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Citation style: Wojtaszek Adam. (2019). Surprising turns of the persuasive path – exploitation of conceptual blending in Polish medical advertising. "Linguistica Silesiana" Vol. 40 (2019), s. 361-383, DOI 10.24425/linsi.2019.129418



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SURPRISING TURNS OF THE PERSUASIVE PATH – EXPLOITATION OF CONCEPTUAL BLENDING IN POLISH MEDICAL PRODUCTS ADVERTISING

The essence of advertising lies very often in unusual and surprising juxtapositions of apparently incongruous elements, which nevertheless successfully combine in producing a coherent and understandable message. A vital role is performed by a skillfully engineered context, which allows for simultaneous activation of certain otherwise inconspicuous senses and the construction of novel and attractive connections. Such theoretical proposals as Lemke's traversals (2001; 2005), Fauconnier and Turner's Conceptual Blending Theory (1998; 2002) and Kecskes's Dynamic Model of Meaning (2008) seem to describe many vital aspects of the phenomenon in question. It is in advertising that we often come across the linking of elements by transgressing naturally existing borders between domains which are unrelated, and we are invited to map onto one another different mental spaces on the basis of their salient analogy or identity, and indulge in creative riddle-like exploration of contextual elements in order to reconstruct the intended message. These techniques' true power lies in their ability to blur the distinction between 'the real' and 'the imagined' to such an extent that certain irrational but attractive connections, implanted in the minds of the audience, contribute to subsequent decisions in the real world. The present study attempts to uncover the ways in which certain unrelated elements are skillfully brought together in a context which allows for such a juxtaposition in selected Polish TV advertisements for various medicine and health-related products. The method employed is an in-depth content analysis of the material, followed by an attempt to integrate the identified mechanisms with the models of meaning-making mentioned above. The results will hopefully help in better understanding of the ways in which particular components of the context may interact with the message expressed verbally or pictorially in the construction of multilevel meanings in advertising communication.

Keywords: medical products advertising, conceptual blending, traversals, context, innovative commercials

1. The setting

Contemporary advertising is more than ever about standing out. Only the most conspicuous and prominent commercial messages stand a chance of accomplishing their persuasive goal, because without their being noticed the likelihood of their informational content being somehow integrated with the conceptual framework of the recipients is very small indeed. This seems to be particularly true about advertisements for medical products and dietary supplements in Poland, because they constitute the largest share of commercial communication on radio and television. This observation is corroborated not only by the opinions of many individuals who often recount an impression that more than half of the commercials they see on TV advertise medical products of all kinds¹, but also by financial reports on advertising budgets. According to one of these, the medical products advertising budget was the largest product-type sector in 2016. More money was spent only on advertising for consumer electronics retailers and discount supermarket chains, collectively reported under the ‘Commerce’ heading in Figure 1. It has to be remembered, however, that such commercials are not limited to one product group only: they usually promote very diverse commodities whose only common denominator is a reduced price.

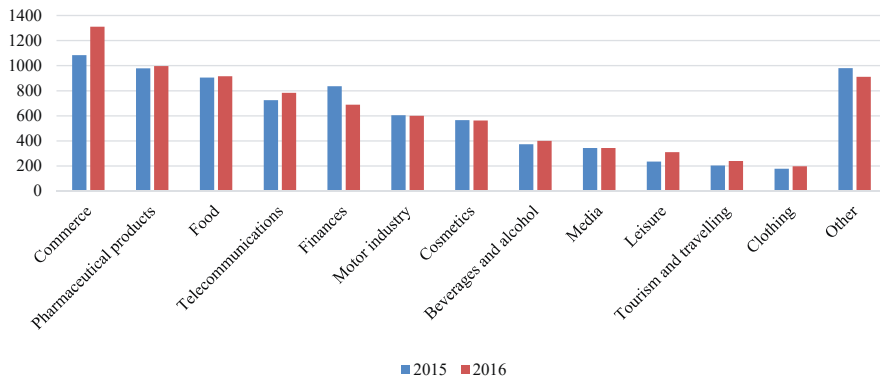


Figure 1. Advertising budgets in Poland in PLN (mln)

Source: Pallus, P. 2017. “Niespokojny rok” zahamował wzrost wydatków na reklamę. Sklepy RTV AGD i dyskonty motorem rynku” [An “unsettled year” put a stop to the growth in advertising expenditures. Home appliance stores and discounts were the market drivers], *Business Insider Polska* 2017-02-24, accessed on 03-05-2017 at <http://businessinsider.com.pl/media/reklama/rynek-reklamy-w-polsce-w-2016-roku/5lke08s>

¹ Opinion expressed by participants of NDLP conference held in Łódź in May 2017 during a panel discussion, confirming the survey results among English philology MA students at the University of Silesia carried out in February 2017.

The reasons why pharmaceutical products are so remarkably widely advertised in Poland and the effectiveness of these aggressive marketing practices are beyond the scope of the present paper; what is relevant for the present considerations is the market saturation with commercials of this type and their omnipresence in all media. Because we are constantly being flooded with advertisements for various health-related merchandise, producers have to fight for consumers' attention more effectively than in commercials for other types of products, and for this reason pharmaceutical advertisements constitute a perfect site for original and innovative advertising practices. This is one of the major reasons why commercials for pharmaceutical products and dietary supplements have been selected as the analytic material for the present paper.

2. The theoretical framework

In view of the fact that TV commercials depend on simultaneous activation of different channels of perception, including at least the linguistic (auditory and textual), visual and auditory non-linguistic components, it is necessary to analyze them within a framework that allows for incorporation of multimodal message encoding. The multimodal perspective in the analysis of commercial messages has been applied in a number of works already: Baran (2013), DeRosia (2008), Forceville (2008; 2009), Goodrich (2010), Houston, Childers and Heckler (1987), Jeong (2008), Kövecses (2010), Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), Lagerwerf, van Hooijdonk and Koller (2012), McQuarrie and Phillips (2005), McQuarrie and Mick (1999; 2003), Negro Alousque (2015), Pérez-Sobrino (2017), Phillips (1997; 2000), Phillips and McQuarrie (2004), Proctor, Proctor and Papisolomou (2005), Rossolatos (2013), Urios-Aparisi (2009), van Enschoot, Hoeken and van Mulken (2008) and Yu (2009), to mention just a few. None of these, however, focused on the exploitation of innovative and surprising conceptual blends used as mechanisms for boosting the attention-attracting value of commercial messages, which is going to be the central theme of the present paper. References to cognitive models operating not only on language-related input, but allowing for the inclusion of other cognitive resources available for interpretation, processing and integration of information, will be inevitable.

One possible candidate is the Conceptual Blending Theory developed by Fauconnier and Turner (2002). Rather than relying on relatively simple models of metaphorical thinking of the kind proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), they employ the idea of mental spaces (Fauconnier 1994 [1985]) which, unlike conceptual domains proposed in the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, have a dynamic nature and are constantly created and modified in the process of communication on the basis of all information resources available for a person, incorporating not only linguistic, but all salient contextual cues. Mental spaces are temporary constructs composed of active mental representations of information packets (Grady 2005: 1597), which may be connected thanks to a set of basic

relations, such as “time, space, identity, change, cause-effect, part-whole, analogy, disanalogy, representation, property, similarity, category, intentionality and uniqueness” (Turner 2015: 212). As a result of such combinations, blends are created which possess not only selected elements of two input domains, but also their own structure and properties which result directly from the operation of blending, developing an “emergent content of its own, which arises from the juxtaposition of elements from the inputs” (Gibbs 2015: 171). The important thing is that such blending processes involve projections which are always partial and selective, because only certain aspects of the mental spaces involved are relevant and sufficiently salient in the act of connecting². While we absorb the content of TV commercials, we are presented with informational cues in different modes, on the basis of which, in combination with the already existing knowledge resources, new temporary blends are created, actively re-shaping our cognitive environment in the process of meaning construction.

Another relevant point of view might employ Lemke’s idea of traversals (2001; 2005), which are frequently invited by ads, since they often transgress naturally existing borders between unrelated domains which nevertheless share common components or features. Traversals are defined as “temporal-experiential linkings, sequences, and catenations of meaningful elements that deliberately or accidentally, but radically, cross genre boundaries. A traversal (...) creates at least an ephemeral or idiosyncratic meaning (...) and represents at least a temporarily functional connection or relationship among all its constituent processes and their (human or nonhuman) participants” (Lemke 2001: 86-87). Unlike the construct of conceptual blending, traversals highlight the aspect of border-crossing, connecting elements which apparently do not have anything in common or are conceptually very distant. Couched in terms of the framework of Conceptual Blending Theory, they would represent those blends which are based on the operation of the dissimilarity, disanalogy or counterfactuality. Such connections, transgressing the traditionally established borders, may offer a high potential to surprise the viewer, which is a valuable currency in the world of contemporary advertising.

The Dynamic Model of Meaning (Kecskes 2008), although primarily focused on the linguistic component of message transmission, is nevertheless also a viable candidate for an explanatory framework, due to its novel conceptualization of context. According to Kecskes, elements of previous contextual embedding deposited in the lexical items used by speakers (*coresense*) interact with the broadly understood, situated context to produce the temporal, situated meaning (*consense*) relevant for a given act of communication, at the same time dynamically influencing the semantic content of the items used in this way (388-393). For example, the Polish word *ekskluzywny* ‘exclusive’

² An interesting example of conceptual blending, illustrating nicely the emergence of the novel elements resulting from the blend, is provided by Mark Turner in his analysis of ‘The Buddhist monk riddle’ (Turner 2010).

used to be understood as referring to luxury and high quality, corresponding only to one of the senses listed in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2013), but due to its recurring use in the Polish media (dating back to the late 1990's) to signify something which has been granted only to a particular radio or TV broadcaster (e.g. *an exclusive interview*), the sense of the word has undergone a broadening. In other words, the *coresense* of the Polish word has been modified under the influence of repeated context-bound exploitation of the situated *consense*. The mechanisms involved resemble the way in which blends of mental spaces are constructed in the Conceptual Blending Theory (Fauconnier and Turner 2002), as these also contain novel elements resulting from the very process of mapping selected elements of one mental space on another. A modified version of the Dynamic Model of Meaning, expanded to include the visual elements and highlighting the fact that (especially in advertising discourse) parallel *consenses* may be deliberately evoked at the same time, was presented in Wojtaszek (2016), where "juxtapositions of pictorial and linguistic elements are frequently responsible for emergence of additional senses which would be absent or only implicitly communicated if we were to separate the language from the illustration" (81-82). Another element linking this modified version of the Dynamic Model of Meaning with Conceptual Blending Theory is a representation of the meaning-making process as active construction rather than decoding, focused on on-line mental processing of informational input against the existing knowledge-base of the recipient in a particular contextual embedding.

All three theoretical frameworks will be referred to in the discussion of the TV commercials that have been collected for the purpose of the study, as all of them allow for a comprehensive explanatory account of the phenomena involved in the mental processing of this kind of informational input. Before this is done, however, the initial pre-selective stage of the data collection has to be outlined, against the background of the methodological procedure applied in the study.

3. The study design

As signaled in the sections above, commercials for medical products and dietary supplements³ constitute the largest portion of television advertising in Poland. It has also been tentatively suggested that in connection with the above-mentioned tendency, such commercials call for an exceptional degree of innovativeness and appeal in order to attract the attention of viewers. Their

³ The distinction between medical products and dietary supplements is clearly defined in relevant legislation, which was more extensively discussed in Wojtaszek 2017. However, it is irrelevant for the present study and both product groups will be considered as belonging to the same category.

expected surprise value, novelty and originality of content presentation is at the same time a perfect environment for unusual conceptual blending and traversals.

In order to pre-select the best examples and compile a collection of highly innovative and noteworthy commercials, a two-step procedure has been applied. In the first step Polish TV commercials for medical products and dietary supplements were recorded from the publicly available video-sharing website YouTube. All of them were commercials broadcast on Polish television in the years 2010-2017. The collection was not wholly random, because an attempt was made to include advertisements for as wide a variety of products as possible, which might result in underrepresentation of those categories which were the most popular (e.g. painkillers, cold relief medicines) and overrepresentation of those less frequently advertised (e.g. hemorrhoid relief preparations, Restless Legs Syndrome medication). In order not to make the elimination procedure too wearisome and tedious, the number of commercials in the initial corpus was limited to 100.

In the second stage, 30 students of English philology at the University of Silesia were asked to perform a screening procedure leading to the choice of the most innovative and surprising commercials in the collection. Each of the advertisements that they watched had to be evaluated for inventiveness and originality on a 5-point scale. In order to eliminate the potential effects of fatigue and fading responsiveness to stimuli on the results, each subject viewed the commercials in a different, random order. Those commercials whose average score was equal to or higher than 4.0 were included in the trimmed corpus, which eventually consisted of 21 spots.

Following the initial selection, one more preliminary procedure was applied. The subjects were asked to watch the abridged collection once again and note down, this time in an open-ended manner, those elements or aspects of the commercials which were in their opinion the most innovative and original. In this way intersubjective identification of the most creative and unexpected elements was hoped to be achieved, reducing the risk of favoring the author's intuitions in this regard. Any element which was reported with higher than 66% frequency was ultimately noted down and considered a sufficiently indisputable and prominent aspect of the commercials under investigation. It is those elements which were subsequently analyzed as instances of intriguing conceptual blends and traversals, and which are illustrated and commented on in further sections of the paper.

The ultimate aim of the analytical procedure was an inductive, bottom-up identification of the most frequent forms and locations of conceptual blending and traversals in the studied commercials. To this end a qualitative content analysis (albeit based on the previously described identification procedure) was applied, resulting in the emergence of a couple of interesting generalizations, which could be formulated on the basis of the material investigated in the study. The findings are presented in the subsequent section, followed by the formulation of some conclusions and tentative implications for further investigation.

4. The results

Advertisements are often criticized for their detachment from reality, unjustified bias, employment of stereotypical images, and presentation of half-truths or even blatant deception. However, most such criticisms miss the point, because it is not the purpose of ads to represent reality or communicate objective opinions. They are produced to engage our mind in a game of connections, attractive mental constructions and inventive juxtapositions whose ultimate purpose is producing a positive association with the advertised product or a plausible claim related to it. Arguably, the more inventive and unusual they are, the better they perform their function, or at least the more they stand a chance of performing it, as a result of being noticed.

4.1. Conventional advertisements for medical products

Before the more inventive commercials are presented, however, let us have a short look at two examples of those which scored very low on the scale of originality. The first one is the commercial for *Rutinacea Med*, a preventive medicine which is recommended for times of increased cold and flu risk, but may also be used to fight the first symptoms of the illness. The advert features a stereotypical figure of a female doctor who describes briefly the situations when the medicine is recommended, its composition, directions for use and major benefits (Figure 2a).

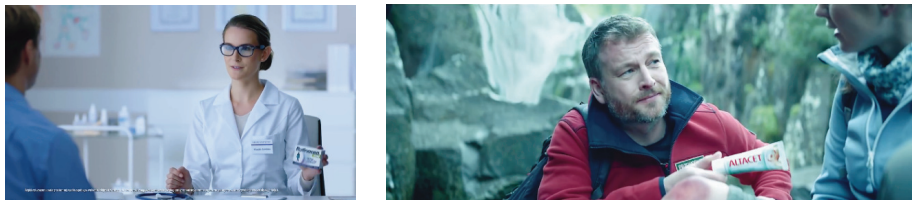


Figure 2. a. *Rutinacea Med* commercial; b. *Altacet* commercial

The other one, for *Altacet*, represents the ‘slice-of-life’ format, and shows us a few scenes of hiking in the mountains, where small accidents, such as spraining your ankle or bruising your knee, may happen. In the commercial we see the female victim of such a misfortune who immediately after her accident happens to meet a handsome male who has a tube of *Altacet* in his rucksack, just the sprain and bruise relief that she needs (Figure 2b).

The viewers of such commercials undoubtedly notice their artificiality and stereotypicality, but their familiarity with the genre and the awareness of conventions pertaining to advertising prevents them from rejecting the

informational content on the basis that the situations portrayed in the spots are not real. It seems that the problem is that advertisements of a similar format are so abundant that we are less likely to pay any attention to them; they are so monotonous and boring that we lose the ability to tell one from another and unless we are personally involved because we are suffering from a relevant ailment, we do not engage any mental effort in their reception (Teixeira 2014). Inventive and unusual advertisements, on the other hand, have the power to attract viewers' attention, and when this first initial step is made the door to potentially successful persuasion is open. As Teixeira (2014: 6) claims, "there are two distinct classes of ad content that can provide value to viewers: information and entertainment". In the following part of the paper the presentation of inventive exploitations of conceptual blending is going to be divided into inductively determined categories.

4.2. Animization

It turned out that the most frequently employed type of conceptual blending took the form of metaphorical visualizations of the problem or ailment that the advertised product was supposed to cure or provide relief from. It was even possible to identify sub-categories within this particular class, and the first sub-type to be presented is the exploitation of animization and personification. Stills from two commercials representing this strategy for presenting medical problems are shown in Figure 3.

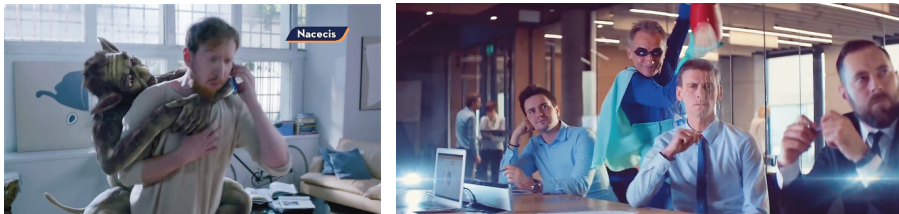


Figure 3. a. *Nacecis* commercial; b. *Persipblock* commercial

Figure 3a is a frame taken from a commercial for *Nacecis*, a medication taken to eliminate excessive phlegm, which is sometimes the major symptom associated with a cold. The form of presentation can be compared to a linguistic mechanism of cataphora, when a co-referential pronoun is used before its antecedent in a sentence. In this particular commercial, before anything is linguistically communicated we can see an unhappy, coughing and ill-looking man with a green monster hanging on his back. This activates a mental space associated with whatever the viewers associate with similar imaginary creatures and their relationships with people. Only after six seconds are the

words *zalegająca wydzielina* ‘excess phlegm’ pronounced by the voice-over, which results in the mental activation of associations related to it. At this point the simultaneous linguistic and visual modes of presentation allow for the emergence of the conceptual blend between the two mental spaces, resulting in identification of the green monster as phlegm.

This identification is supported by at least two factors: on the one hand, the curiosity induced by the visual image, and on the other hand, viewers’ awareness of the fact that they are watching a commercial. The former is a natural reaction of a human being presented with a stimulus which has been initially identified, but not yet precisely interpreted within the particular context in which it appears. The advertisers constructed the spot as a small riddle for the viewers, in which they are invited to guess what the green creature represents. The latter might be associated with the additional mental space which is active in the mental processing of the commercial, called by Fauconnier and Turner ‘generic’ (2002: 46), which “contains the abstract structure taken as applying to both input spaces” (Kövecses 2010: 271), allowing for the identification and profiling of the relevant connections between them and contributing in this way to the foregrounding of certain elements and suppression of others. In this particular case the generic space would contain such elements as viewers’ knowledge of advertising conventions, the general idea of unpleasant experiences, our natural tendency to identify and classify and our inherent impulse to eliminate the source of suffering. The elements that are highlighted and transferred from the input to the blended space include the perceptual heaviness of phlegm, its colour, our disgust associated with it and the fact that it is not easy to get rid of it. An interesting example of a new emergent feature, which is absent from the mental space associated with experiencing problems with excess phlegm, is the placement of the monster on the man’s back, which is referred to also in the text read by the narrator, i.e. the prompt *zrzuć to z siebie* ‘shake it off’, rather than the more appropriate (in the context of what we know about phlegm) formulation *wykrztuś to* ‘cough it out’, which is not used in the ad. The features that undergo suppression, on the other hand, include a mismatch between the feminine gender of the word *wydzielina* ‘phlegm’ in Polish and the visually recognisable masculine gender of the monster, the fact that the body of the monster is covered with fur⁴ and, most importantly, the identity of the monster as a purportedly real figure: it is clear to all viewers that this is only a metaphorical zoomimization of the ailment.

In the other commercial, represented by Figure 3b, for the antiperspirant *Perspiblock*, the personification is a bit less direct, because it involves an additional metonymy. The human figure dressed in the fancy blue cloak does not represent excessive perspiration, which is the ailment for which *Perspiblock* is

⁴ A feasible interpretation of this particular property might be suggested, however, in the form of a postulate that the fur is a metonymic representation of the tickling sensation in the respiratory tract experienced by people suffering from excess phlegm.

the advertised remedy, but we can see him splashing or pouring liquid on one of the characters in the spot from a sprinkler, watering can or bucket. Thus, rather than representing sweat itself (the object), the blue man plays the part of someone who dampens and douses people (the cause). The commercial introduces the problem in a way similar to the previously described advertisement: the video frames present a young man obstinately followed by the blue-cloaked character who tries to soak him in liquid on all occasions and the voice-over in the first person singular (interpreted as the voice of the protagonist) complains about this persistent follower, naming him as *pot* 'sweat' only after the first seven seconds. Thus, in the initial part of the commercial the viewers are invited to guess the identity of the mean guy, which is withheld for a few seconds.

The problem-solution format of the *Perspiblock* commercial follows the usual pattern: about 20 seconds of the advertisement are devoted to the presentation of the problem, and in the final ten seconds the medicine package is shown in a close-up, followed by a frame featuring the blue character who again tries to pour some water on the protagonist from a hose, but this time it does not work. Facilitated by the awareness that we are watching a commercial, two parallel mental scenarios are activated in our mind: one more closely related to the problem of excessive perspiration and another one to the fictitious story profiled by the video. This time it is not so much the properties of sweat that play the main part⁵, but the images of specific situations in which extreme sweating causes significant embarrassment to the person who experiences it. The advertisers must have hoped to evoke associations in the viewers' minds with situations which they experienced in their own lives, by creating images containing elements familiar to almost everyone, which could easily be connected with one's own memories. Obviously, in each case such memories will be different for different viewers, so the frames in the spot act only as triggers or prompts, but the important thing is that in this way the commercial potentially speaks in a very personal way to every viewer. Juxtaposing the unpleasant recollections from the past with the promise of a remedy capable of preventing similar mishaps in the future constitutes a very strong persuasive mechanism.

4.3. Hyperbole

The two commercials portrayed above, in addition to employing animizations, exploit also another important rhetorical figure: hyperbole. For this reason, they could also be included in the second sub-group of metaphorical representations of the medical condition. It is quite conspicuous that the portrayal of excess

⁵ Although the effect of being soaked, with possibly also a bad smell accompanying it, are quite explicitly presented.

phlegm and intensive sweating is significantly exaggerated in the commercials for *Nacecis* and *Perspiblock*, and the same trait is found in at least three other spots in the collection (Figure 4).



Figure 4. a. *Neo-angin*; b. *Procto-hemolan*; c. *Flavamed*

The mental space representing the discomfort associated with a sore throat is blended with an altered portrayal of tough men in commercial 4a. At first, we are presented with a few frames showing men who could be best described as tough guys, strong men not easily moved by anything. This image is supported by a female voice-over saying *prawdziwi mężczyźni nie czują bólu* ‘real men don’t feel pain’, but after a while we can see grimaces of pain on their faces, and one of them even starts to cry. The reason for such behavior is provided by the voice-over, who identifies the problem as sore throat. Relief may be provided by the advertised medicine, *Neo-angin*. The incongruity between the tough men stereotype and the images which we are shown results in the hyperbolic amplification of the pain which is the only way in which the stereotype can be sustained. Stereotypes are not easily abandoned, so rather than modifying them we will have the tendency to allow for certain well-grounded exceptions (Ellemers 2018: 287-291). The hyperbole applied in this particular commercial allows for enhancement of the pain-soothing properties of the advertised drug, which was probably the advertiser’s aim.

In the commercial for *Procto-hemolan* (4b), a number of intriguing tricks have been applied. The most relevant in the present context is the application of hyperbole representing the pain experienced by people suffering from hemorrhoids. Because it would be difficult to visualize pain as such, the advertisers decided to apply metonymy, substituting the cause for the effect. To be more precise, we deal here with *metaphonymy* (Goossens 1990), a metaphor embedded in metonymy, because the cause is presented metaphorically (and hyperbolically) as fire. The exaggeration implicit in the portrayal resides in the unquestionable difference between the pain caused by fire and the pain resulting from hemorrhoids. Apart from the above-mentioned metonymy, however, the advertisers also chose a very indirect form of communicating where the hemorrhoidal pain is located, by placing the flames on an armchair, exactly in the place where it comes into contact with the buttocks of the person sitting on it. In this way a scenario of the act of sitting down on an armchair was blended with the simultaneously evoked painful experience of a person suffering from hemorrhoids. The incongruity between the positive associations related to

a cozy living-room and the negative connotations of pain only strengthen the effect. The consequence is enhanced communication of the effectiveness of the advertised medication.

The commercial for *Flavamed* (4c), in turn, presents persistent coughing in an exaggerated manner: its magnitude is so great that the coughing man makes the house, the car or the elevator where a fit of coughing catches him, shake as if during an earthquake. This time the remembered sensations accompanying coughing are blended with the mental image of an earthquake and its usually disastrous results. This kind of blend allows the ad to highlight at least two important aspects of the experience of persistent coughing: that it is a very discomforting and frustrating condition for the one who coughs, but also that it brings a lot of distress to others.

4.4. Behavioral patterns

Another form of metaphorical visualization of the condition, taking advantage of inventive conceptual blending, is the exploitation of behavioral patterns associated with certain real or imaginary figures. The best examples are illustrated in Figure 5. In the *Fervex* commercial (5a) an additional mechanism (genre disguise), which is going to be discussed later, is applied at the beginning. The advertisement starts as a horror movie, with a musical background typical for that genre, portraying a man who looks like a zombie walking around the house and chasing the living inhabitants. The behavior that we associate with the walking dead and which we are familiar with on the basis of the horror movies we have seen in the past is blended with the experiential recollections of suffering from a cold or flu. The voice-over communicates after seven seconds *gdy dopada cię przeziębienie lub grypa, czujesz, że nie jesteś sobą* ‘when you’re down with a cold or a flu, you feel as if you were someone else’, bringing up the theme of suffering from a cold. Obviously chasing other people around the house with arms stretched out is not one of the typical symptoms of a cold, but the temporary blend of the two mental spaces provides a very suggestive illustration of the numbing and stupefying effects of the illness.

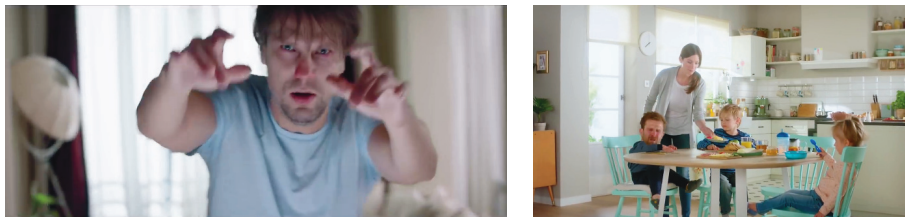


Figure 5. a. *Fervex* commercial; b. *Vicks* commercial

In the commercial for *Vicks* (5b) we are faced with an image of a grown-up man reduced to the size of a child, the only adult element being his bearded head. The voice-over comments that a man suffering from a cold is worse than a naughty child, and this kind of behavior is precisely what we can see in the video. Just as in the previous clip, the most visible effects of an illness are manifested in untypical behavior. In both cases, however, it is only temporary, as the remedies capable of returning the portrayed men to their usual conduct come in the form of the advertised products.

4.5. Simile

Yet another form of medical problem visualization comes in the shape of simile. It has to be made clear at the beginning that the notion of simile, which is a rhetorical figure of speech, is understood here in a metainterpretative way, as if the commercials in question were saying “the symptoms of an ailment X are like the portrayed phenomenon Y”, because there is a certain (usually metaphorical) likeness between the two. In some cases the parallel is relatively close, sometimes a bit more distant. A few examples are presented in Figure 6. The commercial in 6a, for *Nasivin*, illustrates the most straightforward rendition of the problem of a blocked nose. In it we see a young couple on a date, and the man is portrayed with two corks in his nostrils. We cannot understand what he is trying to say; he produces strange grunting noises and looks miserable. The voice-over uses the expression *zakorkowany nos* ‘corked nose’ to describe the man’s problem, verbalizing what we can actually see in the video. This is a perfect example of a very direct exploitation of metaphorical connection based on simile, as the source mental space represented by the video is blended with the target mental space evoked by the text. The fact that the word *zakorkowany* allows for probably the most direct and concrete visual illustration justifies its use in the commercial instead of the more natural and frequent adjectives *zablokowany* ‘blocked’ or *zapchany* ‘stuffed’, commonly used to describe such a condition. The reason is that the latter expressions are semantically based on the performed action, while the former is derived from the name of the instrument used for it, which makes it very easy to picture.

A less direct connection is represented in commercial 6b for *Penigra*, a medication recommended to men suffering from erectile problems. This time the dysfunctional part of the male body is represented by a bull which refuses to stand up and participate in a rodeo. The indirectness is justified by the taboo nature of the topic, but it is partly compensated for by what we can see in the commercial, making it completely clear to the viewers what kind of medical condition is being illustrated: the woman who is trying to ride the bull is sitting on it with her legs straddling its body, making impatient movements as if to provoke the bull to stand up and become more active. The perceptible similarity of this behavior to the sexual activity alluded to in the commercial

counterbalances the dissimilarity between the animal and the male organ. The element that guides proper interpretation of this commercial comes in the form of the voice-over: we can hear a male voice saying *kochanie, jestem zmęczony, proszę, nie dziś, daj spokój, kochanie innym razem* ‘honey, I’m tired, please, not today, let go, honey, some other time’, very easily identified as some flat excuses given by a man who’s unwilling to respond to his partner’s advances, in this way reinforcing the association between a failed rodeo ride and an unsuccessful sexual act.



Figure 6. a. *Nasivin* commercial; b. *Penigra* commercial

The commercial for *Riposton* (6c) surprises the viewers with the unusual arrangement of the characters portrayed in the spot. We can see the announcer, who is the primary character in the ad, against the background of an ill-looking man sitting on a bed in a room which is literally turned upside-down. The interpretation of what we can see is prompted by the words uttered by the primary character: *wczoraj był udany wieczór, a dziś kac... co zrobić?* ‘last night was a great night, but today – hangover... what to do?’. The conceptual blend between the scene shown in the commercial and what we know about the sensations associated with a hangover foregrounds some of the symptoms, mainly those related to negatively affected balance and temporary loss of proper sense of direction. Other symptoms, such as headache and nausea, are not mentioned or brought to our attention.

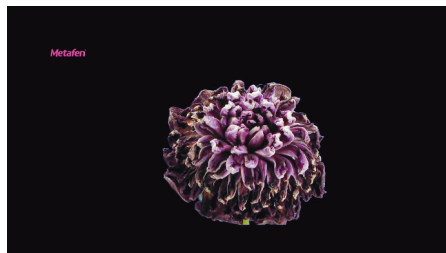


Figure 6. c. *Riposton* commercial; d. *Metafen* commercial

A slightly different connection is being made in commercial 6d for *Metafen*: this time the visualization does not concern the condition to which the medicine provides relief (pain), but it represents the detrimental side-effects of painkillers to our body. The connection is made thanks to simultaneous presentation of the image of a fading flower and the words of the voice-over *boję się, jak to wpłynie na mój organizm* ‘I am concerned about the way it will affect my organism’. In a later part of the ad the slogan *zwalczaj ból, szanuj organizm* ‘fight the pain, protect your organism’ suggests in an indirect way that the medicine is capable of reconciling these two apparently conflicting goals. Interestingly, no support is provided for this indirectly made claim, even in the disclaimers presented in very small print, e.g. in the form of references to some published research. Such indirectness can thus be interpreted as stemming from the need to avoid being accused of making unsubstantiated claims.

There was also one commercial in the collection which opted for the inventive employment of the spoken channel of message transmission, rather than exploiting the opportunities offered by the visual path, in order to illustrate a specific health problem. This was a commercial for the sedative medication *Valerin Max*, in which the obligatory note to read the enclosed leaflet or consult the doctor or pharmacist before taking the drug was read out in a very unusual and peculiar way. The voice-over was unusually agitated, screaming out the information rather than reading it, prosodically marking the message as coming from a person suffering from a nervous disorder, unable to control her emotions. Although the commercial also included close-ups of clenched fists, grimaces of anger and tears running down a sad face, the yelling was the most prominent element encoding the symptoms. What is so special about this particular commercial is its very inventive combination of the obligatory statement with the presentation of the symptoms of the medical condition to which *Valerin Max* offers a relief. It has to be noted that the connection between the most prominent symptom and the medical condition is metonymic and also iconic in nature, as the voice of the characters (the effect) signifies the nervous breakdown (the cause). In terms of Conceptual Blending Theory it could be described as merging the two input mental spaces (associated with screaming and with suffering from a nervous breakdown), although in this particular case it might also be claimed that for many people screaming could actually belong to the same mental space as mental breakdown, as an inseparable element and a necessary ingredient.

4.6. Other strategies

The commercials analyzed so far all involve exploitation of inventive conceptual blending and traversals focused on the presentation of the medical problem to which the advertised products provide a remedy. This turned out to be the most frequently targeted, but not the only area of application of

surprising and inventive strategies. Other themes which also deserve attention include aiming at portraying the absurdity of not using the advertised medicine, presenting the benefits of following the advertisers' suggestions and employing the strategy of genre disguise.

Reducing something to absurdity might also be conceived as a peculiar form of hyperbole, since we are undoubtedly dealing with unnatural and exaggerated behaviors which are not found in real life. This time, however, the focus is not on the medical problem presentation but on the consequences of stubbornly refusing to take advantage of the advertised product. The main objective for the advertisers is to ridicule such practices, taking credit at the same time for the humorous appeal of the commercials. Two illustrations will follow to demonstrate this particular strategy (Figure 7).

The commercial for *Fosidal* (7a) contains a couple of very surprising frames, in which we can see a child half-dressed, with bare legs and feet, another one covered with a duvet which is too short, because it only covers the upper part of the body and then two children looking in disbelief at the front part of a rocking horse, which has apparently been sawed in half. A voice-over commentary says that we do not normally do the things that are being presented in the video, but the information how this all is relevant is withheld until the 11th second of the commercial. The voice-over explains in the remaining part that when a child has a cold, we do not normally take half-measures to get rid of the problem, and presents the medicine which not only helps to eliminate coughing, but also reduces the inflammation normally associated with a cold. In retrospect, we find the intended significance of the initial illustrations, which strengthens our conviction that using a medicine which is designed only to eliminate coughing is not a very wise choice. The superiority of the advertised product over all competitive merchandise is in this way firmly communicated, seasoned additionally with indirectly poking fun at other manufacturers.



Figure 7. a. *Fosidal* commercial; b. *Permen-king* commercial

Figure 7b is a frame from a commercial for *Permen-king*, a product advertised as a remedy for erectile dysfunction. All the males portrayed in the video are busy with ordinary tasks – cleaning windows, repairing a car and mowing a lawn – and what makes them unusual is not the activity itself, but the way the men are dressed (pyjamas, underwear) and the fact that they are

all working at night. Additionally, all of them are being watched by attractive women wearing sexy lingerie, evidently waiting for the men to finish and get occupied with other things than those ordinary chores. In connection with the voice-over explicitly stating that erectile problems often lead to abstaining from sex, the activities are shown as absurd forms of love-making avoidance. Thus, the commercial also represents the strategy of ridiculing rejection of the advertised product. The transgression of the culturally accepted patterns of behavior involves highlighting the above-mentioned incongruence of the activities and their contextual embedding.



Figure 8. a. *Apap* “picnic” commercial; b. *Apap* “Venice trip” commercial

A strategy focusing on the other side of the coin, i.e. unconventional presentation of the benefits of taking the advertised medicine, is represented by two commercials for *Apap* (Figure 8). In both of them not only are the pain-relieving properties of the medication praised, but so too is its contribution to the warmly portrayed return to youthful practices by two elderly couples. The ads employ the frame of a story told by an elderly lady to her younger female relative: in one of them a picnic which started a new love relationship is described, and in the other a hitch-hiking trip to Venice with her (until recently) very sedentary husband, and in both of them the direct factor triggering the change was *Apap*, freeing the characters from the pain that until recently had prevented them from acting like young people. The incompatibility between the conventionally conceived life of elderly people and the situations presented in the commercial is somehow moderated by the drug. Thus, one of the input spaces encompassing stereotypical aspects of life of elderly people (sedentary lifestyle, predictability, reduced mobility, health-related problems and unadventurousness) blends with a contrasting one involving images of youngsters’ lifestyle (mobility, energy, fitness, boldness). This time, however, the actions presented in the commercial are not intended to look absurd – exactly the opposite. Such interpretation is the only one compatible with our awareness that we are dealing with an advertisement. In this way the ‘generic’ mental space, containing our knowledge of the advertising genre, its tendency

to resort to exaggerated claims, the awareness that the portrayed images must be somehow related to the advertised commodity and the cause – effect relation, contributes to the emergence of appropriate features in the blend.

Finally, the mechanism of genre disguise will be presented. The term highlights the fact that an advertisement is ‘dressed up’ as a different type of discourse, it pretends to be something else, at least for some time. We might claim that in such cases we deal with a form of genre blending, as certain aspects of two distinct types of discourse undergo merging, with advertising space as the ultimate target. Certain aspects of this strategy may be found in some of the ads that have been expounded above, but it is most clearly visible in the commercials for *Theraflu* and *Ibum* (Figure 9).

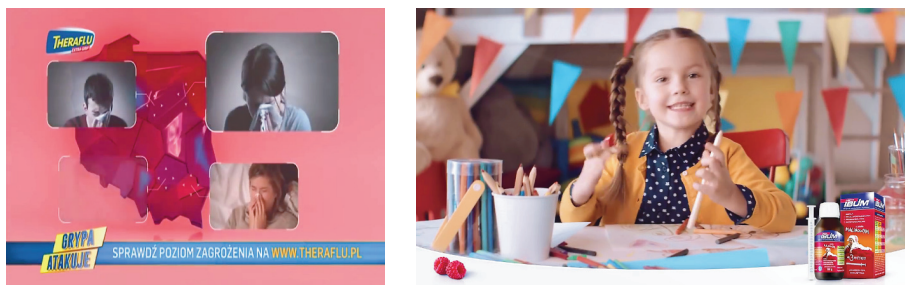


Figure 9. a. *Theraflu* commercial; b. *Ibum* commercial

The commercial for *Theraflu* (9a) begins like a breaking news report, announcing something very important which has to be urgently communicated to the general public: it warns the viewers about an outbreak of flu. Very soon, however, it becomes clear that it is an advertisement for a medicine which helps to fight the most severe symptoms. Although the viewers are perfectly aware that it is a commercial, in spite of the genre disguise (as it is broadcast within a commercial break), such salient aspects of a breaking news insertion as its critical importance and relevance for every person are so pervasive that they permeate the commercial content and may profile our mental processing of the message. This form of traversal between the two distinct conceptual domains create a temporarily functional connection, generating the emergence of meanings very favorable for the advertiser and the product recommended in the spot.

The *Ibum* commercial sustains the genre disguise for much longer (about 75% of the ad), employing the form of a series of short clips in which children express their thanks to their parents, at first in a very general manner, but later referring to their help with such problems as pain and fever. The disguise is not complete, however, because from the very beginning the advertised medicine is shown at the bottom part of the screen, acting as a common denominator of all the thanks expressed by the kids. To uphold the thanking mode of the whole spot, the voice-over also articulates thanks to the parents for the trust they have put in the product. Although no direct description of the healing or

pain-alleviating properties of *Ibum* is made, we derive the message that these are indeed its attributes from the blend created as an effect of connecting the mental spaces related to experiencing various kinds of pain or fever and the felicity conditions licensing the speech act of thanking: it only makes sense when a beneficial effect of our efforts has been achieved.

The other commercials that were also partly based on the strategy of genre disguise include the *Fervex* advertisement (Figure 5a), where the motif of a horror movie is employed in the initial frames, and the *Apap* “Venice trip” commercial (Figure 8b), utilizing the format of a journey documentary. In fact, all commercials based on the so-called ‘slice of life’ script may be categorized as involving some kind of genre disguise, since they exhibit many traits of feature films.

5. Conclusions

The discussion of the commercials presented in the part reporting the findings of the study made very few references to the theoretical construct of traversals and virtually none to the Dynamic Model of Meaning. This does not mean, however, that these frameworks are irrelevant or inapplicable to the material gathered for the purpose of the present investigation. The omission was intentional and guided by considerations connected with the size limitations of the article. If each theoretical model were brought up in connection with every commercial discussed above, the paper might double in size. As a form of compensation, some summative remarks and generalizations will be presented below, outlining briefly major explanatory merits of the two theoretical frameworks referred to in section 2 alongside Conceptual Blending Theory.

Practically all the commercials extensively discussed in section 4 involved instances of traversals, temporary trans-domain connections between seemingly unrelated mental spaces. However, their apparent unrelatedness is not absolute, and the viewer is invited to find the linking elements and discover the concealed associations. Thus, the inherent contrasts between a man and a zombie, between a bull and a penis, between earthquakes and coughing, or between a withered flower and a damaged organism, to mention but a few, involve also certain common features which, in the context of the commercials in which the contrasting ideas are evoked, enable the viewers to establish a relevant connection, rendering a set of very rich, but at the same time finely-tuned, meanings. Often the motivation for the link requires considerable interpretative effort, as in the *Procto-hemolan* commercial (4b) which employs images of burning chairs, stools and armchairs, but the expenditure of mental energy for solving the puzzle is usually rewarded with a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. The advertisements that do not employ inventive cross-domain traversals very quickly dissolve in our consciousness into an insignificant and negligible background against which the more ingenious ones stand out and successfully modify our mental environment (Wojtaszek 2011).

In connection with the Dynamic Model of Meaning two principal comments are due. Firstly, the commercials analyzed in section 4 are virtually packed with parallel *consenses*, i.e. two different, but simultaneously evoked context-bound and context-driven meanings attributed to a single linguistic unit. Examples include the literal and the figurative sense of *zakorkowany nos* ‘corked nose’ in the *Nasivin* commercial, the sense of *by znów mógł być sobą* ‘so that he can be himself again’ signifying return to health or regaining of a grown-up body in the commercial for *Vicks*, the description *natrętny, wstrętny pot* ‘obtrusive, obnoxious sweat’ in the *Perspiblock* commercial referring either to the real condition of excess perspiration or to the malicious character shown in the video, the words *wydzielina: to ciężar ponad twoje siły? Zrzuć go!* ‘phlegm: a burden too heavy to carry? Shake it off!’ in the *Nacecis* ad, ambiguous in a way similar to the previous example, and finally *wstrząsający problem* ‘quaking problem’ in the *Flavamed Max* commercial as the description of coughing. Incidentally, in this last case both Polish and English collocations sound a bit unnatural, but match perfectly the hyperbolic illustration used in the commercial (4c).

Secondly, the less salient sense of a word or expression is usually activated by the visual images presented together with the text, but the whole point is to support and maintain both senses, because such experience is perceptually attractive and stimulating to the mind, and it directs our attention to those elements which make such ambiguous renditions possible.

Finally, a short summary should be made of the most frequently found tendencies pertaining to the location of inventive conceptual blending in the medical and health-related commercials analyzed in the paper. It turned out that most of the advertisers’ effort is invested in an unusual and original presentation of the ailment for which the advertised products provide relief, and here we can even identify a few subcategories. Other areas include the consequences of not using the medication and its opposite: the benefits related to its application. Finally, inventive encoding sometimes also takes the form of genre disguise. The typology could be summarized in the following way:

- Problem Visualisation
 - animization (usually personification, but also zoonimization)
 - hyperbole
 - untypical behavior
 - simile
 - exploitation of prosody
- Portraying Consequences
 - of refraining from use
 - of taking advantage of the offer
- Genre disguise

The typology could potentially be extended or modified if applied to commercials of different types of products, which might suggest a possible direction for further studies. A slightly different point of focus, favoring a differ-

ent theoretical framework, might also create a chance for valuable comments concerning the ways in which meanings are constructed and communicated in contemporary multimodal advertising.

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