2007

Movie poster advertisements: A relevance theory persepctive

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MOVIE POSTER ADVERTISEMENTS:

A RELEVANCE THEORY PERSPECTIVE

A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

in

English Composition

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by

Steven Lawrie Forrett

December 2007

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ABSTRACT

The impact of advertisements in various cultures has been the subject of investigation in a great deal of linguistic and communication studies over the past thirty years. One linguistic framework, Sperber and Wilson's (2005) Relevance Theory, primarily a pragmatic approach to understanding human communication and cognition, helps us understand how advertising messages become relevant in the minds of readers. Although one main premise of Relevance Theory is that an audience will expend no more than a minimal effort to process a message, the contextual implications in many advertisements make additional processing effort worthwhile.

While there is a substantial amount of literature that investigates advertisements through a Relevance Theory perspective, there has been little research aimed at movie poster advertisements. In this thesis, I present ten movie posters and primarily examine the discourse of the taglines, a short message that represents a synopsis of the movie advertised, through a Relevance Theory perspective. This is accomplished while considering the linguistic strategies (such as puns, word repetition, ambiguity in diction, and other creative devices) that ad writers employ

to attract audience attention. I consider the contextual implications achieved through the movie poster elements: the illustration, title of the movie and the tagline. I conclude with implications of this study for a pedagogical application that considers how movie posters can promote noticing in interlanguage development from a Relevance Theory perspective.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to thank my greatest love and life partner Maryann Forrett, who has been instrumental in encouraging me to plod forward when my feet were heavy with disillusionment. Secondly, I cannot help but give acknowledgement and love to my mother, Elizabeth Ann Zahorik Forrett, without whom I would not have an aptitude for English and reading — this work is dedicated to you.

To Professor Sunny Hyon, whose wonderful editing suggestions made my work go much smoother, I give my highest regards. I must also thank Professor Ron Chen, who introduced me to cognitive linguistics in such an interesting way that it planted the seeds for this thesis to develop.

I knew going into this project that writing it would be a difficult task, but I must also mention my son Joseph, who always thought that I could get it done — eventually.

As a Christian and a believer in God, I know that His hand was upon me in writing this because He made all things, including my ability to perceive and initiate any intellect in making this project useful and understandable.

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CHAPTER ONE

ADVERTISING: A GENRE OF COMMUNICATION

Advertisement Studies

Advertisements (hereafter referred to as ads) are commercially paid-for communication devices (Hermerén, 1999) whose purpose is to make an impact on a human mind. According to Twitchell (1996), advertising's reach is ubiquitous and inescapable. As a result, most people have some knowledge of certain brand name products and the companies that sell these brands, thanks, in part, to the ads promoting them. That nobody is exempt from exposure to this type of discourse is evidenced by my five-year-old granddaughter, who knows that she can get a Tinkerbell doll at Toys-R-Us and not at a Harley Davidson motorcycle shop. Amazingly, ads operate in a limited time and space targeting a human audience whose attention is often focused elsewhere (Cook, 2001, pp. 230-232).

Business-related scholarly analyses of ads in English-speaking cultures began in the nineteenth century, mostly to explore ad effectiveness (Cook, 1992; Maloney, 1994). In the first decade of the twentieth century, new studies

taken from the psychology perspective considered how ads
manipulate the human mind (Maloney, 1994).

Linguistic studies of the words in ads did not appear
in the literature until the early 1960s, most noticeably
represented by Leech's (1966) oft-quoted contributions.
Since then, linguists like Meyers (1994, 1999), Cook
(2001), Goddard (1999), and Hermerén (1999) have
contributed various studies of ad discourse. Cook (2001)
regards the intricacy of ads as "ingenious attempts to
disguise [themselves] as something else" (p. 13).
Linguists have examined ads through discourse analysis
(Bruthiax, 2000; Cook, 2001; Myers, 1999; Hermerén, 1999);
pragmatics (Taillard, 2000; Simpson, 2001; Crook, 2004);
semiotics (Goddard, 1998; Myers, 1994; Shie, 2005); and
stylistics (Cook, 2001; Myers, 1988, 1999; Hook, 1986).

Communication researchers' studies have investigated
ads' social implications and manipulative characteristics
(Borchers, 2005; Heiligmann & Shields, 2005; Kardes, 1988;
Twitchell, 1996; Sloan & Krol, 1996; Ritson & Elliot, 1999;
Frith & Mueller, 2003; Hartley & Pickton, 1999; Harris,
1989). Thus, it is not surprising that many more ad
studies are being published due to an ever-increasing
variety of ads.

The more traditional ad media have been radio, television, newspapers or magazines, billboards, direct mail, and telemarketing (Borcher, 2005, Hartley & Pickton, 1999). Lately, however, ads have appeared in technology-oriented media such as Internet advertising and new media including blog ads, website ads, and e-mail (Frith & Mueller, 2003, p. 253).

Another long-standing medium for ads is movie posters; these date back to the beginning days of the film industry, and they have found their place in movie theaters and newspaper ads as an outlet to showcase upcoming films to potential audiences. These creatively-designed works of art are especially interesting due to the way the visual elements interact with the short written discourse presented on the poster, known as the tagline. Audiences are able to peruse these posters in movie theater lobbies before and after the show, and, as this paper will show, they can serve as an "appetizer" to stimulate interest in an upcoming film.

Interestingly, there has been little or no research analyzing the tag-line texts or images from movie posters in any area of academic literature, especially linguistics studies. The purpose of this thesis is to examine ten

movie posters while hypothesizing whether or not their tag-

line texts could interest a reader; this thesis will also

look at the taglines' interaction with movie poster images.

The analysis will be accomplished using a cognitive

linguistics lens known as Relevance Theory (Sperber &

Wilson, 1995). The remainder of this chapter reviews

previous linguistic research on ads, which provides an

overview of several analytical concepts from communications

theory and other research areas that will be useful later

in this thesis. The latter portion of the review will

focus on the application of Relevance Theory (RT) to

advertising discourse, setting a primary framework for the

movie poster analysis.

Persuasion in Advertising

It can be said that there are two salient

characteristics that explain how ads function: (1) their

persuasive strategies and (2) the ways they gain a specific

audience's attention. This paper will discuss the two

characteristics in the above order. To begin with,

persuasion is defined as "the process of inducing a

voluntary change in someone's attitudes, beliefs, or

behavior through the transmission of a message" (Schmidt &

Kess, 1986, p. 2). A number of linguistic studies have examined persuasion strategies used in ads (Bruthiaux, 2000; Cook, 1992, 2001; Frith & Mueller, 2003; Hermerén, 1999; Meyers, 1999; Moore, 2003; Shie, 2005; and Taillard, 2000). In an analysis that combines linguistic pragmatics, social psychology, and marketing communication, Taillard (2000) asserts that the words in an ad serve as a speech act that attempts to achieve two distinctive goals: to be understood and to be believed. Taillard further explains that ad discourse should correlate with the targeted audience's beliefs, desires, and actions in a clear and recognizable way, which can set the groundwork for successful persuasion. Similarly, Cook (2001), speaking from a discourse analysis framework, claims that ads are separated from other genres of communication because ad discourse or the actual words (their linguistic order and semantic meaning) function to "persuade people to buy a particular product" (p. 10).

Drawing on a semiotic approach to how ads function, Shie (2005) reports how such persuasion is accomplished when ads represent a product, idea, or a service, the message text needs to reinforce the brand name or product and communicate to the consumer audience distinctive,

symbolic features associated with the product. The familiar symbol or icon can lead to product recognition when a consumer is shopping, illustrating a more subtle form of persuasion. Importantly, Shie's research points out two distinctive features of most ads: verbal (words) and visual (pictures) persuasive strategies. These can transmit specific messages, either working separately or together. Since movie posters use a combination of words and pictures to relay a message to a reader, both of these features will be considered during the remaining literature reviewed in this chapter.

Cook (2001) reports that manufacturers and consumers agree that ad discourse aims to persuade consumers to buy impulsively, using "hard" and "soft" sales techniques. He points out that, ironically, when the implications in the ads might actually "persuade people to do something or buy something," they are often judged and "criticized for misrepresenting or distracting from the facts" (pp. 102, 103). In sales terminology, blatant distortion and pressure to persuade a person to buy is known as the "hard sell" (Kardes, 1988). Verbal appeals are very common in ads that use the hard sell technique—such as "Visit your Chevy dealer, now, before time runs out." In contrast,

according to Cook (2001), some ads come into your environment in non-threatening manner using colloquial language and brand familiarity, resulting in the "soft sell." A visually persuasive example of the soft sell is the cute bunny and a drum (Twitchell, 1996) that aims to persuade a consumer to buy a battery. The creature marches across the television screen while the announcer describes a long-lasting battery. The message is subtle, creative, and softly suggestive, and the appeal is memorable. A famous example of the soft sale technique was McDonald's appeal to their customers' sense of vanity using what became the well-known ad slogan "You deserve a break today," which sold countless hamburgers during the life of that ad.

Researchers like Myers (1999) have examined the hidden persuasion techniques accomplished with high-profile ad slogans. Myers (1999) claims that when brand names are associated with brief and cleverly written linguistic structures, they can boost the familiarity and respectability of a product. Moreover, brand names, when used in concert with slogans, help accomplish persuasion with meaningful (and often poetic) jingles that do more to advance a cultural message than to provide an informative

description of a product. A great example of a highly

successful jingle, and a very effective verbal means of

persuasion, is the 1970s Coca-Cola commercial, "It's the

real thing" (Meyers, 1999). The slogan was combined with

music to drive the message home to consumers. Moore (2003)

pointed out that branding in ads creates a semiotic

relationship with consumers because a symbolic meaning

found in ad discourse can easily be associated with a

product. Thus, a commodity changes from being a "tangible

thing [to becoming an] aura, [a] simulacrum, [a]

reproduction (as opposed to the original) . . . brand" (p.

331). Coke's ad agency capitalized on the tangible image

even further when they taught "the world to sing" during

that same time period by using a very powerful cultural

message: it became a spectacular aura featuring a large

cluster of human beings, balanced in ethnic diversity,

swaying arm-in-arm and singing "in perfect harmony" about

coke. Essentially, this ad placed coke at the table of an

entire world of consumers, using a visual persuasive

technique that beckoned the audience to partake in a

worldwide coke ritual. The people themselves, the

consumers, became the symbol of coke's success. Meyers'

(1999) research amplifies this concept when he echoes an

old sales adage about how marketers sell the sizzle, not the steak.

Audience Attraction to Ads

How advertisers attract audiences has been the focus of researchers in both linguistic and communication studies (Bernstein, 1974; Cook, 2001; Goddard, 1998; Harris, 1989; Hermerén, 1999; Meyers, 1994, 1999; Sloan & Croll, 1996; and Twitchell, 1996). Meyers (1999) reports that marketing involves selecting an ideal media time slot and language for an ad, all of which interact with maximal efficiency to grab a consumer's attention. He also found that agencies research specific consumer and product compatibilities in an attempt to predict whether those consumer groups might purchase a product. Afterwards, the advertiser must send information that complies with the "knowledge and interests" of the addressee (Cook, 2001, p. 173) using the appropriate medium (e. g. newspaper, television, or radio).

The consumer-to-message connection is tricky to predict because advertising agencies cannot always be sure what combination of words (or pictures) will grab the attention of the target audience. Cook (2001) suggests that ad dialogue should be structured by pairing old

information known to the addressee with new information that would serve to receive greater attention. Previous information plays a necessary role in communication because interest is generated by the information one gains when hearing or seeing something new. Consider the verbal element of persuasion exhibited in an example of a successful AT&T ad: "Reach out and touch someone." Those targeted by this message needed to understand that one meaning of the pun in the slogan referred to long distance calling, but the ad writer purposefully drew from the audience's stored information or memory—the fact that humans reach out and touch each other to show that they care. Thus, the pun relayed a message of, "show that you care—make a long-distance phone call," which became a positive augmentation in the ad using the known fact that humans care for one another.

Past connections to current ideas can appeal to human emotions, which give marketing experts an exploitable avenue for attracting audience attention (Cook, 2001). Regarding emotional appeal, Twitchell (1996) makes an interesting point by saying that advertising earns audiences by being profane. His use of the generic word, "profane," suggests that human attraction to ads occurs

when the audience is shocked or shaken emotionally. The causes of shock can range from intense situations, grotesque depictions, or things sexual in nature—all characteristics that rouse human emotion. Using emotive appeals in ad discourse is known as a "tickle" technique (Cook, 2001; Simpson, 1998). Bernstein (1974) first asserted that when ads use tickle as an attention-seeking appeal, an effective communication is understood and attended to due to the prompting of comsumers' emotions and desires. In effect, the tickle can lead the consumer to pay closer attention to the ad.

Hermerén, (1999) provided one example of how tickle is achieved through a combination of visual and verbal elements that attract audience attention. His ad shows "dark silhouettes of a man and a woman sitting alone at a table" (ibid p.55). Most likely, readers will look at this magazine ad with some emotionally-driven curiosity because the darkness in the ad enhances the romantic situation that is portrayed. The discourse associated with the picture is, "Must I share you with everyone?" The combination of the dark shades in the visual images and the verbal effects of the discourse could enhance a feeling of desire in some audiences, especially because of the innuendo implied in

sharing: could sharing mean to share the girl (sexually) with other men? If that idea is even subtly communicated, readers might be tempted to look at the additional information accompanying the ad. The innuendo behind the word "sharing" becomes the "tickle" in that particular ad's discourse.

Goddard, (1998) illustrates tickle in a different way by describing ads that use startling visual and verbal elements as attention-seeking strategies. One ad featured a most offensive visual element—a baby with blood streaming down from her bandaged eyes, fresh from her mother's womb (Goddard, 1998). The purpose of the ad was to collect funds for a British agency to control child abuse. The verbal element associated with the ad was, "All this baby will remember seeing is her mother, her teddy, and the tips of her father's fingers" (ibid p. 14). Goddard also described two additional ads created by a clothing company that featured the visual element of a man on his deathbed in the first ad, and in a second ad, a baby covered in blood (also fresh from her mother's womb). Both ads were accompanied by a verbal element — a text to sell clothes. The ads created a public outcry, but not before the company received a great amount of public attention. Other

companies followed suit with this strategy because they
knew that outraging or irritating the public generally
results in public attention, and more importantly, they
believed that consumers would remember and buy their
product.

One prevalent attention-seeking strategy that has been
greatly exploited by television's commercial medium is the
use of sexual images to sell. Communication research shows
that the exploitation of men's and women's bodies to
attract a viewing audience is growing every year (Sloan &
Croll, 1996). Many television ads use human sexual
attraction to grab the attention of the viewer (Fite, Fite,
McElwee, Neal & Smith, 2000). Taflinger (1996) asserts
that men pay closer attention to television commercials
when they see the visual image of young, attractive women,
and they will associate buying the product with getting the
girl.

In terms of verbal and visual persuasive strategies
involving sex, Crook (2004) discussed how magazine ads can
contain sexual innuendo by using sexual images and the
associated verbal messages to successfully attract a
person's attention. To illustrate, he cited an example of
a brassiere billboard ad that caused traffic accidents.

The text in the ad described the attributes of the Wonderbra, but the model illustrated as part of the visual strategy attracted many viewers who should have been paying attention to their driving.

Cook (2001) reported that a visual persuasion strategy alone can be effective to gain audience attention with regard to sexual content in ads. He cited an example of a candy bar ad that contained an "analogy with sexual suggestiveness" (p. 51). The advertiser had no desire to lead the audience into ideas beyond a pure enjoyment of the bar; they only wanted audience attention. As it happened, according to Cook, certain "obsessed individuals" (p. 51) probably entertained the wrong notions about the ad, which contained the visual image of a woman inserting a chocolate bar into her mouth. Cook claimed the ad would likely "increase sales among a target audience" (p. 51).

In another area of research that investigates how ads gain audience attention, Harris (1989) asserts that audiences cannot ignore the semiotic message when advertisers purposely manipulate linguistic structures and combine them with certain pictures. In the well-known Marlboro cigarette ads, one verbal message "Come to where the flavor is" was minimal yet the visual strategy

attempted to create the most attractive message—a symbol of Americana and the coveted cowboy. Harris also pointed to another way that linguistic structures are used in print advertising, and these ads are printed in ways that break a rule in some systematic fashion. The result, according to him, is that the malformed structures become part of the foreground (a salient linguistic feature) and are likely to be noticed by audiences. A good example of foregrounding a message to gain attention was seen in the late 1960s when television was still showing cigarette ads. Someone had pointed out that the Winston slogan contained incorrect grammar: "Winston tastes good *like* a cigarette should." The grammatical error occurs in the use of *like*, which should have been rendered "*as* a cigarette should." The controversy created a great campaign for Winston (i.e., "What do you want—good grammar or good taste?") One television show, The Beverly Hillbillies, further fanned the flame of fame for their sponsor, Winston, by having its character, Granny, (Irene Ryan) spout in non-standard dialect "Winston tastes good like a cigarette had oughter." R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company basked in the limelight while many Americans were attracted to their ads.

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In another study, Goddard (1999) explains how typographical features of words (known as paralinguistic devices) can display unusual textual shapes, and when used in combination with varying color schemes, the visual and verbal context can "foreground" a message by attracting attention to the type of print it uses. For example, advertisers can use different font sizes, upper and lower-case letters and integrate any combination of colors to achieve a foregrounding or noticeable effect. In other words, advertisers can use colors and font differences to initially attract audiences to the ad, and then the person or persons will read the ad's message. In a somewhat related study, Myers (1994) discussed another way that certain word features can be foreground in ads through unexpected irregularities called parallelisms. One such example is explained by a candy bar brand known as "Mars Bars." The parallelism exists in the brand name because the words "Mars" and "Bars" rhyme. The rhyme is easily remembered and the brand name remains in the foreground of a person's mind. Myers (1994) also mentions another case of ad-word irregularities called unexpected deviations. He cites one notable deviation found in the oil giant's name, "Exxon." The combination of two sequential x's in English

is unexpected (Meyers, 1994, p.31). In addition, the x's are particularly memorable and even iconic, because they have an exaggerated shape on the sign found by the gasoline filling station. Consumers will look for and be reminded of this icon every time they fill their gas tanks.

Summary of Studies on Ad Features

The above research suggests that advertising uses specific techniques to gain the attention of a consumer audience and to influence their minds, leading to persuasion. Furthermore, people generally can be manipulated to pay attention and eventually be persuaded by ads because they do not carefully consider what they are reading, hearing, or viewing (Meyers, 1994). This audience manipulation occurs through verbal and visual strategies. Verbal strategies in ad discourse include memorable slogans, uses of shocking and sexually-suggestive language, and breaking of grammatical rules. All of these can contribute to the "tickle" of ads. Visual strategies in ads rely on aesthetic appeals through human subjects displaying love and emotion, animals looking warm and fuzzy, and different shades of lighting inferring romantic notions. Other visual strategies in ads include sizes and

shapes of letters, memorable symbols and icons, pictorial associations with brand names, and the use of contrasting colors and shapes. Verbal and visual strategies are often combined in ads to produce powerful and memorable messages that exploit sexuality, aesthetics, and culture, working to impact human minds with words, cowboys, bunnies, and brassieres.

Applying Relevance Theory to Ad Discourse

As reviewed above, one challenge advertisers have is making audiences pay attention to an ad. Leech (1966), in his study of modern ad discourse, emphasized that people can barely tolerate ads. Yet, despite potential audience resistance, ads still work.

Relevance Theory (RT), a cognitive approach to interpretation of communication, offers one way to explain how an audience might be persuaded to pay attention to a message and understand what the sender wants them to know. In fact, according to Byrne (1992), RT is an "ideal tool for analyzing . . . the creative linguistic style of advertising [that] is geared [toward] a large target audience" (p. 8).

According to Sperber and Wilson (1995), the concept of relevance in RT cannot be explained by a simple dictionary definition of "relevance." Within the RT framework, linguistic relevance occurs when an utterance creates "cognitive effects" that do not require much "processing effort." Cognitive effects occur when the speaker's or writer's utterance contains new information that strengthens the addressee's old assumptions, provides evidence that will lead to the abandonment of them, or combines with old assumptions to create implications. When utterances imply more than one meaning, and in ads this is often true, there is the potential to create greater cognitive effects. Byrne (1992) points out that a critical tenet of RT lies in the fact that a hearer will expend effort to process an act of communication if he deems it to "alter or enrich his cognitive environment" (p. 12). Thus, it is possible for an utterance to be relevant even if more processing effort is needed, as long as the enrichment is worthwhile to the hearer.

With that in mind, advertisers will often sacrifice ease in processing by making ambiguous statements that have more than one implied meaning. The greater cognitive effects the advertisers aim at consumers (through multiple

implications) may justify the potential processing effort required to generate the various interpretations of the ad messages. Thus, it follows that although the effort to process the meaning of an ad may be greater, the resulting interest and attraction that leads a consumer to bother to read an ad might also be greater. The following paragraphs will develop how RT applies to ad discourse, keeping in mind the previous research regarding the attractiveness of ads and their potential to persuade an audience.

Puns and Cognition of an Advertising Message

Tanaka (1992) presented a RT-based study that examines ambiguity and multiple meanings in ads. She asserts that word play or puns can lead audiences to expend more processing effort to achieve meaning in ad discourse. In terms of RT, such a move violates the ideal condition for relevance, which Sperber & Wilson (1995) refer to as optimal relevance. Optimal relevance occurs when the sender of a message makes sure that the communicative intention is relayed in such a way that the language does not contain costly distractions or prevent an audience from expending the least amount of processing effort to recover its cognitive effects. Although puns may require more processing effort, the curiosity and maybe the test or

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challenge of solving the pun outweighs the extra effort needed to achieve cognition. It follows that the intellectual stimulation experienced in the recovery of a pun's interpretation in an ad provides a greater reward. To illustrate, consider Tanaka's (1992) example of an ad for the London trains in 1981: "Less bread. No jam. (p. 93). In the colloquial meaning of the day, bread was money. Jam refers to the traffic jam a customer would avoid by riding the train. The catchy phrases combined two common foods, bread and jam; this connection to food is the most easily processed meaning that could be derived from the ad. Moreover, the reader might appreciate being able to solve the meaning of the pun—that is, that the train is more economical than fueling a car, and it avoids traffic problems for its riders. Tanaka (1994) acknowledges that puns require more processing effort on the part of the addressee, but justifies the usage of puns in ads because they "attract and hold the audience's attention" (p. 64). According to van Mulken, van Enschot-van Dijk, and Hoeken (2003), when the communicator successfully relays the pun, the readers may increase their positive attitude toward the product endorsed in the ad. In addition, they also assert

that relevance is achieved when this happens, which can be explained more fully in the following paragraph.

Yus' (2003) study also discusses puns in advertising from a RT perspective. In drawing from Sperber and Wilson's (1995) inferential model of communication, Yus (2003) explains how humorous interpretations occur through contextual knowledge shared by both the speaker and the addressee. When contextual knowledge is considered in comprehension, the effort extended to process an utterance increases. Blakemore (1997) wrote that the processing effort on the part of an addressee takes into account "the complexity and length of the utterance being processed, together with the size and accessibility of the context that is required for its interpretation" (8). In other words, as Yus has pointed out, if both speaker and addressee share contextual knowledge, the message will be received and understood. A simple example of this can be explained by two utterances illustrating the inferential model:

(a) I have no brothers or sisters.

(b) I have no siblings. (Blakemore, 1997, p.8)

In (a) an addressee possessing even a very small lexicon in English cannot mistake the meaning of the utterance, but in

(b), if the addressee does not know the meaning of the word "siblings," then further processing effort will be necessary, either by asking the speaker more questions, or by looking up the meaning of siblings in the dictionary. In the above example, there is merely a lexical barrier to understanding; however, if previous utterances between the two parties had a defined context of "family," it would be possible for the addressee to conclude that "sibling" refers to family members, possibly brothers and sisters. In this way, contextual implications allow for the addressee to infer the meaning of a previously unknown word through an earlier context provided in conversation, which had then become part of the addressee's background knowledge. Yes, there would be more processing effort expended, but the meaning of a new word could be achieved inferentially. In addition, the excitement of learning a new word would be a great motivator to recover meaning, and, I contend, the addressee would gladly expend the processing effort because it would add enrichment to their vocabulary.

Messages containing puns in ads work very much in the same way, except that an addressee can choose a correct meaning in context with the utterance rather than solve a

lexical riddle as in the above example. Yus (2003) asserts that puns allow for "different stages in the interpretive process of inference which RT predicts may be exploited by speakers aiming for a humorous interpretation of their utterances" (p. 1304). Puns offer many possible messages outside of previously understood contexts, and thus, the multiple meanings can create greater cognitive effects and greater processing efforts for an addressee.

Interestingly, however, according to Yus (2003), a large number of puns have only two possible interpretations. To that end, he posits that one is more overt to the addressee and the other is covert. Yus asserts that this fact creates an ideal environment for an addressee to consult their previous knowledge in context with a message.

Consider Tanaka's (1994) example: "Mazda—the perfect car for a long drive" (p. 74). (The ad also shows a picture of a Mazda parked at the top of a long driveway.) Yus (2003) explained that two possible interpretations could come from this ad: either the car was good for long trips (a covert interpretation), or the car was perfect for owners who had a long drive(way) (a overt interpretation). Ideally, the audience would need to make the preferred covert inference because the advertiser would favor the first interpretation

(where the long drive implies a comfortable ride) to encourage a future sale. But the reader could choose either or both interpretations of the message. In this example, the enjoyment of gaining both contexts according to Yus (2003) is "mutually manifest to both [advertiser] and [audience] that a humorous interpretation was intended" (p. 1321). Even though most consumers don't have a long driveway, they would receive a greater cognitive reward if they recovered both interpretations of the ad. Thus, according to Yus (2003), both the pictorial context and the verbal context would serve to satisfy Speber and Wilson's inferential model of communication for relevance because both interpretations could be recovered by most addressees reading the ad.

Van Mulken, van Enschot-van Dijk, and Hoeken (2005) decided to put the research where "the rubber meets the road" when they tested whether audiences appreciate puns in ads. They performed a cross-sectional study involving 68 people and 24 ad slogans. They found that when readers can solve the pun riddle in an ad, they appreciate the ad much more. In light of the RT perspective, the cognitive challenge of processing the information was a rewarding experience for the participants in the study in several

ways (i.e. amusement, satisfaction in recovering more than

one meaning, and appreciation of the challenge), even

though the effort expended exceeded the ideal conditions

for optimal relevance. Their research (ibid, p. 709) draws

from Giora's (1999) assumption that a more conventional or

more typically used meaning derived from a pun is

preferable to a hearer. Thus, they contend, the humorous

meaning of a pun in an ad becomes salient and readily

accessible because of the hearer's preference to process

the humorous meaning rather than the literal meaning,

overriding the condition for optimal relevance.

Metaphors in Ad Discourse

According to Diaz-Perez (2000), the blasé ad using

informational wording is likely to be ignored by a non-

interested public. To contrast this idea, consider that a

face-to-face conversation between two friends will draw the

attention of both participants because a verbal interchange

takes place, regardless of the content of the conversation.

RT explains that optimally relevant communication requires

an ostensive stimulus that needs to catch the attention of

an addressee so that cognitive effects can occur. In

advertising, this stimulus must be attractive, and as

reported above, things like puns can serve to be salient

features of this type of discourse. Without direct

communication between two living beings, ads have to be

"imparted to an audience in an interesting and creative

way" (Byrne, 1992 p. 35). Thus, according to Diaz-Perez

(2000), word play and attention-getters can fulfill this

mission. Metaphors, like puns, exploit word play in

communication and, as with puns, when metaphors are used in

ad text, they also can elicit more than one meaning.

Consider the following example: "Exotic flowers aren't the

only thing (sic) that blossom here" (Diaz-Perez, 2000, p.

48). The ad text describes a tourist destination with two

young people romantically walking among beautiful flowers.

In this ad, "blossom" can imply two different

interpretations of the text, and an audience can choose

between them — either love will happen or nice flowers will

please the eye. The metaphor in this ad is very attractive

to an audience and begs to be processed, thus fulfilling a

condition of relevance by using metaphor as an ostensive

stimulus. The advertisers might achieve audience attention

by providing two positive interpretations for their tourist

destination and could possibly gain some sales as a result.

Another researcher (Forceville, 1994) extends the

research regarding metaphor in advertising though a RT

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lens, but his study is restricted to billboards. What is interesting about this study is the way that billboard pictures relay a metaphorical meaning. Like movie posters, the picture adds a great amount of information needed for an audience to recover the cognitive effects from the short discourse in this type of ad. Unlike magazines, billboards cannot have a long or extensive message due to the short viewing time that passing drivers have to read them. Forceville (1996) describes verbal metaphor as a type of semantic deviant requiring effort for an addressee to unravel. However, the work that must take place for an addressee to derive meaning from a metaphorical message involves additional steps in cognition — these are not ideal conditions for achieving relevance according to Forceville (1996). What makes ads interesting and possibly more open to an audience interpretation is the element of unexpectedness.

The following example (Forceville, 1994) is, at first, not easily understood. It is a picture of a parking meter with a curved pole resembling a human spinal cord and a tongue protruding from the "head" at the top of the curved display where a red pointer shows the time elapsed since the last coin was inserted. Because this picture is on a

large billboard, most of these details can be quickly processed by a passing motorist. Unfortunately, the one picture by itself leaves very little room for interpretations as to its meaning because there is no endorsing company's name on the bottom of the ad. According to Forceville (1994), the company uses a second picture on a different billboard, and this time it comes with the caption "starve a meter" (pp 108, 109). The second billboard bottom has the caption "The London Underground," which is a tunnel train that runs under the city. The audience can easily determine from the second billboard that the starvation comes from a lack of coins and not from a lack of food. Thus, using the context of the second billboard, the audience is able to interpret the pictorial metaphor in the ad to mean that parking meters starve when cars stay home and people ride the train instead. Interestingly, the metaphorical interpretation is actually easier for the audience to recover from the message; thus, the words (the text and the endorsement) and the pictures act in tandem to make the ad more relevant. Audiences gain pleasure from the "aha moment" when they see the second billboard.

Summary of Relevance Theory Applications
to Ad Discourse

The above research suggests that ad discourse becomes more interesting when linguistic devices such as puns and metaphors are used to sell ad products. Although one RT tenet is that discourse should be easily processed to be relevant, the implications in a mixed message, such as one that contains a pun or a metaphor can actually be more relevant due to an addressee's desire to process the information to gain the reward provided by the intellectual stimulation experienced in the recovery of a pun or a metaphor's interpretation. However, when an ad presents a riddle in discourse, the addressee's background knowledge must contain sufficient information for the addressee to make a connection and recover the intended message, or relevance will be lost. This may seem to be a paradox in communication, but advertisers, as shown in the above examples, successfully bet that a large percentage of their target audiences will make the cognitive connections and recover the intended meaning of their messages in both contexts.

As a conclusion from this research, it is obvious that ad people must have a good knowledge of customer background

information in order to make an intelligent choice about
what kind of message to send in an ad. With that in mind,
they can gamble that most of their readers will understand
the pun or metaphor they use, and present the sales message
based upon a consumer's desire to be entertained. In the
same way, movie poster creators, like billboard creators,
could gamble that a short message will be understood, but
more importantly for the movie, the creators should make a
reader curious about a tagline's reference to the movie.
As this thesis will show, movie poster discourse uses more
than just puns and metaphors; it uses a variety of
linguistic devices to achieve the cognitive effects that
provide the foundation for relevance in human cognition.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

In this thesis, I will consider how tagline discourse in movie posters potentially attracts the attention of moviegoers, and how the messages of this discourse might be interpreted. The potential effectiveness of artwork and tagline messages varies with each poster; thus, this study intends to consider the verbal and pictorial relationships found on different posters, and the ways a moviegoer might react to the combination of both components.

Collecting the Data

The data for this study consist of ten movie posters that were identified as useful for analysis. Over a period of several months, I walked the hallways of a local cinemaplex and read movie posters inside and outside of the theater, taking note of titles, poster artwork, and taglines. In this quest, I selected posters with interesting combinations of text and pictures. In addition, I also considered whether the taglines contained certain linguistic features including, but not limited to, ambiguity in diction, puns, interesting sentence pairs, and

combinations of word fonts and colors. A formal list of these linguistic features is found in the "Table of Linguistic Features for Analysis" at the end of this chapter. Once I decided my movie poster titles, I was able to download quality images of the posters from the website *Internet Movie Poster Awards*, a warehouse for selling posters as consumer collectables. In the data below, there are some movie titles that marketed more than one poster ad suitable for analysis; next to those titles I indicate that there are "multiple posters," and they are lettered (a, b, etc.) below the title. Other movie title ads use a variety of discourse, and on those occasions, I indicate that there are "multiple discourses on one poster"; this data is also listed with letters.

The 10 posters I collected are listed below, along with their taglines:

1. *The Corpse Bride* (multiple posters):

    a. "Rising to the occasion this September"

    b. "There's been a grave misunderstanding."

2. *Hidalgo*:

    "Unbridled. Unbroken. Unbeaten."

3. *Wimbeldon*:

    "She's the golden girl. He's the hotshot. It's

a match made in . . . "

4. *Saw II* (multiple posters):

   a. "2nd annual *Saw II* blood drive"

   b. "this halloween, give till it hurts"

5. *Scooby-Doo2: Monsters Unleashed*:

   "Doo the fright thing"

6. *The Bourne Ultimatum*

   "Remember everything / Forgive nothing"

7. No title on poster—readers must figure it out

   (multiple discourses on poster):

   a. "What are the odds of getting even?"

   b. "13 to one."

   c. "06|08|07"

8. *Mr. 3000*:

   "Big mouth. Big league. Big time."

9. *Because I said so*:

   "She's just your normal, overprotective,

   overbearing, over-the-top mother."

10. *Hairspray*:

   "Who's who behind the do?"

Relevance Theory Application to This Study

For the purpose of this study, I have chosen to apply
Sperber and Wilson's (1995) Relevance Theory (RT) to
analyze the aforementioned movie poster data. The most
valuable insights that RT has for this analysis of tagline
discourse in movie posters are its underlying principles
related to communication and cognition. Regarding
communication, Sperber and Wilson's (1995) concepts of
"informative principle" and "communicative principle" have
direct applications to movie posters. The communicative
principle is achieved by how an interlocutor (or movie
poster author) grabs the attention of an audience, or as
Matsui (2000) puts it, this communication "involves
'ostensive' behavior: that is, behavior intended to attract
an audience's attention to some phenomenon" (27).
Regarding the informative principle, the term "informative"
suggests in RT that when a speaker wishes to relay a
certain message to an audience, there is a desire to make
information known. Sperber and Wilson (1995, p.54) define
the informative principle as "what is communicated and how
it is achieved."

In many modern cinemaplexes, the RT informative
principle is fulfilled through the movie posters that can

be seen by passing audiences in the hallways leading to the individual theater auditoriums. According to Forceville (1996) the informative principle is explained when "the communicator makes it overtly clear that she wants to communicate" (p.84). Movie advertisers are quite overt in their intention to communicate because theaters contain numerous movie poster ads housed in glittering, glass display cases. With that in mind and in view of the above circumstances, it follows that the advertiser's communicative principle is relayed once a reader glances into the display case and notices the catchy poster artwork and its written discourse, which is a fulfillment of that communicator's ostensive behavior.

Cognition, the second major RT tenet, when defined simply, deals chiefly with the "comprehension" of words, and, as a condition of relevance, it is achieved while expending the least amount of processing effort. In terms of this framework, the entire movie poster ad, the tagline discourse, the movie title and the illustration on the movie poster must be easily comprehended to be relevant. RT addresses cognition through the principles of cognitive effects, or when information is understandable to the human mind in a way that makes it memorable to the reader. In

terms of how this view of cognition applies to movie posters, taglines rely on the reader's prior knowledge of facts concerning the movie or details about the subject of the movie, which, in the light of RT, can create the desired cognitive effects.

Summarily, then, according to RT, the advertiser hopes that the informative intention will be fulfilled when an onlooker, who has only moments to be attracted to and read the message on a poster while traversing the theater hallways will take time to glance at it. Next, in RT terms, the advertiser's communicative intention is relayed by an interesting poster (a product of their ostensive behavior) that will attract a reader, who will then effortlessly processes the movie poster ad. However, if the reader is attracted to the artwork yet the tagline is insignificant or too difficult to process (creating few or no cognitive effects), or the tagline is not interesting enough to expend additional processing effort (explained below), it is likely that the reader would not give much thought to the poster. In either case, the relevance of the message is lost, according to Sperber and Wilson (1995).

Framework for Analysis

With regard to cognitive effects in general, the old information (or the prior knowledge of the reader) should interact with the new information (on a movie poster) creating implications ideal for relevance in RT. When a reader encounters a movie poster's message, four possible outcomes can occur. I will use these specific outcomes to frame my discussion in Chapter 3 of how the new information in a tagline, conveyed through certain linguistic strategies, creates cognitive effects.

(1) The new information may combine with an existing assumptions and yield contextual implications. In reference to movie poster ads, contextual implications are deductions that would arise by cognitively processing all 3 components on a poster. Consider the tagline:

"Houston, we have a problem"

The meaning of this tagline is almost insignificant because the readers cannot reach a definitive conclusion about the movie. If the rest of the poster is added to the mix (the illustration showing an astronaut's face inside of a bubbled helmet, implying

that he is in space, and the movie title *Apollo 13*)
the contextual implications become clear.

In other words, readers must process all of the
information on the poster (the picture on the poster,
the movie title, and the message in the tagline) and
combine that information with their existing
assumptions (old information) about the subject of the
movie advertised (in this case the historical fact
regarding the near disaster of Apollo 13). As a
result, the reader may become curious about the movie,
creating interest in seeing the movie.

(2) New information may combine with the 3
components of a movie poster ad (just mentioned above)
and may strengthen existing assumptions—either
positively or negatively. With regard to a negative
reaction to any feature on the poster including the
tagline, the interest generated by someone being
informed about something that they already know or do
not care much about could be quite boring, and
probably would not result in additional desire to
process more information or think about the poster's
information further — obviously there would be little
chance that they would want to see the movie.

However, if her existing assumptions about a movie are strengthened positively when she views and reads the poster, it might be possible for her to become excited about the movie. Thus, there might be enough interest for her to expend processing effort to parse the information on the poster or go see the movie.

(3) New information combines with the 3 components of a movie poster ad and may contradict and eliminate existing assumptions. This happens when the readers already have made an assumption about the movie's content. After they look at the movie poster ad, they realize that the movie is not what they expected it to be. As with (2), the readers will either become more interested in the movie poster ad or they will walk away depending on their positive or negative reaction to the change in their existing assumptions about the movie.

(4) The tagline creates more than one contextual implication through ostensive devices such as puns, rhymes, and parallelisms in the text, which, according to (Díaz Pérez, 2000), draw attention to the message. However, the reader must expend more cognitive effort to process these implications, not an ideal condition

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in RT (Byrne 1992; Tanaka, 1992). Nonetheless, this might not be a bad situation because the interest generated by multiple implications just might be exactly what the poster's creator intended. According to Yus (2003), multiple implications arising from cognitive effects can become more memorable due to the pleasure a reader gains while expending effort to process, sort, and eventually select the appropriate conclusion. It is reasonable to assume that readers under this condition might want to go see a movie that has become memorable from its poster ad.

Ideally, in terms of RT, a moviegoer should want to read a poster, process it, possibly look more closely at it, and ultimately, create potential interest in seeing the movie at a later time (or even that day).

Procedure for Analysis and Categorization

Chapter 3 will be primarily concerned with the application of RT to tagline discourse while considering the linguistic strategies employed by movie poster advertisers. According to Ogilvy (1983), when people look at newspapers, "readers look first at the illustration, then at the headline, [and] then at the copy" (pp. 88-89).

This may apply to movie posters; that is, readers would be initially attracted to artwork on the poster after which they would read the title and the tagline—in that order. Thus, in Chapter 3, when I analyze each poster, I will assume readers look at posters in this way.

As mentioned above, Díaz Pérez, (2000), reports that a reader's processing efforts to make meaning from cognitive effects (the RT model) become worthwhile when certain linguistic strategies exist in ad text messages, such as puns, parallel structures, and rhyming. Additionally, he asserts that paralinguistic structures such as "letter types, shapes, colors, and sizes are exploited to catch the addressee's attention" (p. 41). In choosing posters I could analyze, it was necessary for a tagline to draw readers' interest, and the above research proved very useful. It also helped me sort posters for analysis and locate certain linguistic strategies in the taglines, and from that data, I sorted them into general categories so that I could organize my analysis accordingly. Table 1 below lists the linguistic features this study intends to investigate in the order of their appearance by category:

Table 1: Linguistic Features for Analysis

Poetic Devices	Puns Rhyme and Repetition
Semantic Elements	Use of homonyms Ambiguity in diction
Syntactic Features	Parallel structures
Formatting Effects	Font sizes Letter colors Letter substitutions

CHAPTER THREE

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings from the movie

poster data collected for this thesis. The findings are

organized according to the categories of linguistic

features listed on the chart found in Chapter 2: poetic

devices, semantic and pragmatic elements, syntactic

features, and formatting effects. For each linguistic

feature group, I examine how each feature (or multiple

features from the group) in concert with movie titles and

illustrations on the poster could create cognitive effects

according to Sperber and Wilson's (1995) Relevance Theory

(RT).

Poetic Devices: Puns

Across the ten posters in my data, there were a

variety of taglines that incorporated the poetic device of

puns as a linguistic feature to attract audience attention.

Puns, according to the research discussed in Chapter 2,

require, in RT terms, more processing effort. Thus,

capturing the dual meanings in puns would be a condition

where new information would yield multiple implications.

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Due to the expense of additional processing effort to gain

understanding, it is possible to create additional

cognitive effects, which could make a message more relevant

to a reader due to its high interest value or potential to

be humorous (Yus, 2003 and Van Mulken, van Enschot-van

Dijk, and Hoeken, 2005). I found puns in a number of the

poster taglines, as listed below.

> (1) There's been a grave misunderstanding. (*Corpse Bride*)
>
> (2) Rising to the occasion this September (*Corpse Bride*)
>
> (3) This halloween (sic), give till it hurts. (*Saw II*)
>
> (4) It's a match made in . . . (*Wimbledon*)

In example (1) the tagline is a pun because the word

"grave" has two different meanings. If readers look at the

picture first, they will see an illustration of a bride and

groom holding hands, perhaps after their wedding vows have

been given. What makes the illustration interesting is

that the groom has a shocked look on his face as he gazes

on his new bride, seemingly due to the bride's skeletal

hand that he is holding in his. The phrase "grave

misunderstanding" in the tagline appears to correspond to

the groom's choice of a wife—as evidenced by the bony hand—
a woman who is dead. The title of the movie confirms the
connection because a *Corpse Bride* is a dead bride. Thus,
from the tagline, the gravity of the misunderstanding is
not a poor choice in love, which would be a literal
translation of the tagline, but it is the gravity of being
married to somebody who is fresh from the grave. The
skeleton dog in the background supports this interpretation
of the pun because the dog seems to have risen from the
grave itself. Also, the literal meaning of grave is
"extreme," and certainly, if someone married a dead person,
that would be an extreme misunderstanding as well. Thus,
from the tagline, the reader should conclude that the groom
is marrying a dead person, which is the intended meaning
for the pun in the tagline on the poster, the meaning that
the ad agency hopes would create enough interest for
certain readers to want to see the movie.

From a RT perspective, the new information presented
in the tagline taken in concert with the visual information
in the picture creates multiple implications that a reader
would have to process, which might become a pleasurable
task and could actually justify the additional processing
effort. Van Mulken, van Enschot-van Dijk, and Hoeken

(2005) assert that the additional cognitive effort to determine a pun's meaning becomes more relevant because the humor delivers an extra effect — the pleasure of "getting the pun." From what I discussed above, it is conceivable to believe that readers would find this poster amusing (considering the look on the groom's face) because of the implications behind the phrase "grave misunderstanding." In addition, Forceville's research (1994, 1996) implies that consumers remember ad messages when they expend more cognitive effort to determine their meaning. In this case, because there are two meanings in each pun, the posters may generate additional cognitive effects in the reader and are thus worth the extra processing effort. In addition, this poster could also remain memorable due to the pleasure the reader had in solving the pun, and when poster messages remain foremost in your mind, this could lead to further interest in the movie as well.

In the second *Corpse Bride* poster, example (2), the tagline reads, "rising to the occasion this September." When considering the meaning of the word "occasion" the reader might first look at the poster's picture showing a church with spooky-looking guests making their approach. The wedding context is easily captured due to the title of

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the movie (*Corpse Bride*) and the bridal costume on the
flower-bearing character (the bride) in the picture. All
of these factors on the poster produce a salient set of
cognitive effects or "contextual implications." In the
framework of RT, Sperber and Wilson (2004) assert that
contextual implications lead to a better conclusion in
cognition when you combine input with context. When you
consider all of the movie posters in this study (including
the current) the "input" is the tagline and the movie
title, and the "context" is the picture working in
cooperation with the input (the discourse) on the poster.
Simply put—contextual implications help a reader form
better conclusions within the scope of the cognitive
effects a reader processes when they examine ad pictures
together with the discourse found on them or below them.

After looking at the picture, the reader can notice
that in addition to giving information about the release of
the movie, the tagline contains a familiar idiomatic
expression, which is also an interesting pun (rising to the
occasion) that alludes to graveyard activity. Regarding
the two meanings of puns in advertisements, Yus (2003)
asserts that there is an overt meaning (one more obvious to

an addressee) that takes precedence over a covert meaning

(less obvious to an addressee) during cognitive processing.

First, readers will notice the words "rising to the

occasion" in context with the picture on the poster and its

title, which allows for an overt meaning to rise from the

discourse—that is, the connection to the idea of rising

from the dead in a graveyard . Since this poster is filled

with contextual implications arising from the cognitive

effects created by the picture, title, and tagline, readers

can simultaneously process the information to arrive at

this overt solution to the pun: (1) Readers can notice that

in this *Corpse Bride* poster, the impending wedding is

interesting due to the time of day it is depicted—a

nighttime wedding. (2) There is a large, full moon in the

backdrop illuminating the bride and groom. (3) When

considering the illustration details and tagline together,

the message of "rising [from the dead]" becomes easily

parsed because this meaning may be most quickly accessed —

corpses (from the title) who wed probably have risen from

the grave prior to the ceremony. (4) Readers might also

process the idea that a nighttime setting upholds the idea

that graveyards can be a busy place due to numbers of

corpses coming out of the ground. (5) The subtle, yet

fully-risen harvest moon in the backdrop of the poster also
contributes to the eerie scenery and the subliminal message
of a body rising (since the moon itself also rises). Thus,
all five of these contextual implications can lead readers
to process the overt or most obvious meaning of the pun
"rising to the occasion" to mean that the wedding attendees
as well as the bride are freshly-risen corpses.

Secondly, the covert or less obvious meaning of
"rising" is the literal meaning: becoming actively involved
in something when it is necessary to do so, which is also
the idiomatic meaning of that phrase. Clearly, from the
above analysis, it is true that readers must expend more
processing effort to recover the multiple meanings from the
pun in the tagline. However, the tagline can be considered
humorous because the guests and the prenuptials are
purposefully walking toward the chapel to attend the
ceremony (as shown in the picture), so they are definitely
"rising to the occasion," whether they are freshly raised
from the grave or simply being responsible by attending the
event. Readers could feel a sense of accomplishment in
"getting" the dual implications behind the pun, which,
according to Yus (2003) makes the extra processing effort
worthwhile according to RT. I submit that if the reader

expended the added cognitive effort to capture the dual meanings behind the pun, they just might be motivated to see the movie as well.

In the example (3) above, there are two messages on the *Saw II* poster. The tagline for the movie Saw II challenges the reader that "this halloween, (sic) [they should] give 'til it hurts." The picture on the poster shows a depiction of a nurse (with a traditional nurse's cap) who has a look on her face as if to suggest that she were about to stick a needle into your arm. In the context with the tagline's imperative clause, "give 'till it hurts," one could suppose that the giving could occur at the hands of the depicted nurse who would draw your blood.

A further examination of the poster shows the second message, which is the movie title embedded into a commercial-like, declarative phrase that reads "The second annual *Saw II* blood drive." Working together with the tagline, the reader could make a connection that blood most definitely would be shed. At this point it is possible to assume that the traditional method of drawing blood by a nurse's needle might not be used. Thus, giving "'til it hurts" could suggest that pain is involved when the blood is drawn, more pain than just a needle entering the skin.

Since the clause "give 'till it hurts" is an idiomatic

expression to mean voluntary giving at painful expense, the

pun occurs when the painful giving becomes involuntary.

Thus, the pun's second interpretation can include the idea

that there might be sinister forces, such as the mean-

looking nurse, who could coerce the act of giving, thus

rendering it involuntary. Furthermore, if readers buy into

the idea of involuntary giving, they could conclude that

certain sinister forces could create bloodshed that would

be severe enough to result in death.

Most likely, the "sinister" interpretation of the pun

would be the poster creators' desired meaning behind the

message since the movie it advertises can be classified as

part of the "horror genre" or fright films that certain

audiences enjoy seeing. That particular target audience

would likely respond to the poster and, I submit, be

willing to expend the additional processing effort to

recover the tagline's most salient interpretation that when

you "give 'til it hurts," the result is probably a bloody

death, the worst kind of hurt, as is most often seen in

this genre of films. Therefore, even though the new

information on the poster has multiple implications, the

tagline and picture quite possibly would yield conclusions

that matter for the type of moviegoer who would appreciate a bloody, gory, suspense-filled, and frightening film, and they would be willing to engage in the extra cognitive processing work involved in closely examining the implications on this poster. For this type of audience, the ease of processing the information for the ideal conditions of relevance in a RT model would be overridden by the desire to absorb any clues as to the content of a movie they want to see.

When considering the *Saw II* poster, it needs to be said that a different audience might process the new information on the poster and could strengthen their already existing negative set of assumptions about this genre of movie. Upon receiving the poster's information, this type of audience would almost immediately dismiss any further cognitive processes and walk away repulsed due to the nature of violence associated with the bloodshed in this type of shock movie and reflected in the visuals and text of the poster. Sperber and Wilson (1995) would say that the reader is abandoning the available assumptions that occur when the reader processes the cognitive effects based on the new (negative) information they see when encountering this poster.

Similarly, in example (4), readers could also strengthen existing (negative) assumptions about the input from the poster advertising the movie *Wimbledon*—a tennis romance movie. In this case, a reader might react negatively to the game of tennis in general and immediately discard any further interest in the poster or its message. Or, some readers could immediately classify this movie as a "chick flick" because of the conceivably romantic picture of a man and woman on the poster, and refuse to further process and extend the available assumptions that arise from the poster's contextual effects.

After viewing the man and woman on the poster looking as if they were romantically inclined, many readers would probably solve the first meaning of the pun in the third tagline "It is a [love] match made in . . . " *Wimbledon* (instead of heaven) before considering the rest of the tagline's clauses. The second meaning of the pun in this tagline could be found by looking at the picture on the poster where the woman is holding a tennis racket in her hand. In this case, the cognitive effects created by the contexts in the tagline and poster illustration could be strengthened if the reader possessed even an elementary knowledge of tennis—the knowledge that a tennis contest is

known as a "match." They would only need to connect the

word "*Wimbledon*" as a famous site for tennis matches to

complete the pun in the tagline. If readers solved both

meanings of the pun, there might be some pleasure gained

from this cognitive experience, and the possibility of

getting the multiple meanings would offset the cost of the

additional processing effort.

Poetic Devices: Repetition and Rhyme

Poetic devices can be seen on many movie poster

taglines through the linguistic features of repetition and

rhyme, which often appear together on one poster. The

following two movie posters and taglines contain these

features (note: a slash mark (/) appears below to indicate

multiple lines on the poster's tagline):

(5)   "She's just your overbearing, overprotective,

      over-the-top mother."

      (*Because I said so*)

(6)   "The rules of the game / are about to change"

      (*Gracie*)

Filreis (2007) calls rhyme and repetition the "center

of interest" in poetry, and certainly, taglines could be

considered poetic if they rhyme or have repetitive

discourse. Interesting words could be considered

pleasurable, and they could form an extra effect similar to

puns such as I have discussed above. For RT, this means

extra processing effort, yet there is a reward of sorts

because the reader might enjoy reading things that rhyme.

In example (5) above, words beginning with "over" is

repeated three times in the tagline. In the illustration,

the reader would see an older woman shaking her index

finger directly at the face of a younger woman (presumably

the older woman's daughter). In large, emphatic font, the

title below asserts, "Because I said so" (words that can be

associated with the illustrated finger shaking). If the

reader looks at the tagline next, they will see the first

two repetitions of "over" (overprotective and overbearing).

Readers could be tempted to process this repetition of

words, especially in reference to the noun that the

adjectives containing the word "over" modify—mother. The

repeated word "over" can give readers the impression that

the mother exaggerates her role as a mother because she is

overprotective and overbearing, meaning a bit too much of a

mother. While this may be a stereotypical depiction of a

mother, depending on the reader, there can be a variety of

reactions according to the principal of RT. If the new

information from the tagline falls into the eyes of a mother or someone who has experience with this kind of mother, the contextual implications arising from the cognitive effects (from the input of language and the context of the picture) might strengthen the reader's already existing assumptions about motherhood—it is strong, protective, and somewhat intrusive.

Interestingly, the third repetition of "over" (over-the-top) throws the reader off balance — "over" no longer means THAT over but something else. In this case, "over" is part of an idiomatic expression (over-the-top), which means somebody who exaggerates speech or actions. This would cause the reader to think just a little more, and by thinking a little more, the reader gets more cognitive effects. It is conceivable that this tagline discourse would be humorous to anyone who could relate to the challenges and endearments of motherhood because of this repetitive and exaggerated discourse, and humor itself could justify the additional processing effort created by the cognitive effects in the tagline.

Example (6) shows the value of rhyme or assonant words for emphasis in a tagline. For the movie poster advertising *Gracie*, there is another line at the bottom of

the poster under the title that reads, "inspired by one family's real story." The poster illustration shows the back of a young woman looking at an all-male soccer team practicing on a field. She holds a soccer ball in her hand, and she is dressed in a soccer uniform—the illustration undoubtedly suggests that she wants to play the game. If readers came to the same conclusion listed above, their attention potentially could be drawn even closer to looking at the tagline's meaning. When the input "the rules of the game are about to change" is taken in context with the picture of the young woman viewing the obviously male-dominated field, it is easy to suggest that the reader would reach the conclusion that the film relates the true story of a young woman who strongly desires to play soccer with men. Furthermore, the value of assonant words (game and change) in the dual-lined tagline (as shown above by the poetry line break: /) could work to emphasize how important it was to "change" the "game."

Readers could react in a variety of ways to this new information. Some readers might be activists for the need to change social rules governing women's involvement in traditionally male sporting events. For those readers, the cognitive effects from the tagline and illustration could

add information to their existing assumptions to create

implications regarding their feelings about equality for

women. In that case, it is reasonable to suggest, they

would be motivated to see the movie. In terms of RT, these

readers would embrace the contextual implications fully

because the stimuli from the input on the poster are

salient in view of their emotional investment in women's

rights.

On the other hand, there could be readers that might

not make those assumptions when processing the cognitive

effects from the poster's new information. Perhaps those

readers might not even possess enough background schema

about the sport, be aware of the desire of a woman to play

in that sport, or have any idea about how rules could

change just because a young woman is looking at some men

playing soccer. In RT, the results of this scenario would

be that the readers would have to expend too much

processing effort from the input on the poster to yield any

conclusions that matter to them—a very poor condition for

relevance. For these readers the contextual implications

are not really accessible, so they would probably abandon

all cognitive processing and not think about the poster

again.

Semantic Elements: Homonyms and Ambiguity in
Diction

Semantic ambiguity is a strategy that ad writers use
to capture readers' notice, and when combined with creative
poster illustrations, the resulting contextual
implications, as seen in the following taglines, provide an
interesting appeal:

(7) "Who's who behind the do?" (*Hairspray*)

(8) "Doo the fright thing." (*Scooby Doo II: Monsters
Unleashed*)

(9) "Remember everything. Forgive nothing." (*The
Bourne Ultimatum*)

The poster in example (7) is unique in that it is very
colorful, and according to Hermerén (1999) and Cook (2001),
colorful effects enhance the appeal of advertisements and
make them more likely to draw a consumer's attention.
Readers will notice that the poster shows the tops of 10
people's faces, emphasizing their hairlines and hairdos.
Since the question in example (7) above ("who's who behind
the do?") has the word "do" that is somewhat ambiguous at
first, the faces on the poster (emphasizing the hair lines)
would likely help readers at least to clarify the meaning
of the homonym "do." This conclusion would lessen the

ambiguity in the tagline. With this information readers

will have processed one cognitive effect from the new

information on the poster (determining the use of the

homonym "do") and made some inferences about the tagline

from the textual implications; however, the work of

digesting the tagline message on the poster is not done—the

question in the ambiguous tagline (Who's who . . .)

requires additional cognitive processing, and the lack of

an answer creates more textual implications.

Upon closer examination of the pictures, readers could

notice that two of the pictures on the poster are the same

actor with the hairdo of a woman. Many readers are

familiar with the actor John Travolta, so this connection

might be easy to make. If some readers make that

contextual implication about the question in the tagline

(the "who" behind one of the dos), it is reasonable to

assume that these readers would like to gain more

information or answer the question more completely. They

have combined some existing assumptions about the movie

(identification) and might be curious to continue trying to

solve the identities of mystery faces on the poster. If

so, this would involve a greater amount of processing

effort. Thus, to avoid the work and the time involved to

further identify the faces on the poster, they might just go and see the movie to find the answers.

However, for some readers, the information on this poster would not produce a positive cognitive effect. That is, the new information would combine with the 3 components of this movie poster ad (illustration, title, and tagline) and may strengthen their existing negative assumptions about the content of this movie. Following Sperber and Wilson (1995), the input on the poster would not make a worthwhile difference to those individuals' representation of the world because the effects generated by someone being informed about something that they do not care much about could be quite boring, and probably would not result in additional desire to process more information or think about the poster's information further. They would probably walk away not caring about who's who behind the do.

In example (9) above, for the movie *The Bourne Ultimatum*, the tagline presents two ambiguous statements: "Remember everything. Forgive nothing." Part of the ambiguity of the tagline lays behind the lack of referents for the words "everything" and "nothing." For readers like me who have seen the previous two sequels (*The Bourne*

Identity and *The Bourne Supremacy*), I submit that there would be adequate background information to process the cognitive effects and make relevant meaning out of the tagline because the first two movies disclose that the main character, Jason Bourne, is unsure of his real identity and feels resentment toward the U.S. government agency that reprogrammed his identity. Furthermore, the power in the ambiguous deixis (the meaning of the words "everything" and "nothing") in the lines might easily tempt fans of the previous movies to see the third sequel and add new information to the problem suggested by the deictic phrases.

However, for other readers, attempting to identify the meaning of the deictic phrases would be fruitless if they had no memory or mental connection to previous editions of the movie. The pictures on the poster give some hints of the context by showing two views of Jason Bourne's facial expressions—looks that are serious and vengeful. In addition, the movie's title, *The Bourne Ultimatum*, provides more information for understanding the deictic phrases: an ultimatum, by definition, is a threat. Taking the illustration into account, readers could conclude that when someone "remembers everything" (evil) they might want to

demand (issue an ultimatum for) some kind of resolution.

Additionally, "forgiving nothing" could be a natural

outcome of the evil memory suggested by the first deictic

phrase of the tagline to justify a person issuing an

ultimatum to someone. Readers could assume from looking at

the gun in Bourne's hand in the illustration on the left

side of the poster that there will be some kind of

reckoning for the character's (Bourne) previous problems—

but what problems? What is it that Bourne needs to

remember? Who or what will he not forgive? Even with the

above contextual implications taken from the poster, title,

and tagline, if the reader with no previous exposure to the

Bourne movies attempts to expend effort to produce

conclusions from the contextual implications in the poster,

there would be far too much processing effort expended to

bring any immediate conclusion to resolve the tagline's

ambiguities or answer questions about the movie like the

ones posed above.

Herein, RT's applications to this poster become

interesting. In the discussions above, I have posed that

when readers solve puns there is a reward to justify the

additional processing effort according to the RT model.

For some curious readers, there might be a quest to find

out the unknown information (detailed in the last paragraph) from the given contextual effects created by the poster. In other words, a newly formed set of assumptions arising from a person's innate curiosity could arise due to the effectiveness of the tagline, title of the movie, and the illustrations on the poster — all with the minimum of processing effort expended — a condition for relevance. In addition, there could be some pleasure in attempting to process any definitive conclusions, similar to the pleasure one feels when attempting to predict outcomes of mysteries in good literature. Given the ambiguity in the tagline message and a lack of background knowledge to solve the deixis, it is possible that readers might be motivated to see the movie simply to resolve these issues.

The tagline from example (8) above, "Doo the fright thing" advertises a children's movie, *Scooby Doo II*. Readers will make that connection immediately when looking at the cartoon illustration on the poster. There is some minor ambiguity in the spelling of the word "Doo," because it alludes both to Scooby Doo and the verb "do." This can easily be solved by those familiar with the characters on the poster. Among children, there are many readers of this poster who would know Scooby Doo. Sperber and Wilson

(1995, 2004) do not discuss differences in cognitive

abilities regarding the age and human development of the

brain. One could speculate, however, that if the child or

parent reader is able to comprehend the meaning of the

tagline in context with the poster's movie title and

illustrations, there would be a suitable amount of input to

create cognitive effects from these contextual

implications. A child reading this poster could

conceivably make a number of connections about it: Replace

"Doo" with "do," yet understand its association with Scooby

Doo; replace "fright" with "right" while understanding the

moral implications behind this wholesome movie; and

understand that "fright thing" means that Scooby and his

friends are solving mysteries while engaging in hilarious

moments of mock fright suitable for the minds of younger

viewers. Some children can make these connections, but

they will have needed to be familiar with prior episodes of

Scooby Doo. For them, the relevance would come from the

input and conclusions speculated above because it yields

positive cognitive effects—all leading to a desire to see

the movie and enjoy the frolics of Scooby Doo and his

associates.

Syntactic Features: Parallel Structures

Parallel syntactic structures are common in taglines.
Parallel structures like those in the examples that follow
are repetitive, and syntactically, they appear in separate
clauses or on separate lines of the tagline message. In
this way, they are different from the repetitions discussed
earlier such as those in (5) about the overprotective
mother:

(10)   "Unbridled. Unbroken. Unbeaten" (*Hildago*)

(11)   "Big league. Big mouth. Big time." (*Mr. 3000*)

In example (10) above, the movie poster illustration
shows a close-up picture of a man (presumably Hidalgo)
superimposed over another picture in the background showing
a man riding a horse through the desert. Within that
background illustration there are a pack of horses and
riders racing through a cloud of smoke several lengths
behind the man and his horse. Readers unfamiliar with any
commercial advertisements of this movie could only make a
few inferences from the observable data and illustrations
on the poster. Taken in context with the tagline, the
contextual implications readers could draw are that the man
is racing an "unbeaten" horse. Readers with knowledge of
horseback riding would understand the meaning of the words

"unbridled" and "unbroken." Here, in RT, the readers'

cognitive effects would result in the revision of available

assumptions about the information in the tagline of the

movie poster. The words "Unbridled. Unbeaten. Unbroken"

might provide enough interest (due to the clever syntactic

parallelism) that readers would be willing to use the

information to yield further conclusions about the movie

such as the quest for superiority when challenged or

refusal to give up when burdened by hardships, for example.

The impact of the three words in this tagline on the human

mind would vary depending on readers' previous knowledge,

but it is reasonable to assume that the words could

stimulate enough conclusions about the movie to pique the

interest of some readers to see the movie.

The tagline in example (11) provides a different set

of contextual implications. There is an immediately

noticeable red-colored tagline that illustrates a parallel

syntactic structure: "Big league. Big mouth. Big Time."

According to Diáz Pérez (2000), parallel structures attract

readers' attention in ad headlines, which cause readers to

look at the ad more closely. The same can be said for

taglines, and in this case, readers might want to think

about the meanings behind the parallel phrases beginning

with the word "big." Questions could come to mind such as

who has a big mouth? How does the phrase "big time" relate

to the phrase "big mouth?"

Sperber and Wilson (2004) assert that relevance "is a

potential property not only of utterances [in this case,

the tagline discourse] and other observable phenomena [such

as poster illustrations], but of thoughts, memories and

conclusions of inferences" (p. 251). Thus, taking the

previous paragraph into consideration, and in view of this

research, readers might have an easier time drawing

conclusions from the poster's contextual implications if

certain background information (conclusions of inferences

from the past) were in place prior to their exposure to it.

If one were to assume that readers held background

knowledge regarding big league baseball players'

reputations — that is, that some of them possess

narcissistic personalities, it is quite possible that the

readers of this poster could conclude from the parallel

tagline "Big league. Big mouth. Big time" that this movie

might be about players with big mouths whose big-time

efforts in the big league resulted in self-elevation.

Interestingly, notice that the first two nouns,

"league" and "mouth," are concrete nouns whereas the last

noun "time" is abstract. In addition, the first two "big"s

describe size but the last one does not—in fact, "big time"

creates additional cognitive effects because it is forms a

colloquial meaning suggesting some exaggeration. Since

narcissism is an exaggerated state of being anyway, the

contextual effect of this phrase upholds the above

interpretation that some big league players have inflated

egos.

An additional tagline message on the poster adds more

contextual effects and also supports the notion of the

narcissistic player: "He's putting the 'I' back in team."

Regarding this tagline, obviously, there is no letter "i"

in the word team; thus it follows that a big-headed player

(a connection suggested by the parallel use of "big") would

likely not be a "team player" who cooperates with teammates

to win a game. There is humor behind many of the

conclusions suggested by the parallel structures of the

tagline and the contextual effects of this poster, which

probably justify any of the additional processing effort

discussed above.

Formatting Effects: Font Sizes, Letter Colors,
and Letter Substitutions

Goddard (1999) points out that when typographical

features of words (paralinguistic devices) display

different textual shapes used in combination with varying

color schemes, the visual and verbal context can

"foreground" a message by attracting attention to the type

of print it uses. Formatting effects are paralinguistic

devices that draw consumer attention (Díáz Pérez, 2000),

and the following examples are only a small representation

of the large number of movie posters that employ this

attention-getting strategy:

(12) "Who's who behind the do?" *Hairspray*

(13) "What are the odds of getting even?" (no title

       Given — answer: *Ocean's 13*)

In example (12), the tagline is split by a picture of

John Travolta's upper face disguised as a woman

(emphasizing the hair), one of 10 faces illustrated on the

movie poster. As mentioned in the discussion above, the

poster illustrations are very colorful. In addition, the

title of the movie appears with blended, rainbow-colored

letters. The tagline differs from the title in that it

employs both different letter colors and different letter

sizes. The font and color difference appear on the first and last word of the tagline: "Who's" and "do." Considering Goddard's (1999) research above, the tagline foregrounds these two words, thereby drawing attention to them.

Sperber and Wilson (2004) assert that in RT terms, when foregrounded words like these become an external stimulus, they provide salient input to the cognitive processes of readers viewing the text, in this case the poster. If readers have already made other assumptions about the poster (from textual implications arising from the illustration or the title), these paralinguistic features could serve to enhance the cognitive process and strengthen assumptions that could motivate them to attempt to answer the question posed by the tagline: "Who's who behind the do?" The most important words in the tagline are the first and last words (the first one asks "*who* [is who]" and the last word gives the context for the answer "[behind the] *do*"). The foregrounding effect (boldly highlighted letters) is a primary motivator to draw attention to and consider answering that question. The paralinguistic effect of the highlighted words may do little to aid readers' processing efforts in searching for

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an answer, but an answer may not be necessary. The

highlighted words and the almost impossible request to

identify the "whos" (because the facial illustrations

provide only half-faces making identity difficult) might

provide a catalyst to help readers become more curious

about the movie. These numerous contextual implications

created by this poster and the processing effort required

to answer the question from the available data would create

an interesting distraction, perhaps raise a reader's

curiosity, and maybe even make some readers want to see the

movie.

The tagline question in example (13) "What are the

odds of getting even?" is answered in the poster: 13 to

one. What makes the answer interesting is that the font

size of the 13 is large enough to be a number on a

flashcard for a student learning math if the poster were a

flashcard. Uniquely, in this movie poster, the tagline

question and the answer are most likely more interesting

than the picture on the poster. Readers coming to this

poster may possess background information about the two

previous editions of this movie. If they have those

accessible memories, then they will be able to take the

cognitive effects driven by the contextual implications of

the tagline's question and understand that the title of the movie is *Ocean's 13* (The two previous editions were 11 and 12). In terms of RT, these readers probably will not have to process much information from the contextual effects in the movie poster to be motivated to see the movie, but the foregrounded, large-font "13" would most likely attract them and remind them to set aside a day to see it.

Readers who are not familiar with the series will undergo some processing effort in light of the contextual effects in the illustration (an overhead view of a craps table surrounded by men's bodies). If the reader bothers to count the bodies, they will notice that there are only 12. The ambiguity between the bodies and the large font number 13 could create some additional cognitive effects in addition to readers' possible curiosity about the title of the movie. In other words, there are questions that could arise from this ambiguity — why are there 12 men and an emphasis on 13? Are there really 13 people involved in the plot of this movie, and if so, why is the 13th person left out of the illustration?

Another interesting formatting effect on this poster is the layout of the movie's release date—it appears to look like divided vertical numbers you might find on a slot

machine. Between the craps table, the number 13, the

rendering of the release date, and words like "odds" and

"getting even" from the tagline, readers are inundated with

details about gambling and casinos. Because the processing

effort to determine conclusions from the multiple cognitive

effects created by this poster for some readers is

overwhelming, it might seem that the poster would not be

relevant to these readers. However, the interest generated

by the curiosity this poster could create makes the poster

a worthwhile distraction that could arouse future interest

in the movie.

CHAPTER FOUR

IMPLICATIONS

This thesis has used Relevance Theory (RT) to understand how movie poster tagline discourse can be relevant (cognitively perceived) by some audiences. The following discussion investigates how RT, when applied to movie poster discourse, can be pedagogically useful toward the acquisition and development of the English language.

As this thesis has shown, when viewing English movie posters, some audiences (readers) may attend to the information available to them on the tagline discourse and others might not. Foster-Cohen (2004) asserts that for second language learners (L2s), some bits of textual (and spoken) information are immediately meaningful and others are not. Regarding L2 learning, Carroll (2001) argues that RT can, in part, explain the notion of what input that is noticed or attended to and what input goes to the wayside. Sperber and Wilson (1995) call this notion "manifestness," or what is manifest to you; that is, what you are capable of inferring, or more importantly for this study, what you are capable of perceiving from input that you receive.

Pedagogical Applications

According to Foster-Cohen (2000), who also applies RT to L2 learning, when there is communication from speaker to addressee (whether written or spoken) the notion of manifestness does not require mutual knowledge (lexical equality from native speaker to nonnative speaker or from nonnative speaker to nonnative speaker), but a shared cognitive environment. That is, the addressee's perception "is a function of his [or her] physical environment and his cognitive abilities. It consists of not only all the facts he is aware of, but also all the facts that he is capable of becoming aware of, in his physical environment" (qtd. from Sperber and Wilson, 1995, p. 39).

Additionally, Foster-Cohen (2000) discusses the notion of manifestness to uphold Schmidt's (1990) idea of "noticing" where, according to Foster Cohen (2000), "attention to and detection of [linguistic] forms are crucial for learners to make acquisitional use of input" (p. 80). She elaborates on this idea in the following:

> Linguistic information [or forms] may be there as part of the cognitive context, and may be brought into the comprehension process as and when necessary/possible. . . . [This] allows us to

raise the question of where . . . noticing takes

place, with the possibility that, as Schmidt

originally defined it, something is noticed . . .

with conscious awareness. It may even turn out

that the trigger for whether something is

conscious or not is [through] relevance. (p.80)

Thus, if language learners could trigger conscious

awareness of linguistic forms through relevant input, this

could help them acquire these forms.

In light of this research, approaching the linguistic

forms [or texts] in movie poster discourse (illustrations,

titles and taglines) from a RT perspective offers two ways

to help L2 learners: (1) it can help teach them how to use

clues to figure out meanings of texts and (2) it can help

them notice certain lexical and syntactic structures more

fully, and therefore help them integrate these structures

into their developing interlanguage. In what follows I

have suggested some classroom activities for language

learners where movie posters can be used to create

cognitive effects in ways that aid language acquisition and

interlanguage development.

Encountering the Picture on a Movie Poster: An
English Learner Classroom Activity

As the examples in Chapter 3 demonstrated, movie
posters have wonderful and interesting illustrations on
them. These illustrations can be used to prompt student
background knowledge with the intent to broaden their
understanding of the movie poster genre of discourse while
increasing their language skills in English. This activity
is part of a three-step, high-interest lesson plan. To
illustrate, consider the movie poster advertising the movie
Corpse Bride, (the one showing the bride and groom holding
hands; the bride's hand is skeletal). In this first
activity, the teacher provides students with pictorial
input only, that is, the picture from the poster, and asks
them to write down a sentence or two about what the poster
(illustration) might mean (in essence, they would label the
picture). In the case of this request, if the student
possessed little or no background knowledge about the
movie, then, according to a RT model, the cognitive effects
derived from the picture alone (as input) would be used to
process their already existent lexical knowledge for
describing (labeling) the illustration. However, some
learners might draw inferences from the picture beyond just

labeling — they might recognize that the picture is somehow connected to a movie. If a student wrote a sentence that takes the movie context into account, they are processing data (noticing) in a more complex way, according to Wigglesworth (2005). However, at this point, there is little opportunity for a learner to advance their lexicon in English without the textual input of a title or tagline. Thus, the value of this activity is strictly to build context or background knowledge for the next activity in the lesson.

Encountering the Picture and the Title of the Movie: The Second Classroom Activity

The next step in this lesson would be to show students the picture along with the title of the movie (*Corpse Bride*) and ask them to write another short, one or two-sentence reaction to what they see. Kim (2003) points out that visual cues and titles working together provide a richer context for understanding than a picture by itself. Also, according to RT, the contextual implications are increased due to the greater cognitive effects provided by a combination of a picture and a title.

There are two segments in this lesson that provide language acquisition opportunities. First, the students might be motivated to expend a little extra processing effort to understand the meaning of "corpse" (a potentially new vocabulary word) because they could make a connection from the illustration of the bride's skeletal arm. Thus, using the clues from the illustration, they could add or enforce information in their lexicon.

Secondly, the title could give the student critical information about the meaning behind the illustration on the poster. According to Dor (2003) in a study on newspaper headlines as relevance optimizers, headlines provide readers with an "optimal ratio between contextual effect and processing effort, and direct readers to construct optimal context for interpretation" (p. 695). Movie titles on movie posters act much in the same way as headlines do in newspaper articles—they provide a succinct overview. Thus, readers, upon seeing the title of the movie in association with the picture could better interpret the meaning of the picture. Most importantly, the title leads to an additional contextual effect that students could obtain (figure out the meaning) to produce a more comprehensive sentence or two describing the movie

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than they did in the first step of this lesson plan detailed above (encountering the picture on a movie poster).

Providing Movie Information and Tagline Context: The Third Classroom Activity

Having completed the first two steps of this lesson plan, students now possess greater background knowledge of the movie *Corpse Bride* and the poster advertising the movie. I suggest that the third step could proceed in two different ways: (1) the instructor could show the trailer from the movie and then show the students the tagline for the poster, or (2) the instructor could just show them the movie poster tagline. Either activity would force students to consider the implications of all input from the poster in a similar fashion as would a casual passer-by when viewing the poster ad in a movie theater lobby—just more drawn out.

Regardless of the above approaches, students would now consider the meaning of the tagline, "there's been a grave misunderstanding." Students may go through the same cognitive processes in RT that I suggested that readers would in Chapter 3, but more importantly, the focus of this

activity in the lesson is that students begin to wonder why an advertiser might construct a tagline like this, which I will discuss further below. First, however, it is necessary to point out that the word, "grave," has two meanings and when it is used in the tagline, it creates a pun. For students developing their interlanguage, exposure to a pun is a great opportunity to learn English language pragmatics. Certainly, all languages have puns, idioms, and other types of figurative language, but as this thesis has shown, movie poster discourse exploits figurative language to create greater cognitive effects in taglines, and in keeping within the framework of a RT model, the processing effort (normally too much for RT) becomes worthwhile due to the benefits of "getting" the pun. For English language learners, there would also be more processing effort, but the benefits would be different.

There is a certain "interlingual identification" as Selinker (1972, p. 229) puts it, that language learners must process in interlanguage when they attempt to translate L1 language meanings to L2 meanings. Consider this example in Spanish: *Cuando los gatos van a sus devociones, bailan los ratones*. In English, the literal meaning is rendered, "when the cats go to their devotions

(prayers), dance the rats." However, the figurative
meaning in English is "when the cat's away, the mice will
play." Through this example, it is possible to see the
challenge that English learners face when attempting to
produce meanings from figurative language—they could be
forced to think in the target language because their native
language does not literally translate the meaning. Thus,
it follows that when students attempt to parse a pun on a
movie poster, the same thing happens.

In the final part of the lesson, students would be
instructed to write why they felt this tagline was used on
the poster and how it could stimulate a reader's interest
in seeing the movie. Or, students could write their own
tag lines, especially after this activity was repeated
several times with several different posters. Most
importantly, and in context with the pedagogical
implications of this study, students might begin to
understand the genre of tagline discourse, and the language
taglines implement when representing movies. They should
benefit by either writing exercise because, according to
Foster-Cohen (2000), when students acquire and use target
language input, it is an essential element in noticing
(processing data from) that language.

Direction for Further Research

In an early 1960s Firestone Tire ad, the company successfully used a pun in the jingle "where the rubber meets the road" to illustrate the safety of their tires. The ad was packaged in a clever tune that some people, like me, have never forgotten. There is power in using puns in that way because they are memorable. Movie poster ads employ the same strategy. Pedagogically speaking, it is very important to make learning interesting as well, especially in pre-collegiate environments. In view of the above steps that English learners take to understand the illustrations, titles, and tag lines on movie posters, the activity could be extended to help students alter and enrich their cognitive understanding of English poetic language.

In reviewing the above example of the poster advertising the movie *Corpse Bride*, students who encounter this poster most likely would show interest in the artwork and the title of the movie. Any interest creates cognitive effects, which can add information to their background knowledge regarding the movie and any other details about it, such as the tagline. In the RT model, the cognitive effects created by the poster's tag line require the

students to expend additional processing effort to parse those meanings. The effort may well be worth the expense due to the payoff of "getting" the pun meaning of grave (tomb) and learning the more adjective form of the word "grave" (critical). A tagline containing a pun will cost the students more processing effort, but Tanaka (1992) remarks "as they struggle to solve the puzzle, it sustains their attention for longer" (p. 95). Getting students to pay closer attention (noticing) during a crucial teaching moment would add to their learning success. Thus, it turns out that the cognitive effects can create interesting textual implications that combine the illustration, movie title and tagline discourse leading to an interesting and productive learning experience overall.

In considering further implications of RT models in English language learning applications, there is an entire frontier of short, syntactically significant and meaning-packed language (like taglines) in many different genres of written English language that when combined with creative artwork could provide many contextual implications worthy of processing. Poetry is but one example. Perhaps RT could be applied in this way to different kinds of literature in the English-language arts classroom,

especially at the high school level. This is one area where more research is definitely needed.

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