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Citation style: Wojtaszek Adam. (2011). Optimal innovation in press advertisements. "Linguistica Silesiana" (Vol. 32 (2011), s. 121-132).



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OPTIMAL INNOVATION IN PRESS ADVERTISEMENTS

The discourse of advertising offers an environment conducive to the exploitation of novelty in language. Novelty can be conceptualised as an opposite of salience (Giora, 2003), being also a graded feature. Giora claims that there exists a specific level of novelty, which evokes pleasurable experience in recipients. She proposes Optimal Innovation Hypothesis, which may be implied in the investigation of various types of discourse marked with high originality. The paper reports on two studies. The initial one, described in Wojtaszek (2011), focused on the appreciation of three alternative versions of Polish and British advertising slogans, while the subsequent one is the attempt to find a relationship between the previous findings and the degree of legibility of the investigated texts. In the appreciation task the plain formulations received the lowest scores, followed by the highly innovative slogans, with the optimally innovative formulations ranking highest. In the task where evaluation of clarity was performed, the plain formulations turned out to be the easiest, the optimally innovative slogans were a bit more difficult, and the highly innovative ones the least conspicuous. A number of interesting dependencies were also found, suggesting further developments for the future

1. Introduction

In order to attract consumers advertisements have to fight for their attention. This requirement has recently gained in importance, together with the growing competition in the market and the saturation of all media with multiple forms of advertising. In order to fulfil their ultimate purpose, commercials have to attract the viewer's attention and then maintain it for some time. Various mechanisms may be used to uphold the customers' interest: the application of stereotypical representation of the world (Wojtaszek, 2004), the use of sexual appeal (Belch, Holgerson, Belch, & Koppman, 1982; Reichert & Lambiase, 2003), or the exploitation of various forms of innovation in the presentation of the message (Giora, 2003; Giora, Fein, Kronrod, Elnatan, Shuval, & Zur, 2004), to mention but a few. The last of the three above-mentioned strategies is the focus of the present paper.

Novelty and originality seem to be indispensable ingredients of successful advertisements. Plain and uninteresting commercials are doomed to failure in the contemporary world, dissolved in the all-pervading pulp of advertising noise invading our senses on daily basis. Only something which clearly and distinctly stands out against a dull background can stir the emotions of jaded consumers. The good news for the advertising industry is that the options which they have are limitless, the innovative connections which they may explore are infinite; not all, however, take equal advantage of the opportunity. The real value lies in a clever combination of the familiar and the unknown, a reconciliation of the recognizable with the astonishing. The former provides the necessary links with the interpretative mechanisms, while the latter guarantees the pleasure of discovery. In this way salience and innovation work hand in hand in order to yield the desired effect of advertising communication.

2. Giora's conceptualisation of salience and innovation

The notion of salience is well-known in the literature. Its most extensive elaboration and theoretical model is attributable to Rachel Giora (1997; 2003). Salient meanings are foremost on our mind and bring a very important contribution to language processing. According to Giora, sufficiently salient bottom-up lexical processes run parallel with the contextual matching and cannot be suppressed even by incompatible contexts. Salience is a graded feature, thus particular items may be characterised by different levels of salience. The contributing factors include frequency (Hogaboam & Perfetti, 1975; Liu, Bates, Powell, & Wulfeck, 1997; Neill, Hilliard, & Cooper, 1988), familiarity (Blasko & Connine, 1993; Gentner & Wolff, 1997; Hintzman & Curran, 1994), conventionality (Dascal, 1987; 1989; Gibbs, 1980; 1982) and prototypicality/stereotypicality (Rosch E. H., 1973; Rosch & Mervis, 1975). Familiarity seems to be the most important component, but none of the above-mentioned ingredients is absolutely indispensable (Giora, 2003, p. 17). Thus, what is foremost on our mind is usually an accumulated effect of a particular meaning being frequent, familiar, conventional and prototypical.

On the other hand, salience should be distinguished from such related notions as Sperber and Wilson's (1986) 'relevant information' (because what is salient may sometimes get in the way of effortless information processing), Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) 'embodied meaning', Grice's (1975) 'semantic meaning' or the term 'literal meaning', appearing in multiple publications, but not uniformly understood at all. Further, salience should not be associated with 'accessible referential meaning' (Ariel, 1988; 1990; 1991), or with 'feature salience' (Ortony, Vondruska, Foss, & Jones, 1985).

The notion of innovation, on the other hand, does not belong to such precisely delineated theoretical concepts. Loosely defined, it involves a certain departure from the standards, a shift from what might be conventionally expected. In Giora's elaboration, where the word 'innovation' is used interchangeably with

'novelty', it is in fact contrasted with salience, as its peculiar opposite on the other end of the familiarity scale (2003, p. 176). Thus, similarly to salience, innovation is a graded feature. Giora maintains that certain degrees of novelty produce a pleasurable experience for comprehenders, involving elements of discovery, in a situation when the unexpected and novel aspects of information may be successfully incorporated with the familiar and recognizable facets of the message. Consequently, Giora proposes and discusses Optimal Innovation Hypothesis (2003, pp. 176-184), which is particularly applicable to genres characterised by a high proportion of originality. Advertising discourse undoubtedly meets the criteria for being called original, as since Geoffrey Leech's (1966) prediction that it would incorporate more and more highly innovative elements, many other scholars have confirmed this tendency in numerous publications (Cook, 1992; Djafarova, 2008; Dyer, 1988; Geis, 1982; Myers, 1994; Vestergaard & Schrøder, 1985; Tanaka, 1994; Wojtaszek, 2002).

The Optimal Innovation Hypothesis assumes that there is a certain optimal value of novelty, because going for the extremes would render information processing too demanding and the desired effect would not be produced. It would be too difficult to integrate pure novelty with the information already internalised in the mind. There are no precise measures of novelty, obviously, but relative estimations by native speakers usually serve the purpose very well, this is the technique employed in a number of studies (Giora, 1997; 2003; Giora & Fein, 1999a; 1999b; Giora, Fein, Kronrod, Elnatan, Shuval, & Zur, 2004).

3. The appreciation of optimal innovation in press advertisements

The present study was inspired by an earlier investigation, reported in Wojtaszek (2011), in which the appreciation of selected aspects of five Polish and five British press advertisements was in the main focus. Its design followed certain principles applied by Giora, Fein, Kronrod, Elnatan, Shuval and Zur (2004), where the Optimal Innovation Hypothesis was tested.

In order to exclude the potential influence of the co-text and illustrative elements on the results of the investigation, only the slogans with the most important parts of the body copy text were used, after being removed from their original environment, although it was made clear to the subjects that what they were about to evaluate came from advertising copies. In this way higher validity of the study could be guaranteed. It was the author's intention that the slogans initially selected for the study should be optimally innovative, so their choice was preceded by careful inspection of large corpora of press advertisements in order to find the best candidates. Following the initial selection, the slogans served as a basis for construction of two alternative versions, one of which was meant to be plain and ordinary, characterised by a low level of innovation, whereas the other one much more innovative than the original. It has to be made clear, however, that the novelty of the modified version was not pushed to the limits, there had to be some

traceable connection between the highly innovative slogan and the sense of the advertising message in which it was embedded.

The alternative versions, together with the ones containing the original slogans, were grouped into five triplets in each language under investigation, and subjected to initial gauging of their level of innovativeness. The procedure corresponded to a similar stage in Giora, Fein, Kronrod, Elnatan, Shuval and Zur's (2004) investigation and its aim was the confirmation of sufficiently divergent levels of novelty between the probes. It turned out that the triplets were very well prepared, because the difference between the individual marks given to the probes on a 1-7 point scale was on average slightly higher than 2, for both Polish and British judges. What is more, the standard deviations between the values ascribed by particular judges to a given probe were consistently very close to 0.5, with the exception of only one example, where it amounted to 0.84 (Wojtaszek, 2011, p. 168).

The Polish triplets were subsequently presented to 50 native speakers of Polish, whereas the English probes were shown to 30 native speakers of English, who were asked to express their appreciation of the short advertising texts on a 1-7 liking scale. It turned out that the optimally innovative slogans were always evaluated higher than the remaining two versions, and sometimes the difference was very significant. The standard deviations between particular evaluations were much bigger than in the norming study (0.861 on average), occasionally reaching the value of more than one point (Wojtaszek, 2011, p. 169). Interestingly, the evaluations of the plain formulations turned out to be significantly more consistent than the rest, with values of 0.685 for English and 0.699 for Polish. In comparison, the mean standard deviation values for the optimally innovative slogans were 0.955 (English) and 0.909 (Polish), and for the maximally innovative ones 0.939 and 0.979, respectively. At first sight the differences might not seem great, but in fact the standard deviations for the innovative slogans are on average higher by 35% than the ones for the plain formulations, which is a significant difference.

This suggests that the bigger discrepancies between the evaluations of the innovative slogans could be the result of additional factors, one of which could be related to the comprehension of the messages by the subjects. It could be hypothesised that if some of them have not succeeded in deciphering the intended innovative meaning and the full sense of the whole message, they were more inclined to evaluate such a formulation very low. On the other hand, those who have managed to discover the hidden senses and to solve the mental puzzle offered by the formulations, could be expected to attribute higher values to such probes. This is why such values, seen in the perspective of the whole group of subjects, turned out to be more divergent. A higher consistency in the evaluation of the plain formulations could be related to their perspicuousness, because the factor of variable comprehension was not present in their case. Additionally, it has been noticed that the plain slogans were evaluated as the least attractive in 7 triplets, whereas the highly innovative ones in 3 sets, when the Polish and the English probes are considered together (Wojtaszek, 2011, p. 169). The findings reported above provided

an incentive for a follow-up study, in which the role of understanding might be checked against the level of appreciation, as a factor modulating the discrepancies in the evaluations.

4. The role of intelligibility

In order to check the relative importance of intelligibility of the slogans embedded in short advertising texts, the same triplets as in the study reported in Wojtaszek (2011) were used, but this time the respondents were not asked to rate their appreciation. Instead, they were expected to evaluate their intelligibility, clarity and relevance in the contexts in which they were presented. Once more a scale between 1 to 7 was used, in order to secure a better comparability between the sets of data from the present study and the investigation reported earlier. The questionnaire forms are to be found in the Appendix.

The subjects participating in the investigation were different people than the ones who took part in the earlier study, but they formed two groups of exactly the same sizes as previously, with 50 native speakers of Polish and 30 native speakers of English. In order to achieve a relatively high degree of comparability, participants with similar characteristics to the ones used in the earlier investigation were chosen, i.e. university students between 20 and 28 years of age. Using the same participants was not possible because the investigation of appreciation took place more than one year earlier and the contact with many subjects was lost. Additionally, in the earlier study the questionnaires were anonymous and it would be impossible to match the responses from the same respondents. In this situation it was impossible to calculate correlation between the two samples. That is why the findings can only serve as an indicator of certain tendencies and as a potential incentive for one more investigation, in which the evaluations of both understanding and appreciation would come from the same participants. Hence, the findings reported below belong to the domain of descriptive statistics, as inferential statistical procedures could not be applied.

The results of the investigation are presented in Table 1. The first observation quite clearly following from the data is that in all cases the plain formulations in particular triplets were the easiest to understand, the optimally innovative ones were a bit more difficult and the highly innovative ones always proved quite illegible. Although on average different degrees of clarity could be attributed to particular triplets, the above-mentioned distribution of values from the lowest to the highest was consistently found for all of them.

No significant differences were noted between the Polish and the English samples, and although particular commercials displayed divergent evaluations, the tendencies reported above were present in both languages.

The comparison of the mean values in both tasks, i.e. appreciation versus understanding, are presented in Table 2. The distribution of scores shows a number of interesting relationships. Firstly, the values for understanding and appreciation

Table 1. The mean values and the standard deviations in the intelligibility assessment

	Optimally innovative		Plain		Highly innovative	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
POLISH						
Warka	5.52	0.931	6.28	0.671	3.6	0.728
Netia	3.1	0.647	5.74	0.664	2.36	0.525
Honda	4.46	0.734	5,94	0.62	2.68	0.62
Volkswagen	5.34	0.982	6.7	0.505	3.52	0.707
Rainbow Tours	4.22	1.475	6.22	0.864	2.54	0.973
ENGLISH						
Expedia	5.667	0.994	6.567	0.679	4.2	0.805
Renault	4.033	1.066	5.867	0.776	2.533	1.106
Gatwick Airport	5.3	1.088	6.4	0.724	4.633	0.765
Belvedere	3.9	1.626	5.333	1.093	3.467	1.548
Virgin Media	3.9	1.062	5.567	0.626	3.367	1.351

Table 2. The comparison of mean scores in appreciation and understanding tasks

	Optimally innovative		Plain		Highly innovative	
	Mean: clarity	Mean: liking	Mean: clarity	Mean: liking	Mean: clarity	Mean: liking
POLISH						
Warka	5.52	5.18	6.28	3.02	3.6	2.56
Netia	3.1	3.3	5.74	2.22	2.36	1.98
Honda	4.46	4.74	5,94	2.38	2.68	3.24
Volkswagen	5.34	5.2	6.7	1.82	3.52	4.14
Rainbow Tours	4.22	4.5	6.22	2.2	2.54	2.6
ENGLISH						
Expedia	5.667	4.833	6.567	1.9	4.2	4.067
Renault	4.033	5.567	5.867	2.5	2.533	2.9
Gatwick Airport	5.3	5.7	6.4	2.4	4.633	3.133
Belvedere	3.9	5.0	5.333	2.56	3.467	3.167
Virgin Media	3.9	4.567	5.567	2.33	3.367	2.1

for innovative slogans, involving both optimal as well as high innovation, are very similar for almost all slogans in both languages. At the same time, it is visible

that the highly innovative ones were both less clear and less liked in comparison to their optimally innovative counterparts. In contrast, there is a considerable discrepancy between the understanding and appreciation ratings for those slogans which were formulated in a very plain and prototypical way.

The value for clarity is consistently very high, whereas the appreciation is always very low, only in one instance the mean value is slightly above 3 (*Warka* advertisements in the Polish sample). This means that plainly formulated slogans pose no difficulty for customers' processing capabilities, but at the same time they don't meet with high appreciation, most of them are considered to be dull.

The mean values of the clarity index for all Polish and all British slogans oscillate around 6. For optimally innovative ones the value falls to approximately 4.5 for both language groups, whereas the highly innovative slogans received the average score of 3.64 for the British sample and only 2.94 for the Polish advertisements. It may be concluded, in the light of the above, that a small reduction in conspicuousness and legibility significantly increases the level of appreciation. If, however, the rating of the understanding falls below a certain level (around 4, the middle point on the scale), the average evaluations of appreciation also start falling.

The most intriguing problem, however, was the potential correlation between the levels of standard deviation in both evaluation tasks. The values are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. The comparison of standard deviations in appreciation and understanding tasks

	Optimally innovative		Plain		Highly innovative	
	SD: clarity	SD: liking	SD: clarity	SD: liking	SD: clarity	SD: liking
POLISH						
Warka	0.931	0.962	0.671	0.685	0.728	0.951
Netia	0.647	0.953	0.664	0.764	0.525	0.845
Honda	0.734	0.853	0.62	0.667	0.621	0.797
Volkswagen	0.982	0.782	0.505	0.596	0.706	0.833
Rainbow Tours	1.474	0.994	0.864	0.782	0.973	1.471
ENGLISH						
Expedia	0.994	0.913	0.678	0.662	0.805	0.868
Renault	1.066	0.817	0.776	0.777	1.106	0.995
Gatwick Airport	1.087	0.837	0.724	0.814	0.765	0.819
Belvedere	1.626	1.203	1.093	0.626	1.547	0.986
Virgin Media	1.061	1.006	0.626	0.547	1.351	1.029

A high value of standard deviation indicates that the subjects differed considerably in their evaluations. The most consistent values are to be found in the two middle columns, representing plain formulations. The differences between particular subjects in their ranking of both understanding and liking of all the formulations were slightly greater than 0.7 on average. They would be even lower, were it not for slightly more divergent evaluations of one of the slogans from the English sample, the *Belvedere Vodka* advertisement, in terms of its clarity. Incidentally, this was the least clear formulation within the category of plain slogans, taking both language samples into consideration.

The interpretation of the findings in the other two columns is much more problematic. For example, the evaluations of the clarity of optimally and highly innovative slogans were more divergent in the group of British respondents than in the case of Polish participants. The differences between the two groups is particularly significant for the evaluations of clarity of highly innovative slogans. The Polish participants are surprisingly consistent in their opinions, the values reported in the relevant column resemble the scores of standard deviations for plain formulations. The British respondents, on the other hand, were very dissimilar in their evaluations of some of the slogans in terms of their legibility. The discrepancies are largest for those two advertisements where the mean scores for clarity were below the value of 3.5. For those which were more transparent, the opinions were not so divergent. This concerns, however, only the highly innovative slogans, no similar tendencies may be found for the optimally innovative ones. The Polish respondents did not contribute any values which would allow for the discernment of significant tendencies. The *Rainbow Tours* advertisement, whose evaluations in terms of clarity were the most divergent ($SD=1.474$), did not yield an extreme mean score, neither in terms of legibility nor in relation to appreciation.

It seems that in order to find a more consistently discernible relationship between the level of understanding and the level of appreciation, or the correlation between the mean value in terms of appreciation and the degree of discrepancy in the evaluation of understanding, at least two conditions would have to be met. First of all, the same participants would have to be asked for evaluations in terms of both variables. If their responses were paired, a legitimate correlation coefficient could be calculated for both samples elicited in this way. Secondly, it seems that the input materials would have to be more carefully chosen and elaborated prior to the evaluation tasks. For one thing, if all types of slogans selected for the study were gauged for a comparable level of familiarity, and the differences between the original ones and the modified versions were similarly significant, then the findings would be more reliable. Initial piloting could also be performed in order to eliminate the significant differences between particular triplets in terms of their clarity. In this way the level of understanding would become a more consistent independent variable, against which the dependent level of appreciation could be investigated and calculated in form of meaningful correlation.

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Appendix

Intelligibility: Polish version

Proszę ocenić poniższe wersje sloganów reklamowych pod względem ich przejrzystości, zrozumiałości i spójności z całym tekstem reklamy, na skali od 1 do 7, gdzie 1 oznacza „Slogan jest sformułowany w sposób całkowicie niejasny i niezrozumiały”, natomiast 7 „Slogan jest bardzo przejrzysty i łatwy do zrozumienia, dokładnie potrafię odczytać jego sens i znaczenie”.

- WARKA:
 - HAT TRICK** – MegaWarka (1,5l) – Zabezpieczy każde spotkanie
 - TRZY PO TRZY** – MegaWarka (1,5l) – Zabezpieczy każde spotkanie
 - POTRÓJNA POJEMNOŚĆ** – MegaWarka (1,5l) – Zabezpieczy każde spotkanie
- NETIA
 - OKTAWA SATYSFAKCJI** Szybki Internet 8 Mbit/s za 49 zł. Netia, wolność wyboru

- CHCESZ WYRWAĆ ÓSEMKE?** Szybki Internet 8 Mbit/s za 49 zł. Netia, wolność wyboru
- CO POWIESZ NA 8 Mb?** Szybki Internet 8 Mbit/s za 49 zł. Netia, wolność wyboru
- HONDA
 - POSIĄDŹ SAMOCHÓD Z CHARAKTEREM** na weekend w salonie JKKMOTO. Zapisz się na jazdę testową. HONDA
 - POLOWANIE NA POTWORY** w weekend w salonie JKKMOTO. Zapisz się na jazdę testową. HONDA
 - UPOLUJ AMBITNĄ BESTIĘ** na weekend w salonie JKKMOTO. Zapisz się na jazdę testową. HONDA
- VOLKSWAGEN
 - SAMOCZODY BEZ VAT-U.** POLO, TIGUAN I PASSAT VARIANT z homologacją ciężarową. Odlicz 22% VAT. Volkswaged. Das Auto.
 - TO IDEALY. NIE MAJĄ VAT.** POLO, TIGUAN I PASSAT VARIANT z homologacją ciężarową. Odlicz 22% VAT. Volkswaged. Das Auto.
 - SALONOWA DE-VATYWACJA.** POLO, TIGUAN I PASSAT VARIANT z homologacją ciężarową. Odlicz 22% VAT. Volkswaged. Das Auto.
- RAINBOW TOURS
 - WIOSENNE RABATKI** – RAINBOW TOURS, Lato 2010, nawet 26%
 - OFERTA FIRST MINUTE** W RAINBOW TOURS, Lato 2010, nawet 26%
 - BYŁEŚ JUŻ W RABACIE?** – RAINBOW TOURS, Lato 2010, nawet 26%

Appreciation: English version

Evaluate the following versions of advertising slogans in terms of their intelligibility, clarity and relevance to the whole message, on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 denotes “I don’t understand the slogan at all, it is completely unclear”, while 7 stands for “The slogan is very clear and easy to understand, I can fully appreciate its sense and relevance”.

- EXPEDIA:
 - UNBEATABLE OFFER** – With SALE prices like these, you can’t afford to hang around! Book now, at expedia.co.uk
 - EVERYONE MUST GO** – With SALE prices like these, you can’t afford to hang around! Book now, at expedia.co.uk

- GOING, GOING, GONE!** – With SALE prices like these, you can't afford to hang around! Book now, at expedia.co.uk

- RENAULT
 - CHEAP CHAMPIONS** 0% APR typical. No deposit. Renault Megane Coupe, World Series Special Edition.
 - GRAND PRIX – SMALL PRIX** 0% APR typical. No deposit. Renault Megane Coupe, World Series Special Edition.
 - GRAND PRIX WINNER FOR A LITTLE PRICE** 0% APR typical. No deposit. Renault Megane Coupe, World Series Special Edition.

- GATWICK AIRPORT SHOPPING
 - BEST OFFERS, UNBEATABLE PRICES** – GATWICK AIRPORT
 - BUY AT GATWICKED PRICES** – GATWICK AIRPORT
 - DON'T LEAVE WITHOUT A GOOD BUY** – GATWICK AIRPORT

- BELVEDERE VODKA
 - OUR SECRET LIES IN MACERATION.** Maceration is Belvedere's unique process of soaking real fruit in our luxury vodka. Treat yourself to the world's superior, most natured, flavored vodka.
 - MACERATION IS NOT A SIN.** Maceration is Belvedere's unique process of soaking real fruit in our luxury vodka. Treat yourself to the world's superior, most natured, flavored vodka.
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