are too restrictive. The first two only account for those types of puns in which a lexical item or a sequence can be interpreted in two different ways –but not for those other types which are based on the close occurrence of two words or sequences which are similar, but not identical, in form, and totally different in meaning–, while the third one leaves out those puns which are based on syntactic ambiguity or on phenomena such as homophony or homography.

3. THE ROLE OF WORDPLAY IN ADVERTISING

3.1. ATTRACTING AND MAINTAINING ATTENTION

It is a well-known fact that the first task that an advertisement should fulfil is to attract attention. The audience, or potential consumers, are being constantly bombarded with hundreds of advertisements on TV, in the written press, on the radio, etc. Many of those advertisements run the risk of going unnoticed by the potential consumer, since, as stated by Cook (1992: 199), some of the characteristics of advertising discourse are that it is “parasitic” on other discourse types, “intrusive” and “uninvited”. In other words, advertisements are, using Cook’s own words, “thrust upon the reader or viewer without consultation” (Cook 1992: 199). When somebody is watching a TV programme or reading a magazine, it is the programme itself or the magazine itself that the viewer/reader is interested in, and not all the advertisements which find their way into the main focus of attention without asking for permission and becoming very often a real nuisance. It is for these reasons that “ads often exist on the periphery of receiver attention” and that “their brief is to gain and hold attention, fix a name with positive associations and go” (Cook 1992: 217). As put forward by Byrne (1992: 6), while the average addressee in a normal conversation would normally prefer processing utterances he considers boring rather than appearing impolite, in the case of advertising it is much more unlikely that the addressee bothers to process a statement he is not interested in.⁵

From the perspective of Relevance Theory, an addressee will make the effort to process a statement if he considers it to be relevant, that is to say, if he considers it

⁵ I will follow the convention of referring to the speaker/communicator as *she* and to the hearer/addressee as *he*.

will be able to modify or improve his cognitive environment or, in other words, his assumptions about the world. In this sense, Relevance Theory is based on a basic claim according to which human beings are biologically geared to paying attention and processing the information that is potentially relevant to them. Information which is not considered relevant, on the contrary, is being constantly filtered and dismissed, since it is not worth processing. That is why the first objective of the advertiser must be to attract the addressee or potential consumer's attention, so that the information transmitted by means of an advertisement should not be dismissed.

Tanaka (1994: 68) notices that "puns attract attention because they frustrate initial expectations of relevance and create a sense of surprise." Sánchez Corral (1991: 99) also emphasizes this role of puns as attention-getting devices. However, the advertiser has a price to pay, since, although on the one hand the pun can help to attract attention, on the other hand it imposes an extra processing effort on the audience. Obviously, information processing involves effort and, consequently, it will not be undertaken unless some type of reward is expected. In this sense, there is no point in drawing the addressee's attention to a given stimulus if it will not seem relevant enough to him to be worth his attention (See Sperber and Wilson 1995: 49). In other words, the addressee's expectations of relevance will have to be taken into account. The extra processing effort imposed on the addressee by puns is due to the fact that the addressee has to process at least two different meanings, and decide whether both are equally relevant or one of them is more relevant than the other one. The extent to which a meaning is more or less relevant will depend on its ability to connect with the addressee's background information and modify his cognitive environment or set of assumptions. In spite of the greater processing effort, the use of a pun presents the advantage that it can serve to retain the audience's attention, which in turn will help the advertisement to be remembered more easily.⁶ As Tanaka (1994: 69-71) points out, "because a pun takes longer to process, it sustains the addressee's attention over a period of time, and, once comprehended, it is often remembered."

3.2. MAKING THE ADVERTISEMENT ENJOYABLE

Once the attention of the audience has been attracted, the advertisement must try to arouse interest and, in short, be liked. This will produce a double effect. If an advertisement is considered interesting and enjoyable, it will be remembered more easily and for longer. In addition, the attitude of the potential consumer towards the product will probably be more positive. As signalled by McQuarrie and Mick (1999: 38-39), artful deviation which may be found in puns adds interest to an advertisement.

⁶ This additional processing effort can also be offset by other advantages, such as the production of extra positive cognitive effects, as will be explained below.

Thus, a cigarette advertisement which proclaims (1) should be more engaging to a potential consumer than another one which reads (2):

- (1) Today's Slims at a very slim price
- (2) Today's Slims at a very low price

The use of wordplay in advertising contributes to arousing interest and making the advertisement enjoyable in several ways. Tanaka (1994: 71) signals that solving a pun can produce “a pleasant feeling, springing from a kind of intellectual satisfaction”, which in turn would lead the addressee to think of the product in congenial terms. In this sense, as mentioned by van Mulken et al. (2004: 708), a pun can be considered as a riddle, and solving a riddle is a pleasant experience, as it flatters the addressee's intellectual capabilities. An important way in which wordplay helps to make an advertisement memorable and enjoyable is by endowing it with a humorous component. In this sense, as argued by Kosińska (2005: 77) and Dynel (2010: 106), the relevance of puns also lies in humour and wit, in such a way that the addressee may choose to devote more effort in order to obtain humorous effects.⁷ If the addressee finds the advertisement amusing, he will probably feel congenial towards the product which is being promoted. This humorous component will also help to suppress any critical reasoning, as Sánchez Corral (1991: 99) states. Puns, in this sense, reinforce the ludic and humorous illusion of language, keeping away any critical reflection upon the content.

Examples of puns with a humorous component in our corpus are found in a Spanish advertisement for a brand of tyres, (3), and in a British advertisement for a brand of hair gel, (4):

- (3) El neumático **verde**. Disponible sólo en negro. (Pirelli Cinturato P7) [*Men's Health, Esquire*]⁸
- (4) **Hot** spot. **Cool** hair. (Shockwaves Tuff Stuff Gel) [*Men's Health*]

Humour in the advertisement in (3) relies on the two meanings of the adjective *verde*. The most accessible meaning of that adjective in this context is “ecological, environmental friendly”. The impact of the image of the advertisement, a tyre which seems to be fused with a globe or spherical map, foregrounds this interpretation, which is also favoured by the assumption that an advertisement intends to transmit a positive image of the advertised product. With this short-memory store of information, the next stretch of discourse –in which *negro* appears– is processed,

⁷ For an account of humour from a relevance-theoretic perspective see Yus (2003, 2008).

⁸ The word or sequence containing the pun appears in bold type in all the examples from my corpus. Emphasis is mine.

forcing the reader into an inferential backtracking of the already processed sense of *verde*. Therefore, the addressee will now entertain simultaneously the other less accessible sense of *verde* in this context: “of a colour between blue and yellow in the spectrum”. It is the initial invalidation and later stressing of this latent sense that makes the advertisement effective and gives rise to humour. The addressee never abandons the ecological sense but entertains humorously the potential –but never actual– colour sense of *verde*. This latter sense only has punning purposes. In addition, the humorous effects derivable from the pun outweigh the extra processing effort involved in the processing of the two senses of the pun.



Figure 1. Pirelli advertisement

A similar case may be found in (4), as the adjectives *hot* and *cool*, being used in the same utterance, seem to refer to temperature and to stand in contrast with each other: “high in temperature” and “rather low in temperature, often in a pleasant way”. However, apart from their literal meanings, those two adjectives also have idiomatic senses. Thus, *hot*, being said of a spot or a place, means “fashionable, popular, and lively” or even “full of or characterized by sexual desire”, sense which the image of the advertisement seems to foreground, whereas *cool* indicates that something is “impressive because of being fashionable or attractive”. Those idiomatic senses help to endow the advertised product with positive connotations. With respect to the sexual connotations, as stated by Crook (2003: 735), it is evident that sex functions as an attention-grabber, but as the same author highlights, a sexual image may have a

second function, namely, to serve as input to inferential processes with regard to the advertisement as a whole. This second function forms part of what Crook (2003: 734) calls the “reward dimension” of advertisements, taking as a basis one of the three characteristics of successful advertisements identified by Jones (1997: 89): “[t]hey [successful advertisements] are likeable and offer a reward for watching because they are entertaining and amusing”. In Crook’s own words,

Perhaps a covertly communicated sexual interpretation might be irrelevant to the product, whilst remaining vital to the reward aspect of the advertisement. After all, a pleasing image (sexual or otherwise), a captivating melody or even an ingenious pun is generally pleasing, captivating or ingenious in isolation. (Crook 2003: 735)

In this sense, according to Sutherland and Sylvester (2000: 8), the stimuli used in advertisements are designed to produce just minute effects in their audience, so that success would be achieved in a cumulative way. Therefore, in their opinion, advertising is characterised by “gentle, mental biasing” rather than “heavyweight persuasion”. It has often been suggested that in our capitalist society the differences between a certain product and an analogous one are minimal. Thus, instead of focusing on the characteristics of the promoted product, the advertiser generally prefers “strategies which distract from or add to the literal meaning of language” (Cook 1992: 101), such as puns, by means of which the product is linked to “some other entity, effect or person, creating a fusion which will imbue the characterless product with desirable qualities” (Cook 1992: 105). These positive associations are achieved, as will be seen in the following section, in relevance-theoretic terms, by means of the creation of positive cognitive effects.



Figure 2. Shockwaves advertisement

According to different studies in the new field of lexical pragmatics, the meanings of words are very often pragmatically adjusted and fine-tuned in context, and as stated in Wilson and Carston (2007: 238), a theory of lexical pragmatics can account for pun-like cases, such as those in (3) and (4), involving wordplay. Lexical pragmatics within the framework of relevance theory would explain puns such as that in (3) by saying that the interpretation of the adjective *verde* in this context involves the construction of an ad hoc concept VERDE* whose denotation includes both the characteristic of being a colour between blue and yellow (VERDE₁) and the characteristic of being ecological, environmental friendly (VERDE₂).⁹ Similarly, the interpretation of the adjectives *hot* and *cool* in (4) could also be explained by resorting to ad hoc concepts HOT* and COOL*. As Wilson and Carston (2007: 238) state, this lexical adjustment may be a process which creates an ad hoc concept tied to a particular context that may never occur again. Moreover, this ad hoc concept “is fine-tuned to satisfy the particular expectations of relevance raised by the utterance” (Wilson and Carston 2006: 409).

In the puns contained in both advertisements, (3) and (4), one of the meanings is more relevant than the other one. In (3) the colour meaning of *verde* is much less relevant than the ecological meaning, since with the literal interpretation the statement would not make any sense at all and, in addition, such interpretation would not yield any favourable claim about the promoted product. Its point is to give rise to a pun and yield humorous effects. The same happens in (4) with the temperature interpretations. The use of the adjectives *hot* and *cool* next to one another within the

same advertisement brings to mind the literal meanings of those two adjectives, but the idiomatic interpretation is more relevant, as the literal one is not consistent with the principle of relevance and with the general purpose an advertisement is designed to serve.⁹ In cases such as these, the addressee, who knows that advertisements are designed to make a favourable claim about a product, will select a more relevant interpretation. In relevance-theoretic terms, it could be said that if (3) and (4) are processed in a context containing the contextual assumption in (5), the inferences, particularly the contextual implications, in (6) and (7) could respectively follow¹⁰:

- (5) An advertisement is generally designed to make a favourable claim about a product.
- (6) The ecological meaning of *verde* is more relevant in this context.
- (7) The idiomatic interpretations of *hot* and *cool* are more relevant in this context.

As mentioned above, in both advertisements the image helps the reader to interpret the slogan, a process which Leigh (1994: 23) has called *linkage*, a term used to represent an association by means of which headline and visual elements in an advertisement are mutually reinforcing, in such a way that one element calls attention to or provides information related to the other. Thus, visual information in an advertisement may help the reader to select the intended or more relevant interpretation of the headline or slogan.¹¹ The fusion of the tyre with the spherical map in the picture of the advertisement in (3), as said above, reinforces the interpretation of *green* as “ecological, environmental friendly”. Similarly, in (4), the image –portraying a guy with a fashionable hair style looking up at two pairs of shapely female legs– seems to reinforce the idiomatic interpretation of the slogan, which is the most relevant interpretation out of the two possible ones.

⁹ What the principle of relevance expresses is the assumption that a speaker who thinks it worthwhile communicating something will try to make her utterance as relevant as possible in the circumstances in which it is produced.

¹⁰ For further discussion of ad hoc concept construction within the relevance-theoretic view of utterance understanding, see for instance Carston (2002a, 2002b), Wilson and Sperber (2004), or Wilson and Carston (2006, 2007). The standard practice represents ad hoc concepts as starred concepts, e.g. *VERDE

¹¹ McQuarrie and Mick (1992: 181) use the term *resonance* to refer to those cases “in which wordplay in the headline is reinforced by an accompanying illustration”.

3.3. THE CREATION OF ADDITIONAL POSITIVE COGNITIVE EFFECTS

From the perspective of Relevance Theory, an input (e.g. an utterance) is relevant to an individual when it connects with background information available to that individual to give rise to conclusions that matter to him. In other words, “an input is relevant to an individual when its processing in a context of available assumptions yields a POSITIVE COGNITIVE EFFECT”¹² (Wilson and Sperber 2004: 608; authors’ emphasis). In Wilson and Sperber’s (2004: 608) own words, “[a] positive cognitive effect is a worthwhile difference to the individual’s representation of the world: a true conclusion, for example”. Any modification in an individual’s cognitive environment or in an individual’s assumptions about the world would be a cognitive effect. According to Relevance Theory, other things being equal, the greater the positive cognitive effects yielded by processing a given input, the greater the relevance of that input to the individual processing it. A pun in an advertisement creates additional positive cognitive effects which generally transmit a positive image of the product being advertised, which increases the relevance of the advertisement. Negative cognitive effects –such as false conclusions– as opposed to positive cognitive effects, would not lead to relevant outcomes.

Relevance Theory maintains that the more positive cognitive effects a statement produces and the less effort of interpretation it requires, the more relevant that statement will be. As mentioned above, while in some puns two meanings are communicated at the same time, responding in this way to Redfern’s maxim of “two meanings for the price of one word or phrase” (Redfern 1982: 269), in other puns, just one interpretation is intended to be retained. An example of the first type of pun can be found in the slogan of an advertisement for a watch, (8). In this case, the Spanish version of this advertisement has used exactly the same slogan, reproduced here as (9).

- (8) Breitling has built the chronograph **par excellence**. (Breitling Chronomat B01) [*GQ, Men’s Health*]
- (9) Breitling crea el cronógrafo **por excelencia**. (Breitling Chronomat B01) [*Esquire*]

In these advertisements, the reader will normally be primed to interpret the phrases *par excellence* or *por excelencia* as fixed expressions. Along the lines of this idiomatic interpretation, those sequences would have the meaning of “the best possible example of a particular thing.” Sinclair (1987), in this sense, argues that the idiom or phraseological principle of language is the dominant or default mode of interpreting discourse, as it demands less time and effort from the addressee. Giora

¹² The label used by Sperber and Wilson to refer to positive cognitive effects in previous versions (Sperber and Wilson 1986a; 1986b) of their Relevance Theory was contextual effects.

(2003: 18-21) also states that idiomaticity is more salient than literalness. However, the context may lead the addressee to reinterpret the sequence using the open-choice principle; that is to say, in its literal sense. In the context of an advertisement which will try to transmit an image of the product being advertised as positive as possible, it is entirely plausible that the addressee could interpret the phrase in a literal sense, interpretation which would also be favoured by the body copy of the advertisement, in which the excellence of the product is described.¹³ This process has been called “relexicalisation” by Partington (2009: 1799). The definition Partington offers of this term is “the ‘freeing-up’ of the parts of a normally fixed or semi-fixed, preconstructed lexical unit.” Therefore, after this process of relexicalisation, *excellence* or *excelencia* may also be interpreted in their literal senses, as “the possession chiefly of good qualities in an eminent or unusual degree.” Those idiomatic expressions which have a plausible literal interpretation, that is to say, which possess non-idiomatic meanings which are different from their figurative meanings, have been called “literal idioms” by Lim et al. (2009). It is precisely those literal idioms that can give rise to wordplay. As mentioned by Partington (2009: 1799), “it is the interplay, the enforced switching from one mode of interpretation to another, from the idiom to the open-choice, which is at the heart of a great part of wordplay.” This is the case in advertisements (8) and (9). Both interpretations are possible because the two of them fit the context of the advertisement and contribute to the creation of positive cognitive effects which offer a positive image of the advertised product. Thus, from the literal interpretation the audience would derive (10):

(10) Breitling Chronomat B01 is an extremely good chronograph.

This interpretation would produce a number of positive cognitive effects, among them (11) and (12):

(11) This chronograph measures time very precisely.

(12) You will not be disappointed if you buy this chronograph.

¹³ Fuselaje perfecto, motor de excepción: Breitling lanza un instrumento muy exclusivo (...) Un auténtico emblema del lujo, fabricado con un extremo cuidado del detalle y los acabados. Construido para ofrecer un máximo de robustez, funcionalidad y eficacia (...) Deportivo de alto rango (...) Un motor de altas prestaciones, fiable, preciso, de una arquitectura original y novedosa (...) Estética refinada, performance en estado puro.” (From the body copy of the Spanish advertisement)

“A perfect fuselage, an exceptional engine (...) A strong, unique and quintessential design (...) blend of power and elegance. An authentic luxury gem crafted with extreme care for detail and finishing. Built to provide maximum sturdiness, functionality and efficiency (...) A reliable, accurate, high-performance motor endowed with an original and innovative architecture (...) Refined aesthetics and raw performance”. (From the body copy of the English advertisement)

Nevertheless, the sequence can also be interpreted in its idiomatic sense, along the lines of (13):

- (13) Breitling Chronomat B01 is the best example of what a chronograph represents.

The addressee might in this case derive positive cognitive effects such as (14) and (15):

- (14) There is no other chronograph such as this one.
 (15) This is the best chronograph you could buy.

Therefore, in the previous advertisements neither of the interpretations is to be rejected as irrelevant, since both of them yield substantial positive cognitive effects, and therefore, they complement each other. In the previous advertisements, however, the literal and idiomatic interpretations are very close to each other. Other examples in which two interpretations are possible but in which the semantic differences between them both are more evident are (16) to (21).

- (16) Even more stylish. Even more **smiles** per gallon. (Volvo DRIVE) [*GQ, Men's Health*]
 (17) Police. Be **younique**. (Police watches and bracelets) [*GQ, Men's Health*]
 (18) Zamora **ensimisma**. (Zamora) [*Esquire*]
 (19) La vida no es como es. Es como tú la ves. Gran Feudo. 100% **rosa**. (Gran Feudo) [*GQ*]
 (20) **View** life from any **angle** (Nikon D5000) [*Men's Health*]
 (21) 125 gramos. El **peso** de la tradición. (IWC Gran Ingenieur Cronógrafo) [*Esquire, GQ*]

In all of them the two meanings conveyed by the word in bold fit the context in which it appears. Thus in (16) there is a phonologic pun on the paronymy between the words *smiles* and *miles*,¹⁴ both of which make sense in the sequence which constitutes the headline or slogan. Thus, both interpretations make a positive claim about the advertised product. On the one hand, the *miles* interpretation indicates that more distance will be travelled with the same amount of petrol and, on the other hand, the *smiles* interpretation indicates that driving the Volvo car is an amusing and pleasurable experience. Each of those interpretations produces its own positive cognitive effects. Thus, for instance, (22) is a cognitive effect derivable from the first

¹⁴ *Paronymy* is a phenomenon which relates two words which are similar, but not identical, in spelling and pronunciation.

of the interpretations, whereas (23) is a cognitive effect derivable from the second one:

- (22) You will spend less money on petrol with this car.
 (23) You will enjoy driving this car.

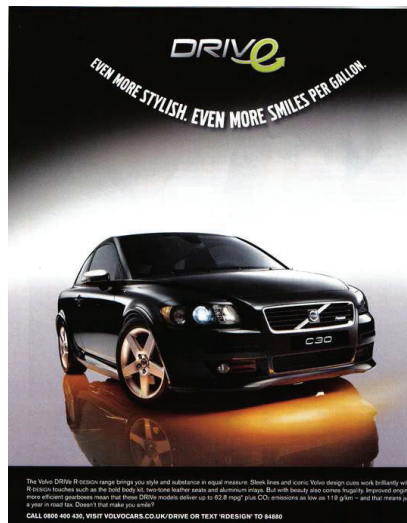


Figure 3. Volvo advertisement

The slogan in (17) presents a blending between *you* and *unique* which gives rise to wordplay. This type of pun is, as signalled by Nash (1985: 143), what Lewis Carroll had called a portmanteau. The slogan invites, then, the potential consumer to be himself and to be different from anybody else. Both interpretations are very closely related, and in that sense, they may produce similar positive cognitive effects. Thus, (24) and (25) would be positive cognitive effects derivable from the first interpretation, whereas (26) and (27) would be positive cognitive effects which could follow from the second interpretation.

- (24) These watches and bracelets will perfectly suit your style and personality.
 (25) You will be more yourself wearing these watches and bracelets.
 (26) You will feel special by wearing these watches and bracelets.
 (27) These bracelets and watches will endow you with a touch of distinction and exclusivity.

The Spanish advertisement used to promote the city of Zamora as a tourist resort, in (18), contains a morphologic pun, since the word *ensimisma* is the third person

singular of the word *ensimismar*, which means “engross”, but at the same time it is interpreted as though it were composed of three different morphemes, or in this case, rather, of three independent words. This is reflected in the typography, since a change of colour indicates the frontier between a word and the following one. Therefore, according to this second interpretation *ensimisma* becomes *en sí misma*, which means “in itself”. Thus, what the slogan of this advertisement conveys is that Zamora engrosses the visitor and that it has its own personality. Both readings are equally relevant, as both yield their own positive cognitive effects, associating Zamora with positive characteristics. Positive cognitive effects which could follow from the first of those readings would be, for instance, (28) and (29), whereas (30) and (31) are positive cognitive effects yielded by the second interpretation.

- (28) Zamora is so beautiful that you will be trapped by it.
- (29) You will have a wonderful time in Zamora.
- (30) Zamora is different from any other place you may have visited before.
- (31) What you can see in Zamora makes of it a unique city.

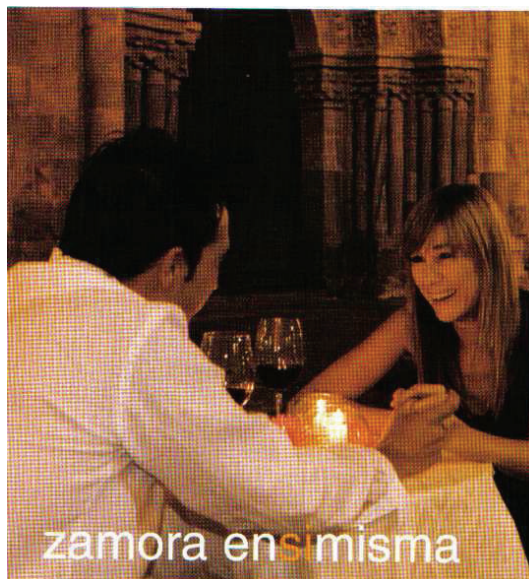


Figure 4. Zamora advertisement (detail)

Slogans (19) to (21) above contain polysemic puns, which implies that the two or more associated meanings are part of what is considered a single word. More specifically, in these particular cases wordplay is based on the simultaneous presence of the literal and metaphorical senses of certain words. Thus, the slogan in (19) plays

on two meanings of the word *rosa*. It refers to “a colour intermediate between red and white; a pale red, sometimes with a slight purple tinge” –which in this case is the colour of the wine being advertised, a *rosé* (or *rosado* in Spanish)–, but apart from that literal meaning, the figurative sense of the word *rosa* is related to something beautiful and even perfect or ideal. Therefore, both interpretations fit the context and yield their own positive cognitive effects. The literal one refers to the wine, or particularly to its colour, whereas the figurative one refers to *la vida*, to life, and in that sense, the advertisement associates the promoted wine with an ideal or perfect life. According to Wilson and Carston (2007: 235), this metaphorical or loose use would involve an expansion from the category ROSA to the category ROSA*, an ad hoc concept which includes both the actual colour and the characteristic of being perfect or ideal. In other words, this figurative use involves lexical broadening, or “the use of a word to convey a more general sense than the encoded one, with a consequent expansion of the linguistically-specified denotation” (Wilson and Carston 2007: 234). As stated for instance in Wilson and Sperber (2004: 620), loose uses, and in particular metaphorical uses, typically convey weak implicatures, which are not essential to satisfy expectations of relevance and for which the addressee must take some responsibility. In this case, a weak implicature could be related, for instance, to the possibility of being engaged in a romantic relationship. The noun *angle* in (20) means at the same time “shape that is made when two straight lines join or cross each other” –literal meaning– and “a particular way of thinking about something” –figurative meaning–, whereas the verb *view* also has a literal meaning –“watch”– and an idiomatic meaning –“consider, reckon”–. The literal interpretation of the slogan, then, refers to a technical characteristic of the camera –which has a vari-angle monitor–, whereas the idiomatic one makes reference to the different perspectives from which life may be considered or analysed, thus linking the product with positive connotations such as open-mindedness, curiosity or a spirit of adventure. Each one of those interpretations produces, then, its own positive cognitive effects, which makes both of them relevant.

The advertisement in (21) contains a polysemic pun on the word *peso* [“weight”]. Both the literal and the figurative senses are present in that vertical pun, namely “how heavy a person or thing is” and “the influence or importance that something has”.¹⁵ The reference to the heaviness, or rather the lightness, of the watch –125 grammes– makes the first interpretation relevant whereas the use of the word *tradición* [“tradition”] accounts for the relevance of the figurative interpretation.

¹⁵ The literal meaning is also present in the occurrence of the word *peso* in the body copy of the advertisement: “Menos mal que el peso de este cronógrafo de la manufactura IWC no ha aumentado lo mismo que nuestra experiencia (...)” [“Just as well that the weight of this IWC chronograph hasn’t increased with our experience (...)” (English version of the advertisement)]

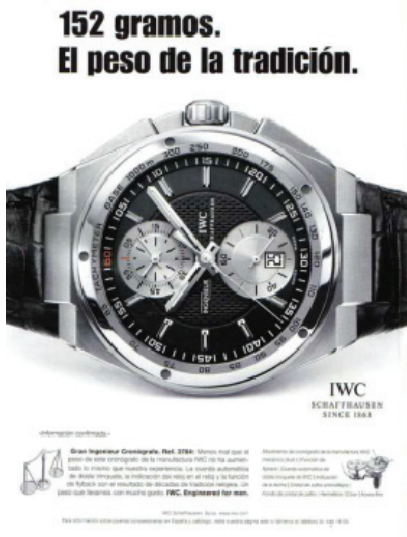


Figure 5. Gran Feudo advertisement
 Figure 6. Nikon advertisement
 Figure 7. IWC Gran Ingenieur cronograph advertisement.
 (Spanish version)

In another type of pun, although one of the interpretations is rejected, this rejected interpretation can still produce additional positive cognitive effects. However, according to Van Mulken et al. (2004: 707), puns used in advertisements which contain two relevant interpretations are considered a better choice by the potential consumers than puns with only one relevant interpretation. Headlines (32) and (33) serve to illustrate the latter type of pun.

- (32) 125 grammes. **Tonnes** of tradition. (IWC Big Ingenieur Chronograph) [*GQ, Esquire*]
 (33) I am not a **number**. (Tocco lite Samsung phone) [*GQ, Men's Health*]

Thus, the English version of (21), presented here as (32), contains a pun on the word *tonnes*, since a tonne is a unit for measuring weight, equal to 1,000 kilograms, but at the same time *tonnes* is a homophone of *tons*, an informal expression used to refer to a great quantity of something. The first of the interpretations is rejected in favour of the second one, but, in spite of that, that rejected interpretation is also relevant, since, as in (3) above, the processing of a literal sense which leads to incongruity –produced by the contrast between the literal meanings of *grammes* and *tonnes*– gives rise to humorous effects, which in turn contribute to the creation of a positive attitude towards the product.

Figure 8. IWC Gran Ingenieur cronograph advertisement.
English version

In (33) the pun is on the noun *number*, which refers both to “a number assigned to a particular telephone (or group of telephones) and used in making connections to it, a telephone number” –which is relevant in the context since it is an advertisement for a mobile phone– and to “an arithmetical value assigned to something or someone, esp. to indicate position in a series, or for purposes of reference, identification, etc.” Both interpretations fit the context. The advertisement is for a telephone terminal, which, as said above, accounts for the first sense. With regard to the second one, it serves to endow the advertised product with positive connotations. The strongest inference which could be derived from this second interpretation is that this telephone is for special people with a strong personality. From that inference, some positive cognitive effects could be derived, such as (34) and (35):

- (34) If you are a special person with a strong personality, you should have this phone.
- (35) This a special phone for special people.

In connection with the creation of positive cognitive effects, as stated by Tanaka (1994: 64), with whom I totally agree on this point, Relevance Theory provides the best framework for the analysis of the role of wordplay or puns in advertising discourse. Puns achieve optimal relevance in spite of the greater processing effort they require, since they constitute the most economical way to achieve a full range of intended positive cognitive effects. Thus, these extra positive cognitive effects which are yielded outweigh the greater processing effort. The theoretical framework used in this study offers then a neat explanation of why puns are extensively used in advertising, even though they have the disadvantage that the addressee will have to invest additional processing effort, which would be detrimental to relevance. The advantages derived from the use of puns in the form of positive cognitive effects counterbalance that disadvantage.

3.4. THE NAME OF THE PRODUCT AS A SOURCE OF WORDPLAY

In a great number of advertisements the name of the trade-mark or product advertised is used as a source of wordplay. The product itself constitutes one of the meanings present in the pun, while the other meaning corresponds to a paronymic word, a homonym or a homophone of the name of the product. This type of pun can be illustrated, for instance, by (36) and (37).

- (36) Tu **plus** para hidratarte. (Powerade Aquaplus) [*Men's Health*]
- (37) The **why** to a beach body. (Whey Protein blend) [*Men's Health*]

the whey to a beach body

Whey Protein
high quality whey protein blend

- Combination of whey protein concentrate and whey protein isolate.
- High in branch chain amino acids to promote muscle growth.
- High in Glutamine the most abundant amino acid found in muscle.
- Added Pro Biotics to promote healthy digestive system which will enable more nutrients to be metabolised.
- Each tub provides 90 x 25g servings.
- Low in Fat and carbs.
- Tastes great and mixes easily.

CNP Professional – The Preferred Choice of World Champions

Strawberry, chocolate or Vanilla flavours

90 servings

Buy online:
www.cnpprofessional.co.uk
Or by phone: 0161 320 8145
Advice line: 0161 320 1212

Available at:

CNP PROFESSIONAL
GOLD
For the ultimate in sports nutrition

Figure 9. Whey Protein advertisement

In (36) *plus* means “additional element”, but it is also a pun on part of the name of the product, *Aquaplus*. Similarly, in (37), *whey* is a homophone of *way*, and therefore, the advertisement contains a pun on the name of the advertised product, *Whey Protein blend*, and on the noun *way*, meaning in this case “the best method to get something; a course of action, a device, expedient method, or means, by which some end may be attained”.

Both interpretations are equally relevant in each of these two headlines, since both fit the context of the advertisement and both yield positive cognitive effects. The fact that one of the meanings corresponds to the name of the product has the advantage that, being part of the play on words, the name of the product may be remembered more easily and for longer, and it can also be associated with enjoyable experiences and positive connotations.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The percentage of advertisements which contain a pun in our corpus is quite significant in all the magazines which have been analysed, ranging between 11.54%

and 32.00%. Taking into account that a number of advertisements contain no slogan and consist only of image and the name of the product, if we consider only the advertisements which do have a slogan, those percentages would be even higher. The use of puns in advertisements is, then, a common device both in British and Spanish men's magazines, which would be explained by all the advantages derived from it and explained in the previous sections. Table 1 portrays the distribution of the advertisements which contain puns across the magazines which constitute the corpus of this study.

	<i>Esquire</i> UK		<i>GQ</i> UK		<i>Men's</i> <i>Health</i> UK		<i>Esquire</i> Spain		<i>GQ</i> Spain		<i>Men's</i> <i>Health</i> Spain	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Image only	6	28.57	11	20.00	5	10.00	4	14.81	7	24.14	3	11.54
Slogan no pun	9	42.86	32	58.18	29	58.00	15	55.55	18	62.07	20	76.92
Slogan pun	6	28.57	12	21.82	16	32.00	8	29.63	4	13.79	3	11.54
TOTAL	21	100	55	100	50	100	27	100	29	100	26	100

Table 1. Distribution of advertisements containing puns across the magazines

In spite of the recurrent use of puns both in British and Spanish advertisements and in spite of all the advantages derived from their use, when comparing the percentages of advertisements which contain a pun in the British magazines with those of their Spanish counterparts, the difference is quite significant. Whereas in the case of the British magazines the percentage of advertisements containing wordplay is 26.98%, the Spanish advertisements with puns represent a lower percentage, namely 18.29%. Table 2 reflects the percentages of advertisements containing puns in British magazines as a whole and in Spanish magazines altogether.

	British magazines		Spanish magazines	
	N	%	N	%
Image only	22	17.46	14	17.07
Slogan no pun	70	55.55	53	64.63
Slogan pun	34	26.98	15	18.29
TOTAL	126	100	82	100

Table 2. Advertisements containing puns in British and Spanish magazines as a whole

The main reason to explain this difference may have to do with the above mentioned punning tradition in the Anglo-Saxon countries, tradition which is also

reflected in other fields, such as the literary one. Spanish literature, on the contrary, does not show that tradition. Thus, for example Leandro Fernández de Moratín, a well-known 18th century Spanish playwright and translator of Shakespeare, quite often showed his dislike of Shakespeare's punning in the notes to his translations. He considers that for a serious genre such as drama an overabundance of puns is not appropriate at all.¹⁶ This author's opinions reflected a general tendency in the Spain of that age, which could also affect the audience of those plays. It could be wondered whether nowadays there is a difference in the reception of advertisements containing puns between the target audiences of the British and Spanish magazines. More research would be needed in this sense to reach any final conclusions.

Another important reason which explains why the frequency of puns is higher in the British advertisements has to do with the fact that in the English language the probability of finding homophones is much higher than in Spanish, which is directly related to the possibility that phonologic puns can be produced. Finding homophones is more probable in English than in Spanish because in English, as a Germanic language, the number of monosyllabic words is higher than in a Romance language such as Spanish, and also because the relation between spelling and pronunciation in English is a peculiar one, in the sense that different character combinations may correspond to the same sound sequence. The relation between spelling and pronunciation in Spanish, however, is much more regular, in such a way that, with few exceptions, there is a one-to-one correspondence between characters and sounds. As stated by De la Cruz (2008: 56), the fact that homophony is much more frequent in English than in Spanish can be explained by sound change in English along with deficient spelling adequacy. In other words, the fact that sound changes were not accompanied by an alteration in spelling has made English prone to homophones.

Apart from this quantitative analysis, the main purpose of this paper has been to contribute to the understanding of the use of puns in advertising, and particularly in print advertisements published in British and Spanish men's magazines. Relevance Theory has proved to be very useful in this sense, as it can explain the motivations behind the use of puns, as they function as attention-getting devices and contribute to the creation of additional positive cognitive effects, which normally endow the

¹⁶ The following note is a good example which serves to illustrate Moratín's attitude towards wordplay:

Muy bruto fue el que cometi6. Estas puerilidades y equívocos necios no son propios de la tragedia, ni de la comedia, ni de obra ninguna escrita con gusto y juicio. En tiempo de Shakespeare se hizo tan común esta corrupción, que los mas graves predicadores llenaban sus oraciones de tales frialdades, y no es de admirar que se usara en el teatro lo que se aplaudía en el púlpito. (Moratín 1798:263)

It was a brute part of him to kill. These childish things and foolish plays on words are not suitable for tragedy, comedy, or any work written with taste and good sense. In Shakespeare's age this corruption was so common that the most serious preachers filled their prayers with such unemotional issues, and it is no surprise that what was praised in the pulpit were also to be used in drama. [My translation]

promoted product with positive associations. In addition, Relevance Theory also sheds light on the interpretation of wordplay.

5. CONCLUSIONS

There are some important functions which wordplay fulfils in advertising which explain the great quantity of puns in this type of discourse. Wordplay is, first of all, an attention-getting device, thus overcoming a possible initial lack of interest in the advertisement and in the product. Thanks to their humorous component, the intellectual satisfaction which is produced by solving them or the desirable qualities they associate the promoted product with, puns help to create in the potential consumer a positive attitude towards the product.

By means of the theoretical framework adopted in this paper –Relevance Theory– puns have been proved to be very useful for the creation of additional positive cognitive effects, which are generally intended to endow the advertised product with positive associations. These extra positive cognitive effects offset the greater processing effort imposed on the addressee, who, by being involved in the processing of the utterance for longer, will be more likely to remember the advertisement.

In spite of the importance of wordplay in advertising in general, when comparing British and Spanish advertising, the use of puns has been shown to be more prominent in the former. This partly responds to a long punning tradition in the English-speaking countries and particularly in the United Kingdom, although there are other factors, such as the fact that the quantity of homophones is higher in English than in Spanish. This great number of homophones in English may be exploited for the production of phonologic puns. Although in earlier periods the use of puns was considered as an acceptable device in serious literature in England, that was not the case in Spain. Future research will have to determine whether there are any differences today with respect to the reception of puns by the target audiences of British and Spanish advertisements.

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