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The Language of Advertising: a Pragmatic Approach

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(School of Oriental and African Studies)

by  
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### Abstract

The language used in advertising has been the subject of studies in different disciplines, but surprisingly little has been done in linguistics. The main purpose of my study is to give an adequate analysis of the language of written advertising in the U.K. and in Japan, within the framework of pragmatics, and to explain how communication occurs between the advertiser and audience. I consider what communication is and how it is achieved, and investigate aspects of communication prominent in the language of advertising.

The first chapter is a survey of the literature, covering structuralist, semiotic and linguistic approaches to the language of advertising. The second chapter is a discussion of pragmatic theories. It is argued that Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986a) provides the best basis for explaining the comprehension of utterances, including advertising. A study of puns forms the subject of the third chapter. As a trigger for processing which does not necessarily add to the informative content of an utterance, puns provide a potential problem for Relevance Theory. But I argue that Relevance Theory sheds light on the variety of ways in which puns function in advertising. In the fourth chapter, I investigate another potential problem for Relevance Theory, posed by the language of advertising, that of partial suppression of the speaker's intentions. The fifth chapter focuses on the projection of the image of women in advertising.

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## Chapter 1: Some Problems of Meaning in Advertising

### 1.1. Analysis of meaning in advertising

There has long been considerable interest in the means used by advertisers to convey a desired message to their audience. In this opening chapter, I wish to survey selected parts of this literature, in order to assess how the problems raised by the language of advertising have been seen and approached by other authors, and what are the major strengths and weaknesses of these approaches. More specifically, I am interested in analysing in this chapter how other authors have dealt with the following basic questions: How is communication achieved? In particular, how is advertising as a form of communication carried out? How does the advertiser convey a message to his audience by what he says?

In Section 2, I shall examine two books by structuralists, and in Section 3, I shall consider works by two semioticians. Although semiotics is a form of structuralism, it concentrates more narrowly on systems of signs. Section 4 will look at various studies of the language of advertising within the domain of linguistics.

It is my contention that the literature to date has not paid enough attention to the context within which audience read and process advertisements, and has relied too much on the supposed

structures of symbols in the text itself. This in turn explains my own recourse to Relevance Theory as the most appropriate tool for the study of the language of advertising, as I attempt to demonstrate in the remaining chapters of the thesis.

## 1.2. Some structuralist approaches

Some attempts to analyse advertisements within the framework of structuralism have tended to obscure the problems, rather than to clarify them, notably the two books published by Leymore and Millun in 1975. However, they have had considerable influence on thinking about the language of advertising through their major claim that representations in advertising are reducible to an underlying structure. Leymore attempts to analyse advertisements in terms of binary oppositions, and Millun in terms of classifications.

Leymore attempts to derive from advertisements 'apparent characteristics' (1975:22), and from them what she calls 'exhaustive common denominators' (1975:43), which are both reduced to binary oppositions and regarded as the structure of the system. For example, in the analysis of the advertisements for butter, she argues that their argument on margarine is based on the following equations:

butter : margarine - dear : cheap -  
- concord : protest -  
- content : discontent -  
- care : negligence -  
- love : hate

(Leymore 1975:43)

where ':' means 'is to' and '-' means 'like'. The exhaustive common denominators which she derives from binary oppositions above are:

peace : war - butter : margarine

(Leymore 1975:43)

Crucial to her analysis is an assumption that all relations in a universe of discourse can be reduced to binary oppositions. She argues that 'it is possible... to reduce all advertising phenomena into a binary structure, which is at once exhaustive and complete' (1975:127). Furthermore, she claims that a binary structure is based upon psychological reality. She argues:

...the essential activity of the human mind is

classificatory and its most fundamental rules may be reduced to those of contradictions and permutations - in other words, to binary oppositions' ... the innate structuring ability of the human mind can be expressed in the form of binary oppositions and, consequently, the binary oppositions with the highest generalizing force are, in the last resort, the invariants or the universals of the human mind.

(Leymore 1975:10-1)

The claim that the human mind categorises in terms of binary oppositions is not new (Trubetzkoy 1939). However, the argument against it is just as old. In fact, Trubetzkoy's original phonological representation was in part based on gradual oppositions, which, it has been argued, defy the notion of binary opposition (Hyman 1975).

But what is the status of binary oppositions? It is unclear whether they are physical properties, names of concepts or abstract entities. Nor is it clear whether they belong to the conscious experience of anyone, and whether they vary from individual to individual or are shared by different persons. As for the claim that they are 'exhaustive', firstly, it is not clear how she derives these oppositions, and secondly, it is hard to see how any opposition can be claimed as the 'correct' one. Where does

atomisation stop? And how can correct oppositions be identified? For example, why is the opposition to 'concord' 'protest', rather than 'discord', or, why do we have 'love' and 'care', but not 'like' or 'affection'? It is not plausible to argue that when we see advertisements, we also see these oppositions.

Leymore does discuss two reservations which have been expressed about the binary structure. One of them is that it is not clear that all human thought is as a rule dichotomised in binary oppositions. The other is that the structure is two-valued and does not accommodate for gradable features. However, in support of the binary structure, she argues that in all such cases, the sense of opposition stems from the fact that the terms are discussed with respect to some 'implicit norm' (1975:7). What is not discussed is what she means by 'implicit norm', a term which remains vague and undefined.

Even if we accepted that there were such things as binary oppositions in respect to some 'implicit norm', there is still doubt as to whether binary oppositions could be applied to everything. For example, let us consider colour terms. It could be argued that black/white is a binary opposition, but what about red and brown? It might be accepted that black is incompatible with white, red, and brown, in the sense that there is no such colour as whitish black, reddish black, or brownish black. But the colour term 'reddish brown' is acceptable: red and brown can co-exist with each other. How can we tell which of these colours is the 'norm'? Leymore does

not provide any device to identify them. It is not clear if it is of any use to classify everything in terms of binary oppositions. Even if we accept that classificatory activity is the essential activity of the human mind, it does not mean that its underlying principles are reducible to binary oppositions.

There are two possible positive points to be retained from Leymore's approach, although neither is without flaws. Firstly, contrast can be expressed in an economical way through the use of binary oppositions. It helps to draw attention to differences between two items. But this should not make one forget the importance of similarities. Secondly, Leymore's analysis might help in testing the presence or absence of certain values in a society. There might be some advantage in examining advertisements in terms of whether certain values are manipulated. This said, values are culture-dependent and it is not clear if there is any such thing as 'universal' (1975:11) values, as she claims.

Millun proposes to connect the role of advertising and the role of women by analysing women's images in advertising in terms of a system of classification, which he explains as follows:

...the categories that are in fact derived, stem directly from what have already been seen to be central concerns and should not be derived from some theoretical superimposed structure. *The categories*

*and classifications should emerge from the material rather than be imposed upon it. Each classification should be the result of previous thought and investigation, and tailored to bring out those aspects felt to be the most significant.*

(Millun 1975:25, author's italics)

Now, let us examine some of his classification systems. The following are types of expression of men and women in advertising proposed by him:

Types of men's expression      Types of women's expression

thoughtful	soft/introverted
self-reliant	cool/level
seductive	seductive
	narcissistic
carefree	carefree
	kittenlike
paternal	maternal
practical	practical
comic	comic
catalogue	catalogue



(Millun 1975:97-8)

If we compare the men's list to the women's list, it seems that 'thoughtful' and 'self-reliant' replace 'soft/introverted' and 'cool', respectively. One begins to wonder whether this is because these categories simply 'emerged' from the material, or because someone is called 'thoughtful' if he is a man but if she is a woman she is described as 'introverted'. Furthermore, there seem to be two types of expression missing from the men's list, which are on the women's list, namely 'narcissistic' and 'kittenlike'. It is not clear what is meant by 'kittenlike' and how it is different from, for example, 'comic'. As to 'narcissistic', the reason why there is no such type for men is surely not because men are incapable of being 'narcissistic'; after all, the word comes from a male name. There seem to be two possible explanations for this: one is that when a man is 'narcissistic', he is described as something else, 'self-reliant', for example; the other is that men are 'narcissistic' all the time, anyway.

These classifications are not only culture-dependent. They also depend upon the time, place and purpose or interest of the research. They cannot be accepted as properties which are central to the structure.

Millun calls such categories 'emerged from the material' (1975:25) and assumes that they are in some sense directly

observable. This is in effect an attempt at a thoroughly empiricist position, which suffers from the central contradiction inherent in an empiricist view of language. In so far as they are correct, these categories are not independently identifiable but resolutely cognitive. Thus, although he argues that the categories and classifications should 'emerge from the material' rather than 'be imposed upon it' (1975:25), they do not really 'emerge' from advertisements: it is merely that one thinks that they do. In effect, he admits this, for he adds that categories should be the result of 'previous thought' (1975:25) and they are designed to bring out aspects which are 'felt' (1975:25) to be significant.

The categories and classifications Millun is suggesting as somehow value-free are in fact influenced by the time, place and purpose of the research. Thus, in defining his method of analysis, Millun starts by suggesting that one needs to note the presence or absence of four elements: the product, the props, the setting and the actors (1975:88), without any explanation or justification as to why there are four elements and why those four. He finds it 'remarkable' (1975:136) that there should be a close relationship between setting and actors. I would argue that settings and actors are both part of his fifth element - 'arrangement', and that it is only natural that one should find that they are closely related. Thus, Millun's classifications are marked by a high degree of arbitrariness. On the one hand, they depend on the purposes, interests and bias of the researcher. On the other hand, their relationship to each other cannot be adequately explained.

When Millun applies his system of classification to advertisements, he is bound to find some correlation between certain categories, by virtue of the nature of the categories. For example, a 'sophisticated woman' tends to be found in a setting with 'non-everyday moods', rather than a 'family setting with everyday moods', partly because the actress is arranged to match the settings, or vice versa, and partly because he calls a woman found in that kind of setting sophisticated. His sets of categories describing men and women's expressions are far from self-evident: they reveal a particular view of men and women, upon which his analysis is based, rather than images of men and women in advertising. In an attempt to examine the ways in which women are presented in advertising, Millun endorses stereotypical views of women, rather than questioning them. His analysis is a categorisation of images of women according to criteria which are accepted in the respective society. In Chapter 5, I shall return to the analysis of images of women in advertising, and attempt to show how it can be approached by examining how certain words are used to describe women in advertising.

### 1.3. Some semiotic approaches

If Leymore and Millun fail to provide an adequate explanation as to how communication in advertising is achieved and how

advertising messages are understood, a more convincing system of meaning is presented by Williamson (1978).

Williamson starts off by analysing a Goodyear tyre advertisement, which has an illustration showing a jetty with a car on it. Apparently, the car is being tested for its braking performance. She argues that, on the 'manifest' (1978:19) level, the jetty signifies the test of braking power and connotes 'risk', but on the 'latent' (1978:19) level, it signifies tyre because of their similarity in appearance, and connotes 'safety'. She goes on to argue:

...this transference of significance does not exist as completed in the ad, but requires us to *make* the connection: it is nowhere stated that the tyre is as strong as the jetty, therefore this meaning does not exist until we complete the transference ourselves.

(Williamson 1978:19, author's italics)

Williamson nearly stumbles on the fact that advertising messages are not fully encoded and that interpreting advertisements takes more than just decoding; they need the audience to make appropriate connections. All semiotic approaches are based upon the assumption that communication is achieved by simply encoding a

message, and this assumption is precisely the defect they suffer from. It is a defect shared by Barthes, whose approach is surveyed below.

The problems of the semiotic approach have been argued by Sperber and Wilson (1986a) at length. Let me highlight the points they make which are valid in this discussion. They argue that a generative grammar is a code; what is encoded is phonetic representations of sentences and what is decoded is semantic representations of sentences. However, a sentence is used in different ways to convey different messages, as in (1):

(1) He is charming.

There are possible situations in which (1) is used to mean (2) or (3):

(2) Paul is charming.

(3) Bob is charming.

Furthermore, sentence (1) can be used with a certain tone of voice to mean (4) or (5):

(4) Paul is not very pleasant.

(5) Bob is not very pleasant.

Thus, a sentence can be used with various linguistic and non-linguistic properties, such as a tone of voice, who the speaker and the hearer are, the time and the place of the occasion, and so on. That is, the same sentence can be used as different utterances to have different interpretations. The semantic representation of sentence (1) can be decoded and be analysed in terms of a generative grammar. However, a generative grammar cannot determine whether 'he' refers to Paul or Bob. Nor can it account for how (1) can be interpreted as (4) or (5). It might provide the hearer of (1) with the information that 'he' refers to a single male third person, or that (1) suggests a certain attitude of the speaker, that is, that he is being ironical, rather than sincere. However, the hearer is still left with the gap between linguistic representations of the sentence and the interpretations that the different utterances are used to convey. In each situation, there are always other possibilities, and the hearer has to select a referent or an interpretation among others.

Thus, utterance interpretation cannot be fully accounted for in terms of semantic rules as part of grammar. As we have seen in examples (1) - (5), the semantic representation of the sentence does

not provide sufficient information for the hearer to achieve a complete interpretation of an utterance in context.

While suggesting that interpreting advertising messages is not merely a matter of decoding, Williamson resolves this dilemma by presenting a system of meaning. She argues that the 'transference' is 'based on the fact that the first object (jetty) has a significance to be transferred' (1978:19, author's italics):

...the advertisement does not create meaning initially but invites us to make a transaction where it is passed from one thing to another. A system of meaning must already exist in which jetties are seen as strong, and this system is exterior to the ad - which simply refers to it, using one of its components as a carrier of value (in the case of (the example above), strength, durability) i.e. as a currency.

(Williamson 1978:19, author's italics)

She calls this mechanism 'referent system' (1978:19) and goes on to define 'currency' as follows:

Currency is something which is representing a value

and in its interchangeability with other things,  
gives them their 'value', too.

(Williamson 1978:20)

Pateman (1983) rejects her arguments as unsound. For a currency which allows the jetty-strength connection to exist, there have to be an infinite number of such systems. Williamson herself notes that the jetty represents risk as well as strength. She may be right in saying that the jetty in the advertisement represents both risk and strength. However, she does not explain how an audience will know which system is valid, either the jetty-risk one or the jetty-strength one, or yet another one. This is especially problematic when, according to Williamson, the jetty-risk system is used on the 'manifest' level and the jetty-strength one on the 'latent' level. How is an audience to know which system is to be used when? She points out herself that there is nothing in the advertisement written to the effect that the jetty stands for something. How is an audience supposed to select these two valid systems out of all the possibilities and use them at the right level? What criteria does an audience have in choosing the correct currency? These are the questions Williamson conveniently neglects. And these are the questions for which an adequate theory of communication must provide an answer.



Williamson is aware that, for communication to succeed, the audience must be involved in doing the work of processing and that there is a gap between the message which is obtained by decoding and the message the audience actually recovers. She argues that the gap is filled by the audience's knowledge, but she goes on to assert that this knowledge-base is itself rule-governed:

To fill in gaps we must know *what* to fill in, to decipher and solve problems we must know the rules of the game. Advertisement clearly produces knowledge ... but this knowledge is always produced from something already known, that acts as a guarantee, in its anteriority, for the '*truth*' in the ad itself.

(Williamson 1978:99, author's italics)

According to Williamson, 'the assumption of pre-existing bodies of knowledge' (1978:100) allows the reference system to work. However, the question is: what criteria does the audience use in order to choose relevant information out of the whole range of knowledge they have? She adds that her concern is precisely which reference to pre-existing bodies of knowledge is used in advertising. It is worth investigating what ideologies advertisers employ in their advertisements. From this perspective, her analysis is stimulating and raises a central question. However, she is

unable to answer the crucial question which she raises: how are advertisements understood?

'Rhetoric of the image' by Barthes (1977) is claimed by Dyer (1982:224) to be a major essay on semiotics and its application to the analysis of an advertising message. Barthes studies the interrelationships between the image and the advertising message, using an advertisement for pasta called Panzani as an example. This is perhaps the text which gets us closest to an answer to our crucial question, although it still suffers from defects of a structuralist interpretation.

Barthes argues that there are three kinds of message: the linguistic message, the coded iconic message and the non-coded iconic message. The linguistic message consists of the caption and the labels. Barthes points out that there exist two levels of interpretation of the linguistic message, namely, denotational and connotational. In the example, the advertised product name denotes the pasta, and connotes 'Italianicity'. Putting aside the linguistic message, Barthes argues that we are left with the pure image. This is divided into two categories, which are the iconic equivalents of connotation and denotation. The former is also categorised as a coded, symbolic, and cultural message, while the latter is said to be the non-coded, perceptual and literal message.

However, the denotation-connotation distinction is not clear-cut neither at the linguistic nor at the iconic level. Perceptual

information is not independent of cultural knowledge. As Sperber and Wilson (1986a:65) point out, a distinction between 'central' thought processes and 'input', 'perceptual' or 'peripheral' processes is assumed in current cognitive psychology: so-called input systems are said to transform information from sensory representations into conceptual representations, all of which are in the same format. The information provided by such input systems, however, underdetermines the information derived from them. The central process integrates information derived from the perceptual system with information stored in memory to determine what is actually perceived. Thus, even the processing of information by perceptual organs is affected by one's cultural knowledge.

Barthes mentions 'anthropological' (1977:36) knowledge of a tomato, a string-bag, a packet of pasta, and so on, but once a red and round object is recognised as a 'tomato', rather than as an 'imperfect ball' or a 'red vegetable', perceptual knowledge is no longer devoid of cultural knowledge about 'tomatoes'. Moreover, as a string-bag and a packet of pasta are cultural objects, it can hardly be seen as valid or useful to separate their 'perceptual' values from their 'cultural' values.

Barthes argues that if all cultural signs are removed from the image, one continues to 'read' (1977:35) the image, and that one obtains the non-coded, perceptual message. This is a statement which is hardly acceptable. Not only can cultural knowledge not be separated from perceptual information, but it is common-sensical to

argue that it is perception which comes before knowledge: it is a perceptual stimulus which comes to one's cognitive system first. This initial stimulus triggers the recuperation of stored information and therefore calls upon knowledge, rather than knowledge coming to one's mind first and giving way to the late comer, namely, perception. One has to perceive a round and red object first in order to identify it as a 'tomato', before gaining messages such as 'Italianicity', or freshness.

The analysis of the advertisement in question concludes that there are four discontinuous connotational signs: (a) a suggestion of a return from the market implies the freshness of the products and domestic preparation; (b) the colours used in the poster mean 'Italianicity'; (c) the serried collection of different objects suggests the idea of a total culinary service; (d) the composition of the objects implies the image of the still life painting. Barthes emphasises the discontinuity of these signs (1977:34-5).

However, this 'discontinuity' becomes unconvincing if one looks at these signs. How can the freshness of the products and the domestic preparation be categorised as one message, while the idea of a culinary service forms a distinctive category? The division seems arbitrary, in much the same way as the classifications of other authors discussed above. Moreover, it is possible for an audience to put more effort into deciphering the advertisement and to derive further messages, for example, the idea of harvest, abundance, and so forth.

We have considered in examples (1) to (5) that decoding is not quite enough for communication. Then, the question to be asked would be how the audience achieves an adequate understanding of an advertisement, while there exist a potentially infinite number of different messages carried by a finite number of signals in it.

Barthes seems to be aware of the problem, but he attempts to resolve it by arguing that the linguistic message has a function vis-a-vis the iconic message, a function which he calls 'anchorage'. By this, he means the selection of the intended message:

... all images are polysemous ... (which) poses a question of meaning and this question always comes through as a dysfunction even if this dysfunction is 'recuperated by society as a tragic ... or a poetic game ... (The linguistic message) helps (an audience) to choose *the correct level of perception...*

(Barthes 1977:39, author's italics)

It sounds convenient, but unfortunately it is not realistic. It is a truism that linguistic message is also polysemous. However much we would like them to be clear and straightforward, linguistic codes are not devoid of ambiguity. Reference assignment,

disambiguation and enrichment are only part of the normal process of utterance interpretation (Sperber and Wilson 1986a:185), as in the following example:

(6) It is strange.

(7) The food is hot.

(8) Come back early in the morning.

'It' in (6) would have to be assigned to an appropriate referent. The word 'hot' can mean either 'having a high temperature' or 'spicy', and the audience of (7) would have to decide which the word means in the context. 'Early' in (8) is vague and the understanding of (8) would not be completed until the audience has enriched information as to how early the speaker of (8) means.

If we were to accept that communication is a matter of decoding, and if we wished to account for interpretation of (6) to (8), for example, we would have to accept that there are rules of pragmatic interpretation and add them onto rules of semantic interpretation. However, it is not possible to write general rules to account for most aspects of utterance interpretation, and it would be necessary to have an infinite number of rules.

Sperber and Wilson argue (1986a:27) that verbal communication involves more than a single form of communication. It involves linguistic encoding and decoding, but there is a gap between the linguistically encoded message of a sentence and what the speaker means, or what the hearer understands. They argue that verbal communication also involves inferential processes. Their claim is that in verbal communication, the code and inferential modes of communication are combined together and enable people to achieve a more sophisticated level of communication which neither model can provide on its own.

Let us now consider the inferential model of communication. The input of a decoding process is a signal and the output is a message, which is paired to the signal by an underlying code. The input of an inferential process is a set of premises and the output is a set of conclusions, which follow logically from the premises, as in the following examples:

(9) Input: An amber light.

Output: Be cautious.

(10) Input: If it is a Sunday, the shop will be closed.

It is a Sunday.

Output: The shop is closed.

However, the question is how the premises used in the process are determined. The answer lies in finding premises which match the intentions of the speaker and determining how the hearer can come to recognise them. It was Grice (1957) who first raised the significance of the publication and recognition of intentions in communication, and various pragmatists have since developed inferential models of communication. The inferential model is formulated around the speaker's intention. It states that communication is achieved by the speaker providing evidence of his intentions and the hearer inferring his intentions from the evidence (Sperber and Wilson 1986:24). '

Another problematic feature of Barthes' account is his claim that language is the prime example of a semiological system (Culler 1983:73), and that it is possible to talk of explicit, discontinuous messages, as in the example of the four messages he claims to derive from the pasta advertisement. Sperber and Wilson (1986a:66) argue against this assumption, saying that the kind of explicit communication that can be achieved by the use of language is not a typical but a limiting case. For Sperber and Wilson, the goal of communication is the improvement of the individual's knowledge of the world, and the communicator does not convey a finite number of explicit and precise messages. Instead, he provides his evidence for a number of conclusions, which become more accessible to the



audience to varying degrees as a result. While it is right to argue that linguistic communication can achieve a degree of precision and complexity unattainable by non-linguistic means of communication (Sperber and Wilson 1986a:174), linguistic communication does not function by communicating a limited number of explicit and strong messages.

Barthes' semiotic analysis also fails to provide an adequate account of the degree of strength of a conveyed message, or of the indeterminacy of meaning. It is questionable whether advertisers regard the polysemous nature of both linguistic and non-linguistic messages as the 'tragedy' which Barthes did (1977:39). On the contrary, as I argue extensively in Chapter 3, the advantage of punning, which is frequently used in advertising, lies in its multiplicity of meanings, for it can be eye-catching and it can sustain an audience's attention longer. Nor does it matter much whether a particular message is conveyed or not, even if an advertiser has a set of assumptions which he hopes his advertisement might convey. As long as an advertisement catches an audience's attention, sustains it for a time, creates some response and remains in the audience's memory, the advertisement is said to be successful. The recovery of a message other than that intended is far from being regarded as redundant or as a failure.

Thus, Barthes' analysis is incapable of explaining the following case. A Winston advertisement shows a wok pushed into a black forest gateau with the following caption:

(11) We're not allowed to tell you anything about  
Winston cigarettes, so here's a wok in the Black  
Forest.

The appreciation of this advertisement involves more than decoding the linguistic and iconic message in the advertisement. A wok in the Black Forest is absurd and it is irrelevant to cigarettes. And this is all intentional. The advertiser expects this caption to attract the audience's attention and sustain it, hopefully longer than usual, as the caption is quite absurd and comes as a surprise. Possibly, the pun might attract extra attention, too. The advertiser hopes that it is memorable; due to its absurdity. Even better, the audience might like it, as it might appeal to their sense of humour. Thus, the advertiser could possibly create some favorable feelings among the audience.

#### 1.4. Some linguistic approaches

The next work on advertising to be surveyed is an article called 'How is understanding an advertisement possible?' by Pateman (1983), which appeared in *Language, Image, Media* edited by Davis et al. It is a criticism of Barthes and Williamson, and it favours a pragmatic approach. Pateman argues that semioticians take for

granted 'important conditions of possibility of the routine accomplishment' (1983:187). By 'the routine accomplishment', he means not only audience's linguistic knowledge, but also assumptions about the communicator's intention, the principles of conversation, activity type, point or purpose, and so on.

First, he introduces a theory of script-based understanding (Schank and Abelson 1977); then he notes that advertisements are 'rarely identified *in isolation* and *retrospectively* but rather they are identified *in a context* where they have been *anticipated*' (1983:188, author's italics), and argues that unless an advertisement is identified as an advertisement it would be 'strictly impossible for us to understand...it' (1983:189). His argument is adequate to the extent that advertisements tend to appear where they are anticipated, and knowledge that something is an advertisement helps the audience to understand it.

However, Pateman's thesis is inadequate for a general understanding of the language of advertising. Although it may be rare, a text can be identified as an advertisement without any prior knowledge that it is one. It does sometimes happen that one reads a text, regarding it as an article and finds out as one reads it that it is in fact an advertisement. The information that something is an advertisement is not a prerequisite for understanding it.

Secondly, Pateman argues that knowledge about what kind of thing fills a slot can be used in analysing a particular object

which fills a slot. He borrows the notion of 'activity type' from Levinson (1978), which is defined as follows:

I take the notion of an activity type to refer to a fuzzy category whose focal-members are goal-defined, socially constituted, bounded events with constraints on participants, setting and so on, but above all on the kinds of allowable contribution. Paradigm examples would be teaching, a job interview, a jural interrogation, a football game, a task in a workshop, a dinner party, and so on.

(Levinson 1979:368)

Pateman adds advertising to this list. He argues that participants in different activity types are prepared with minimal knowledge about an activity in which they are engaged, which includes the purpose of the activity. He goes on to say that in the case of advertising the purpose is to sell products, and that without this knowledge an advertisement is not understandable.

However, there are considerable problems with this formulation. For example, the goals of a dinner party are by no means clear. Being sociable and not offending anyone come to little more than a vague and arbitrary set of 'dos and don'ts'. Nor does Levinson

prove his point by referring to a court case in which an alleged rape victim had just admitted that she had been sexually involved with two men before; at this point the defence lawyer said to her: 'And you are seventeen and a half?', implying that a girl of seventeen who has already slept with two men was not a woman of a good repute (1978:380-1). This is not a convincing argument to support the notion of activity type. For such a statement does not have to come from a lawyer in a criminal court in order to suggest this meaning. This example may suggest something about a lawyer's tactics, but it does not explain what it is supposed to explain, that is, how people understand what they understand.

Sperber and Wilson (1987:742) argue that, while recognising the importance of goals, purposes, plans, and so on, there is no defining them, and that it is impossible to show how they are selected or constructed, and, once selected, how they affect comprehension. Their claim is that there is one sole criterion used in comprehension which is called relevance, which is to be discussed at length in Chapter 2, and they define relevance in a context and to an individual. They go on to argue that given a definition of relevance in a context, and the way the context is constructed, assumptions about the goals and purposes of the participants in a conversation form part of the context, and that therefore the notion of relevance is not incompatible with our intuitions about goals and purposes.

Pateman's category of goal-defined activity is just as vacuous when applied to advertising. The purpose of an advertisement is to make the audience want to buy a certain product, when they would not buy it but for the advertisement. If advertisers are to depend entirely upon their audience's recognition of their goal, their chances of success will not be high. Advertising cannot be seen as goal-bound in a social sense, for the goal of an advertisement is not shared by the audience. In effect, advertising is socially 'goal-divided' rather than 'goal defined', inasmuch as the different parties involved are striving for different social goals. The ultimate purpose of advertising is to cause a change in the thought and behaviour of the audience against their will. The advertiser wishes to change the minds of uninterested persons in his audience and make them buy his product. How this can be achieved is the topic of Chapter 4.

Thus, Pateman's argument against semiotic approaches in favour of a pragmatic approach is sound, and his intuitions to support the notion of goals and purposes are valid. However, his analysis suffers from the defects of the theory it is based upon. A more adequate pragmatic theory is needed in order to achieve his purposes of analysing how advertisements are understood. I shall argue in Chapter 2 that Relevance Theory provides just that.

Until now, we have been considering non-linguists' contributions to the study of the language of advertising, even though people like

Pateman use linguistic theory. It is now necessary to cover the writings of linguists.

Leech (1963) is regarded as a 'classic' in this field: as Dyer (1982:225) remarks, Leech provides a comprehensive study of advertising style. However, his work is descriptive and stylistic, and it is not an attempt to explain how advertising as communication is achieved. It was written before work on pragmatics developed. Since then, linguists turned their attention to the nature of communication, whereas Leech merely provides an account of the style and range of constructions used.

The object of Leech's work is to describe British advertising language in a linguistic framework, but it is not of great interest to my study because of its descriptive nature. For example, he presents a list of the adjectives most frequently used in television advertising, which includes 'new', 'good/better/best', 'free', 'fresh', 'delicious', and so on. However, it could be argued that they are all predictable. Firstly, they fall into a category of most frequently used adjectives in English in general. Secondly, given that food and detergents are two of the product categories on which most is spent by advertisers, it can be expected that a considerable proportion of the materials studied was in these categories, and it is thus not surprising that words such as 'fresh' and 'delicious' should get onto the list. Moreover, advertisers often use 'free' referring to incentives used in their promotion. Thus, although his findings are interesting and useful from a

descriptive point of view, they do not offer much of a contribution to understanding how communication takes place in advertising.

The latest relevant work is by two linguists, Vestergaard and Schroder (1985). They argue that advertisements tend to take a certain 'behavioural normalcy' for granted (Vestergaard and Schroder 1985:141). Although the notion of 'behavioural normalcy' needs more explanation, what they mean is that advertisers take a certain behaviour or attitude as the norm without explicitly saying so, as in the following example, which is a caption for a Dr. White's Panty Pads advertisement:

(12) Is there anything you can't wear?

(Vestergaard and Schroder 1985:143)

This advertisement is emphasising that the pads are thin and don't show, and the question presumably is whether there is anything one can't wear with the kind of pad in question. Vestergaard and Schroder argue that since the question does not strike one as meaningless, it must imply that with other towels there are things you cannot wear. They have a point in that advertisements treat certain assumptions as valid without explicitly stating them.



However, this process is not exclusive to advertising, and it is involved in a whole range of utterance interpretation, as will be shown later. Where Vestaargard and Schroder go really wrong is when they argue that this is a 'semantic process of ... imposition of a behavioural normalcy'. It is not one's semantic knowledge about the words in (12) which reveals an underlying assumption that there are things one cannot wear with other pads. This problem cannot be treated at a semantic level: it is a pragmatic one.

The last work to be surveyed here is *The Language of Television Advertising* by Geis (1982). The purpose of the study is to describe how language is used in American television advertising, and how the language of advertising is understood by audiences in terms of pragmatic theory.

Geis argues that the advertiser should be held responsible for non-idiosyncratic inferences drawn by an audience, as well as what his advertisement asserts and what its assertions entail, as ordinary people cannot be expected to distinguish between valid and invalid inferences (1982:33). He takes a Gricean approach and argues that pragmatic theory must be dependent on semantic theory (1982:34). His assumption is that the hearer draws inferences from an utterance with the aid of his semantic knowledge and Grice's cooperative principle:

A sentence S conversationally implies a proposition P

in a given conversation if P can be "calculated"  
given

- a. the literal meaning of S,
- b. general principles governing conversation,
- c. the context of the conversation
- d. background knowledge shared by speaker and hearer.

(Geis 1982:30)

Problems of Gricean analysis have been discussed by Sperber and Wilson, and will be explained in Chapter 2. Here, it is sufficient to point out that Geis has not suggested how 'the context of the conversation' is determined. Moreover, the notion of mutual knowledge has been discussed and dismissed as psychologically unreal. (Clark and Marshall 1981, Sperber and Wilson 1986a) It would not be possible to pin down an advertiser on these notions which are impossible to establish. An advertiser could deny any accusation by saying that he was not aware that his viewers shared that particular knowledge. Geis argues that advertisers should be held responsible for the conversational implicature of what they say. While this is in itself a reasonable and interesting proposal, Geis' actual analysis is not a successful basis for implementing any such restriction.

Geis bases his analysis upon Grice's notion of cooperation between participants in a conversation, and presents six maxims,

rather than Grice's four, incorporating maxims taken from Grice, Boer and Lycan (1975), as well as his own. In effect, Grice's Maxims of Quantity and Quality are each broken down into two maxims, the Maxims of Strength and Parsimony, and the Maxims of Truth and Evidence, respectively. They are defined as follows:

The Maxim of Strength: Say no less than is necessary.

The Maxim of Parsimony: Say no more than is necessary.

The Maxim of Truth: Do not say what you believe to be  
false.

The Maxim of Evidence: Do not say that for which you lack  
adequate evidence.

The Maxim of Relevance: Be relevant.

The Maxim of Clarity: Avoid obscurity of expression.

(Geis 1982:31)

Sperber and Wilson (1981) have argued that Grice's maxims are not all independently necessary and that they may be reduced to a single principle, which is the principle of relevance. Geis himself is aware of problems which arise from inter-relations among maxims. He gives as an example an advertisement for Aftate, which is a deodorant for feet:

(13) Aftate for Athlete's foot, with a medication that kills athlete's foot fungus on contact.

(Geis 1982:55)

Geis argues that it is implied that Aftate kills athlete's foot fungus on contact, and that the Maxim of Relevance is responsible for this implicature. However, taking into consideration the Maxim of Strength, and the fact that advertisers make the strongest claim they can in their advertisement, the fact that it is never actually claimed that this medication kills athlete's foot fungus on contact implies that Aftate may not in fact kill athlete's foot fungus on contact. He adds:

In general, the Maxims of Strength and Relevance can give rise to quite different implicatures ... .. in general consumers are much more likely to go with the Maxim of Relevance than with the Maxim of Strength, for in such cases the latter requires much more sophisticated reasoning than does the former.

(Geis 1982:55-6)

He is suggesting that there is a hierarchy among the maxims and the Maxim of Relevance is superior to that of Strength. However, advertisers cannot be held responsible for different implicatures which are argued to be derived from different maxims. Geis argues that 'in general' audience are 'much more likely to' go with the Maxim of Relevance. But this cannot be used for determining what advertisers are responsible for, as the claim is too weak and not specific enough. Thus, again, Geis' approach suffers from the general defects of Gricean pragmatics, that is vagueness and arbitrariness. Sperber and Wilson offer an account which supersedes Geis' considerations and which does not suffer from the problems inherent in a Gricean approach.

Geis' major finding is how weak claims made by advertisers are, as in the following example:

(14) ...a remarkable nasal spray that lasts and lasts  
up to 12 continuous hours.

(Geis 1982:3)

(14) claims that the nasal spray in question remains effective for twelve hours at most, which is weaker than just saying that it lasts for twelve hours. Based on the assumption that advertisers will make the strongest claims that they can possibly defend, Geis

concludes (1982:4) that the advertiser of the nasal spray cannot justify the stronger claim. He goes on to argue that judging from the fact that weak claims as such are commonly used in advertising, they must have a stronger impact on the audience than their literal strength would indicate.

Geis presents scales to measure the strength of claims, for example, strength of probability and modal verbs. He gives an imaginary situation in which John Jones is known by 100 women and is interested in knowing how many of those women like him, and presents a list of sentences:

(15) a. Every one of the women like John Jones.

b. Most of the women like J.J.

c. Many of the women like J.J.

d. Some of the women like J.J.

e. Few of the women like J.J.

f. None of the women like J.J.

(Geis 1982:63)

and he proposes a method of ranking relative strength as follows:

Given a scale S (say 10 point scale plus 0) and a comparison class C formed with respect to lexical element E, assign those members of C that have absolute values to the appropriate points on S and assign all other members of C to S, giving equal space on S to each member.

(Geis 1982:64)

He argues that given the above method, sentences (15a)-(15e) would be mapped into the following scale:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
none	few		some		many		most		all	

(Geis 1982:65)

and he argues that 'Many X's are P' would be interpreted as claiming that something between 50% and 75% of X have property P. (1982:65)

This definition is too specific and unrealistic at the same time. His argument sounds acceptable in this particular context. However, it is possible to imagine situations in which this measurement does not work, depending on the number of subjects involved. The question is how far beyond the given context does this work? It might be argued that it applies to the case of ninety-nine women, instead of one hundred. Or it might apply to the case of ninety-eight women, and so on. However, it would not apply if the number of women is three: even if nearly 70% of the three women liked John Jones, it could not be claimed that many women liked John Jones. Where is the cut-off point, if there is any? The scale pays no consideration to context. A scale that is valid in an imaginary context but not in others is of little use to an analysis of advertisements.

Thus Geis' analysis suffers in part from the general defect of formal pragmatics. It attempts to explain utterance comprehension by adding rules of pragmatic interpretation, which are unrealistic and not comprehensive, and it does not account for the role of context in utterance comprehension.

Geis considers problems in utterance interpretation and argues that they should be dealt with in the framework of pragmatics. However, his analysis shares the problems of Gricean and formal pragmatics, and remains too vague and arbitrary. Furthermore, his proposed solutions, such as scales for probability terms and modal verbs are inadequate, for he pays no attention to the context



against which an utterance is processed. It is necessary to investigate these problems in terms of a more adequate pragmatic analysis, which provides an adequate account for the notion of context.

### 1.5 Conclusion

The lack of any account of context has indeed been the fundamental weakness of all the writings on the language of advertising to date. They have failed to take into consideration the context in which an advertisement is interpreted.

In this chapter, I have argued, against semiotic approaches, that understanding advertisements is not merely a matter of decoding, and that we must consider inferential processes which are involved in utterance interpretation. I have further argued that the interpretation of advertisements is best approached from a pragmatic point of view, and that we need an account which integrates the notion of context. However, existing pragmatic approaches suffer from the general defects of Gricean pragmatics, namely, vagueness and arbitrariness, or of formal pragmatics, that is unrealistic rigidity. In short, existing approaches to advertising share the defects of the theories of communication on which they are based.

In the next chapter, I shall argue that Relevance Theory by Sperber and Wilson offers a principled account of how an utterance is interpreted by the hearer against the context. It is a theory which supersedes all the intuitions and partial approaches surveyed in this chapter. Relevance Theory is flexible and comprehensive at the same time, and it provides a better theory of communication than any of those surveyed in this chapter, and therefore it offers an effective framework for the interpretation of advertisements.

## Chapter 2: Meaning and Communication

### 2.1. The basic concept of communication

In Chapter 1, I have examined works by various social scientists, including linguists, on the analysis of meaning in advertising. I have argued that structuralist and semiotic approaches are not very fruitful, and that problems of meaning cannot be fully accounted for by semantic analysis. It would seem that the topic is best approached from a pragmatic viewpoint. In this chapter, I shall consider how some pragmatists have approached the problems of utterance interpretation and how best we can analyse the interpretation of advertisements.

Section 2.1 will examine Grice's analysis and an alternative approach by Sperber and Wilson. In Section 2.1.1., I shall look at Grice's approach to meaning and communication, and in Section 2.1.2., I shall consider Sperber and Wilson's criticism of Grice's approach. Section 2.1.2. will be further broken down into smaller sections, in order to study Sperber and Wilson's analysis systematically. Section 2.1.2.1. will look at cognitive environment. Section 2.1.2.2. will focus on the notion of manifestness. Ostensive-inferential communication will be defined and explained in Section 2.1.2.3. Section 2.2 will discuss indirect communication and various approaches to analysing it.

2.1.1. Grice's approach and its critique

Grice tries to draw a distinction between two kinds of meaning as in the following examples:

(1) Those spots mean measles.

(2) Those three rings of the bell (of the bus) mean  
that the bus is full.

(Grice 1957:377)

Grice calls the first type of meaning 'natural meaning', and the second 'non-natural meaning'. He presents (3) as the formulation for natural meaning and (4a) and (4b) as those for non-natural meaning:

(3) A means to do so-and-so (by x).

(4) a. A means something by x.

b. A means by x that...

(Grice 1957:378-9)

where A is a human agent.

The point is that, in regard to (1), there is no asking 'Who means it?'. However, in the case of (2), it is possible to ask 'Who means it?' or 'What does he mean by it?'. The key difference is that, in the case of non-natural meaning, there is some intended cause of belief.

Grice proceeds to a consideration of different stimuli, which he calls 'utterances', such as an artist drawing a picture, a conductor ringing a bell, and a police officer waving to a driver, all of which are non-linguistic acts, but arguably genuine acts of communication. The word 'utterance' is confusing here, so following Sperber and Wilson, I shall use the term 'stimulus' instead.

Grice argues that the recognition by the audience of the intention behind a stimulus is crucial. For example, suppose that A left B's handkerchief near the scene of a murder in order to induce a detective to believe that B was the murderer. In this case, Grice claims, one could not say that the handkerchief has a non-natural meaning. Nor can one argue that A, by leaving the handkerchief, meant as a non-natural meaning that B was the murderer, in that A specifically does not intend his audience to know his intention.

Another concern Grice has as to the definition of non-natural meaning is the distinction between non-natural meaning and 'deliberately and openly letting someone know' or 'getting someone to think'. He explicates this distinction with the following examples:

- (5) a. Herod presents Salome with the head of St.  
John the Baptist on a charger.
  
- b. Feeling faint, a child lets its mother see  
how pale it is (hoping that she may draw her  
own conclusions and help).
  
- c. A man leaves the china his daughter has  
broken lying around for his wife to see.

(Grice 1957:382)

Grice argues that, although here we seem to have cases which satisfy conditions so far given for non-natural meaning, yet (5a) to (5c) are not cases of non-natural meaning. He contrasts 'telling' with 'deliberately and openly letting someone know' or 'getting someone to think', and says that the latter two cases are not

'telling' or non-natural meaning. The question is: is this distinction valid?

Grice gives further examples:

- (6) a. A shows Mr. X a photograph of Mr. Y displaying undue familiarity to Mrs. X.
  
- b. A draws a picture of Mr. Y behaving in this manner and shows it to Mr. X.

(Grice 1957:382)

According to Grice, (6a) is not a case of non-natural meaning, but (6b) is. The reasons are that in the case of (6a), Mr. X's recognition of A's intention to make him believe that there is something between Mr. Y and Mrs. X is irrelevant to the production of this effect by the photograph. However, in the case of (6b), it will make a difference to the effect of A's drawing of Mrs. X, whether or not he takes A to be intending to inform him about Mrs. X, and not to be just doodling or trying to produce a work of art.

It is worth noting that this distinction between photography and drawing has been made by Barthes in his analysis of advertising. He gives the following reasons to support this distinction: (a) to

produce an object or a scene in a drawing requires a set of rule-governed transpositions; (b) the operation of the drawing immediately necessitates a certain division between the significant and the insignificant; (c) drawing demands an apprenticeship (1977:43).

However, all these points in fact apply to photography as much as to drawing. It is not the case that the reproduction of an object in a photograph is carried out without human operation; it takes more than simply pressing a shutter. It includes some manipulation, such as the intended selection of objects and focusing. It is particularly interesting that Barthes draws this distinction in his discussion of advertising. In advertising, everything, whether a photograph or drawing, is carefully and skilfully controlled.

Thus, the distinction between intended non-natural meaning and intended meaning, as reflected in the distinction between photography and drawing which Grice is trying to make is not as clear-cut as he claims it to be. Even in the case of (6a), Mr. X's recognition of A's intention to make him believe that there is something between Mr. Y. and Mrs. X can be crucial. For example, if A leaves the photograph in question lying around by accident and it is found by Mr. X among other photographs of many people enjoying themselves at a party, Mr. X may not suspect anything between his wife and Mr. Y.



As to (5a) - (5c), too, it is difficult to observe the distinction between 'telling' and 'deliberately and openly letting someone know' or 'getting someone to think'. The difficulty partly stems from the fact that Grice does not make clear what is communicated by the respective communicators of (5a) - (5c). For example, it might be accepted that in (5a) Herod was 'deliberately and openly letting' Salome know that John the Baptist was dead. However, one might be tempted to say that Herod was 'telling' that he had kept his promise to her. It could be argued that (5a) - (5c) are both 'telling' and 'deliberately and openly letting someone know' a whole range of things.

Indeed, Sperber and Wilson argue (1986a:53) that there is no clear-cut distinction between the two, and that there is a continuum of cases between 'deliberately and openly letting someone know' or 'getting someone to think', where strong direct evidence is provided, and 'telling', where all the evidence is indirect.

As to what is communicated, Grice argues (1957:386) that only what may be called the primary intention of a communicator has a bearing on the non-natural meaning of a stimulus. For example, he argues that if a man intends to get a woman to do something by giving her some information, it cannot be regarded as relevant to the non-natural meaning of his stimulus to describe what he intends her to do. His argument is valid in that the communicator's informing her of something is an act of communication, but his getting her to do something as a result is not. However, if the

former is called the primary intention, can the latter be called the secondary intention? Are there layers of intentions? Is there a clear-cut boundary between them? These points are not elaborated by Grice, but they are by Sperber and Wilson, who distinguish between what they call informative and communicative intentions.

#### 2.1.2. Sperber and Wilson's approach

Grice's analysis of non-natural meaning can be reformulated in terms of three sub-intentions on the part of speaker: the speaker utters *x*, intending to inform the hearer of *y*; in so doing, the speaker intends the hearer to recognise his intention to inform her of *y*; and the speaker intends the hearer's recognition of his intention to inform to play a part in her comprehension process.

Let us suppose that the speaker thought that he studied hard the night before the utterance and wanted to communicate the fact by saying (7):

(7) I studied hard last night.

The speaker will be said to have succeeded in communication once his intention to inform the hearer of the fact that he studied hard the previous night is recognised by the hearer. There are situations in which the hearer recognises that the speaker intends to inform her of a fact, but nevertheless she does not believe it. For example, she may have seen him at a party the night before, and therefore she may not be convinced that he studied hard on the night in question. Thus, it is possible that the speaker's intention to inform is recognised without this intention being fulfilled. When the speaker's intention to inform is recognised and yet fails to be fulfilled, his intention of making his intention to inform a part of the hearer's reasoning also fails. Then, only his intention of making his intention to inform recognised will be fulfilled. Both his intention to inform and his intention to make the hearer's recognition of his intention to inform a part of her comprehension process will not be fulfilled. However, even then, the speaker will have succeeded in communication; what he will have failed to do is to convince his hearer.

Sperber and Wilson argue that if intention to inform does not need to be fulfilled for communication to succeed, as I have just shown, this intention to inform cannot be described as an intention to communicate. They therefore call this intention to inform the 'informative intention'. On the other hand, the speaker's intention to make his intention to inform recognised by the hearer, according to Sperber and Wilson, is the true intention to communicate, and they call it the 'communicative intention'. By definition, when the

speaker's intention to inform is not fulfilled, the speaker's intention that the recognition by the hearer of his intention to inform should play a part in her comprehension process is not fulfilled either. Since an intention to inform need not be fulfilled for the purposes of successful communication, an intention that the hearer's recognition of the speaker's intention to inform should function as part of her comprehension process cannot be necessary either. Sperber and Wilson define these two layers of intentions as follows:

Informative intention: to inform the audience of something.

Communicative intention: to inform the audience of one's informative intention.

(Sperber and Wilson 1986a:29)

As I have shown above, an informative intention can be recognised without being fulfilled. Once an informative intention gets recognised, the consequent communicative intention is fulfilled. However, the reverse is not necessarily true. A communicative intention can be fulfilled without the corresponding informative intention being fulfilled: the hearer may recover the information intended by the speaker without believing it.

This distinction between informative and communicative intentions will turn out to be of great significance in characterising the covert transmission of information and attitudes typical of many advertisements. It will be central to my discussion of 'covert forms of communication' (Chapter 4), and it is important to clarify here just what is at issue.

These complex intentions all depend on the notions of manifestness, cognitive environment, ostention, and ostensive-inferential communication. I shall therefore take these four notions in turn.

#### 2.1.2.1. Manifestness and cognitive environment

When an assumption is accessible to an individual, and there is more evidence for it than against it, Sperber and Wilson call it 'manifest', and they define cognitive environment in terms of manifestness as follows:

A fact is manifest to an individual at a given time if and only if he is capable at that time of representing it mentally and accepting its representation as true or probably true.

(Sperber and Wilson 1986a:39)

A cognitive environment of an individual is a set of facts that are manifest to him.

(Sperber and Wilson 1986a:39)

The notion of manifestness can be extended from facts to all assumptions. To be manifest is to be either perceptible or inferable. Manifestness is also a matter of degree. An assumption can be weakly or strongly manifest to a certain individual.

Sperber and Wilson argue that the communicator's informative intention is better described as an intention to modify the cognitive environment of the addressee, rather than as an intention directly to modify the thoughts of the addressee. They add that the actual cognitive effects of a modification of the cognitive environment are only partly predictable.

A communicator may form a certain design on his audience. However, to what extent he has control over his addressee is questionable, and is certainly a matter of degree. He may not have much control over her actual thoughts, but he may have more control over her cognitive environment. It is plausible that he should aim more at altering her cognitive environment than her actual thoughts.

There are questions related to this, which have been posed above: what is communicated?; what is communication? Communication, according to Sperber and Wilson, is a modification of the audience's cognitive environment. It is not meant to create a thought or a belief in the audience. Nor is it meant to transfer a certain piece of information to the audience's mind. The communicator communicates something by making a set of assumptions accessible to the audience, and providing evidence for them, i.e. making them manifest, or more manifest. What is communicated is a set of assumptions, rather than a specific piece of information. The communicator intends to alter the audience's cognitive environment by adding a set of assumptions to that environment or making them more accessible.

Sperber and Wilson also suggest that communication is a matter of degree. On the one hand, when the communicator intends to make a particular assumption strongly manifest to the audience, then that assumption is strongly communicated. On the other hand, when the communicator's intention is marginally to increase the manifestness of a wider range of assumptions, then these assumptions are weakly communicated. There is no cut-off point between strongly communicated assumptions and weakly communicated assumptions, nor between what is communicated and what is not communicated. Rather, there is a range of assumptions, some of them strongly communicated and some of them weakly so.

Suppose that I ran into a friend, who asked me what I was going to do on the weekend, and I pointed to the books which I was carrying. By doing so, I would intend to modify her cognitive environment and to draw her attention to the books I was carrying. The fact that I was carrying books would be made more manifest to her, although she might have noticed them already. Among the things I would be making manifest to her is the fact that I was behaving in this particular way. Let us suppose that my friend concluded that my behaviour was deliberate, that I was not just trying to balance what I was carrying, and that I was making this gesture in order to attract her attention to the books. Then my behaviour can be said to have made manifest to her the fact that I intended to make some particular assumptions manifest to her. It is behaviour which makes manifest an intention to make something manifest, and it is called by Sperber and Wilson 'ostensive behaviour', or 'ostention' (1986a:49).

#### 2.1.2.2. Ostensive-inferential communication

Sperber and Wilson argue that a certain type of human intentional communication is a case of ostention. It is this ostensive communication that they are interested in and that they propose an account for.



Ostention reveals two layers of information: first, there is the information which has been pointed out; secondly, there is the information that the first layer of information has been pointed out intentionally. In the case above, my friend might or might not have noticed that I was carrying books. My ostensive behaviour would be drawing her attention to them in an obviously intentional way, making her conclude that there was some relevant information to be obtained from the fact that I was drawing her attention to the books which I was carrying.

Sperber and Wilson argue that all human beings automatically aim at the most efficient information processing possible, and that this efficiency can be assessed by the standard of 'relevance'. The notion of what is relevant will be explicated later. Here, it suffices to note that when the processing of new information gives rise to a multiplication effect, it is called 'relevant' (1986a:48). A multiplication effect is defined as the process whereby when new information is added to old information, they yield new information.

Ostensive behaviour provides evidence of one's thoughts. It succeeds in doing so because it implies a guarantee of relevance. When I ostensively pointed out my books to my friend, my behaviour gave her a guarantee of relevance, that there was something worth her attention, and this made manifest the intention behind my behaviour.

Sperber and Wilson argue that the term 'communication' can legitimately be applied to all cases of ostension. They also argue that communication is inferential. Thus, they treat ostensive communication, inferential communication, and ostensive-inferential communication as being all the same thing. Ostensive-inferential communication consists in making manifest to an audience one's intention to make manifest a basic layer of information, and therefore it can be described in terms of an informative and a communicative intention.

Here is a reformulation of the notions of informative and communicative intentions, taking into account the concepts of manifestness:

Informative intention: to make manifest or more manifest to the audience a set of assumptions.

(Sperber and Wilson 1986a:58)

Communicative intention: to make it mutually manifest to audience and communicator that the communicator has this informative intention.

(Sperber and Wilson 1986a:61)

It is worth noting that communicative intention is defined in terms of mutual manifestness. The notion of mutual manifestness needs explanation. A cognitive environment shared by two or more people, to whom it is manifest that they share it, is called by Sperber and Wilson a mutual cognitive environment. In a mutual cognitive environment, for every manifest assumption, the fact that it is manifest to the people who share the environment is also manifest. Every manifest assumption in a mutual cognitive environment is called mutually manifest. Mutual manifestness is weaker than mutual knowledge. It does not suffer from the psychological objections to mutual knowledge discussed by Clark and Marshall (1981) and Sperber and Wilson (1986a). And yet, the notion provides a sense of overtness to Sperber and Wilson's notion of ostensive communication. For, when the speaker makes an assumption mutually manifest to his hearer and to himself, he is making manifest to her not only the assumption itself, but also the fact that it is manifest to him as well.

To Sperber and Wilson, communication must to some extent be overt. However, one might ask: what difference, if any, does it make whether the communicative intention is mutually manifest to the communicator and audience or not? Can this be a criterion for distinguishing one variety of communication from other forms of information transmission? This is an issue to which I shall return in Chapter 4.

Sperber and Wilson argue that mere informing alters the cognitive environment of the audience, but ostensive communication alters the mutual cognitive environment of the audience and the communicator. Their claim is that, although mutual manifestness may not have significant cognitive importance, it is of crucial social importance. For, a change in the mutual cognitive environment of the communicator and the audience is a change in their possibilities of interaction. (1986a:61-2) Let us look at the following examples:

(8) Could you give me a hand with my luggage?

Suppose that Paul said (8) to Kay as he was carrying luggage. Kay would recover that by saying (8), Paul was asking her to help him with his luggage. She might decide to help him, and by doing so, comply with his request. Or, she might tell him that she was in a hurry, and by doing so, she might refuse to comply with his request. Either way, by ostensively communicating (8), Paul will be faced with Kay's response, which has social consequences: in the former case, he would feel an obligation to her for complying with his request; in the latter case, he would be disappointed by her refusal. On the other hand, if Paul did not say (8) and did not ostensively communicate his request, but communicated to Kay that he was in need of help, for example by showing his struggle with the luggage, it would be a different situation. Even if Kay voluntarily offered to help him, Paul would not be under the same kind of

obligation to her as when she responded to his request. Or, if she ignored him, it would spare Paul the loss of face involved in her open refusal to comply with his request. Either way, Paul would be free of the social consequences which would be caused by his ostensibly communicating his request to her.

Thus, ostensive communication, that is communication by making the speaker's informative intention mutually manifest to the hearer and himself, involves some social consequences. By making his informative intention mutually manifest, the speaker is simultaneously making it mutually manifest that the fulfilment of his informative intention is in the hands of the hearer. Whether or not Kay offered to help Paul, her reaction would cause some alteration in their relationship. Ostensive communication can cause social consequences, which mere information transmission does not.

This social aspect of ostensive communication is significant in the study of advertising. The distinction between informative and communicative intentions plays an important role in characterising the covert form of informative transmission and attitudes characteristic of much advertising, which will be the subject of Chapter 4.

Finally, Sperber and Wilson define ostensive-inferential communication as follows:

Ostensive-inferential communication: the communicator produces a stimulus which makes it mutually manifest to communicator and audience that the communicator intends, by means of this stimulus, to make manifest or more manifest to the audience a set of assumptions (I).

(Sperber and Wilson 1986a:63)

## 2.2 Indirect communication

I have so far addressed the problem of communication by considering instances of information directly communicated. However, a major problem in pragmatics is the phenomenon of indirect communication, which Grice calls conversational implicatures.

In Section 2.2.1., I shall first examine Grice's approach to indirect communication. In Section 2.2.2., I shall consider accounts proposed by other pragmatists. Section 2.2.3 will consider an alternative approach by Sperber and Wilson.

### 2.2.1. Grice's approach

In his 'Logic and conversation' (1975), Grice gives an example of two people, A and B, having a conversation about a mutual friend C. A asks B how C is getting on in his new job, and B replies, 'Oh quite well, I think; he likes his colleagues, and he hasn't been to prison yet.' Grice explains, 'I think it is clear that whatever B implied, suggested, meant, etc., in this example, is distinct from what B said...' (1975:43)

This example is an attempt to draw attention to those aspects of meaning which are not semantically determined, that is, so-called 'conversational implicature' (1975:45), taken to be opposed to 'conventional implicature', which is semantically determined.

Conversational implicature is worked out from the meaning of the sentence uttered, together with the context, on the basis of the assumption that communication is governed by the principle of cooperation. More specifically, the assumption is that the speaker has observed certain general principles of communication. For Grice, the crucial distinction between conventional implicature and conversational implicature is that the latter is calculable:

The presence of a conversational implicature must be capable of being worked out; for even if it can in fact be intuitively grasped, unless the intuition is replaceable by an argument, the implicature (if present at all) will not count as a conversational implicature; it will be a conventional implicature.

(Grice 1975:50)

Grice then proposes a formulation of how this calculation might go, as follows:



- (9) a. He has said that p.
- b. There is no reason to suppose that he is not observing the maxims.
- c. He could not be doing this unless he thought that q.
- d. He knows (and knows that I know that he knows) that I can see that the supposition that he thinks that q is required.
- e. He had done nothing to stop me thinking that q.
- f. He intends me to think, or is at least willing to allow me to think, that q.
- g. And so, he has implicated that q.

(Grice 1975:50)

Sperber and Wilson argue that this is not a logical argument; it is not even clear which of (9a) to (9g) are meant to be premises and which conclusions. In (9c), the content of the implicature is introduced for the first time, but this is by no means deducible from (9a) and (9b). (9c) has to be either an independent premise

itself, or derivable from (9a) and (9b) with some supplementary premises, which remain to be specified. Thus, (9) does not offer an adequate account of the working out of conversational implicatures.

This is also the case in the following example:

(10) She: Would you go and get some flowers?

He: I'm just going to Covent Garden.

How can the conversational implicatures of his utterance be recovered? This is the kind of question a pragmatist aims to answer. As it has been argued, they are not recoverable from his utterance and Grice's general communication principles alone.

If it was used in a context containing assumption (11), then his utterance would be treated as conveying proposition (12):

(11) They sell flowers in Covent Garden.

(12) He will be able to get some flowers.

On the other hand, if it was used in a context containing assumption (13), then his utterance would be interpreted as communication (14):

(13) They do not sell flowers in Covent Garden.

(14) He will not get any flowers.

Grice presents a list of sources of data upon which the hearer will rely to work out conversational implicatures as follows:

- (15) (i) the conventional meaning of the word used, together with the identity of any references that may be involved;
- (ii) the Cooperative Principle and its maxims;
- (iii) the context, linguistic or otherwise, of the utterance;
- (iv) other items of background knowledge;
- (v) the fact (or supposed fact) that all relevant items falling under the previous headings are available to both

participants and both participants know or assume this to be the case.

(Grice 1975:50)

(11) and (13) are alternative contextual assumptions, which, together with other assumptions, permit the deduction of conclusions (12) and (14), respectively.

However, there is nothing in Grice's account to determine where the required premises come from, or exactly how they interact to determine the full import of indirect reply (12). In the next section, we shall examine what other pragmatists have to offer as to these questions.

#### 2.2.2. Other pragmatists' approaches

Many pragmatists have no clear theory of non-demonstrative reasoning, except a shared conviction that non-demonstrative reasoning cannot even contain a deduction as one of its sub-parts. As Sperber and Wilson point out, other pragmatists do not offer a positive alternative. Take Bach and Harnish, for example:

Our empirical thinking in general is rife with generalizations and inference principles that we are not conscious of when we use them, if we are conscious of them at all. It would take us well beyond present-day cognitive psychology to speculate on the details of any of this. Whatever these processes are, whatever activates them whatever principles or strategies are involved, they work, and work well.

(Bach and Harnish 1979:93)

Bach and Harnish argue that the form of inference by which implicatures are recovered 'is not deductive but what might be called an inference to a plausible explanation' (1979:92-3).

Brown and Yule take a similar line:

It may be the case that we are capable of deriving a specific conclusion ... from specific premises ... via deductive inference, but we are rarely asked to do so in the everyday discourse we encounter .... We are more likely to operate with a rather loose form of inferencing...

(Brown and Yule 1983:33-4)

Brown and Yule present the following as a counter-example to deductive reasoning in comprehension:

(16) ... in the kitchen there was a huge dresser and  
when anyone went in ... the hats and coats were  
all dumped on this dresser

(Brown and Yule 1983:34)

They argue that deductive reasoning could not lead the audience to infer that the hats and coats mentioned in (16) belong to visitors of the house in which there is a dresser in the kitchen. They are right that implicated premises are not deduced - only implicated conclusions are deduced, as Sperber and Wilson make clear. Implicated premises are retrieved or derived from memory, and confirmed via consideration of relevance.

Leech claims that all implicatures are 'probabilistic' (1983:30) and the process by which they are recovered is 'not a formalised deductive logic, but an informal rational problem-solving strategy' (1983:31).

Levinson argues that implicatures are 'quite unlike logical inferences, and cannot directly be modelled in terms of some semantic relation like entailment' (1983:116). He uses the following example, in which there is an assumption that in order to get the lavish subsidy under some scheme one must have three cows. The inspector asks John's neighbour the following question:

(17) a. I: Has John really got the requisite number of  
cows?

b. N: Oh sure, he's got three cows all right.

(Levinson 1983:116)

Levinson points out that the neighbour's reply does not commit him to the implicature ordinarily associated with (18a), namely, (18b), by Grice's maxim of quantity:

(18) a. John has three cows.

b. John has only three cows and no more.

The survey of studies on inference system by other pragmatists has been presented by Blakemore (1987). She points out that in the background to Levinson's rejection of deduction there is an underlying distinction between context-dependent inferences and context-independent inferences. She further argues that inferences which hinge on the meanings of the words are deductive, while inferences which depend on contextual information used as premises are inductive, but 'inductive' inference of this type can be reduced to deductive inference, as Sperber and Wilson show.

Sperber and Wilson disagree with Levinson as to where the premises which are used in the recovery of implicatures come from, and argue that this pragmatist follows directly Grice's characterisation of implicature, with all its associated vagueness and defects.

Let us look at example (10) to (14) again. Neither (13) nor (14) are deducible from the content of (10) alone. Moreover, if they were deducible from (10b) they would not be implicatures in Grice's sense, for, according to him, 'the truth of a conversational implicature is not required by the truth of what is said' (1975:58). If this is a defining feature of implicature, no implicature will be deducible from the explicit content of an utterance alone. However, to say that (12) and (14) are not directly deducible from (10b) is not to say that deductive reasoning does not play a significant role in their derivation.



### 2.2.3. Sperber and Wilson's approach

How, then, can the process of recovering implicatures be accounted for? Sperber and Wilson argue that the principle underlying the recovery of implicature is identical to the principle of recovering the speaker's intention.

The process of inferential comprehension is a combination of hypothesis formation and logical deduction. In principle, it is not fully determinable. Even under the best of circumstances, communication may fail. The speaker's informative intention may neither be decoded nor deduced. All the hearer can do is to formulate a hypothesis based on the speaker's ostensive stimuli. Her hypothesis may later be confirmed through the following exchange. However, there does not exist such a thing as a proof of the speaker's informative intention.

Contrary to all other pragmatists, Sperber and Wilson argue that such deduction processes, as shown by examples (10) to (14), play a central role in the recovery of implicatures. Indeed, this follows directly from their theory of cognition, which is an expansion of Fodor's theory of the mind (1983). Their claim is that in processing information, people aim to bring about the greatest improvement of their overall representation of the world for the least cost in processing.

A non-demonstrative inference process has free access to conceptual memory. They argue that it is a 'central thought process' (1986a:66), which involves forming a hypothesis on the basis of the input delivered from various perceptual and linguistic systems and confirming it against background assumptions stored in memory.

This distinction between 'central' processes and 'input', 'perceptual' or 'peripheral' processes is attributed to Fodor (1983 and 1985). Fodor argues that the central systems are beyond our investigation for two reasons: (a) The function of the central system is the fixation of beliefs, about which little is known; (b) The range of facts or beliefs which are involved in the fixation of further beliefs is unlimited. He compares the psychology of central processes with the philosophy of confirming scientific hypotheses.

Sperber and Wilson reject this comparison. They see the central thought process of utterance interpretation as more typical of central cognitive processes than is the forming and confirming of scientific hypotheses, which operates on a different time-scale. The latter requires an enormous amount of time and effort, while ordinary utterance comprehension is instantaneous. Very little time and effort is spent on interpreting an utterance, for example (10b).

Sperber and Wilson also argue that, although the central processes are not fully determinable in principle, as argued by Fodor, at least some of them are highly constrained in practice.

Their claim is that the goal of cognitive activities is the maximisation of relevance, that is, to get the greatest contextual effects with the least processing effort, and that this counts as a single criterion in the process of utterance interpretation.

Thus, Sperber and Wilson argue that conversational implicatures can be characterised as a partly deductive process. I shall examine their analysis systematically. In Section 2.2.3.1, I shall look at the deductive inference system. Section 2.2.3.2 will consider the notion of relevance. The determination of context will be the subject of Section 2.2.3.3. In Section 2.2.3.4., I shall discuss the notions of descriptive use and interpretive use.

#### 2.2.3.1. The deductive inference system

A deductive inference is a formal operation which takes propositions as premises and yields propositions as conclusions. Given a set of deductive rules, and given a set of premises, the deductive conclusions do not vary. A set of conclusions are automatically generated. They need not therefore be stored separately. Thus, a deductive system would provide a significant economy of storage.

According to Sperber and Wilson, propositional representations are stored as factual descriptions of the world, which are called 'factual assumptions' (1986a:74). They are entertained with greater or lesser confidence, depending on the form of their acquisition. They argue that a conclusion derived via deduction inherits its strength from the strength of the premises used in the derivation processes.

A deductive system would provide not only a tool for the working out of new assumptions and their addition to an existing system, but also a device to monitor the accuracy of any conclusions derived by the system. Since the strength of these conclusions depends on the strength of the premises used in their derivation, inference rules can be used to assess the accuracy of the assumptions entertained by testing them against one another.

Sperber and Wilson's hypothesis is that the human deductive device yields only non-trivial conclusions, which they define as follows:

Non-trivial logical implication

A set of assumptions {P} logically and non-trivially implies an assumption Q if and only if, when {P} is the set of initial theses in a derivation involving only elimination rules, Q belongs to the set of final theses.

(Sperber and Wilson 1986a:97)

Sperber and Wilson call those rules which take only one proposition as input 'analytic rules', and the implications which are derived entirely by such rules 'analytic implications'. Rules which take two separate propositions as input are called 'synthetic rules', and any implication which is not analytic is a 'synthetic implication' (1986a:104).

The distinction between analytic implications and synthetic ones is crucial. The analytic implications of a given assumption are intrinsic to it, and they are recoverable as long as the assumption itself is recoverable, simply by reprocessing it through the deductive device. On the other hand, synthetic implications are not intrinsic to any single member of the set of the assumptions from which they are derived. If humans are interested in improving their overall representation of the world, they must therefore be interested in recovering as many synthetic implications as possible from any set of assumptions they are currently processing, before putting them away into separate storage. Analytic implications, by contrast, are only worth recovering as a way to recovering further synthetic implications.

Assumptions which are taken into the memory of the deductive device may come from the following four sources: (a) perception; (b) linguistic decoding; (c) encyclopaedic memory; and (d) the result of

a deductive process. Here, we are concerned with the effect of newly presented information, in particular of assumptions derived via the linguistic input system, on old information which is drawn from an existing representation of the world. In other words, we are concerned with the effect of deductions, in which the set of initial theses placed in the memory of the deductive device can be partitioned into two subsets, new information and old information. Sperber and Wilson call this effect 'contextual implication', which is defined as follows:

Contextual implication

A set of assumptions {P} contextually implies an assumption Q in the context {C} if and only if;

- (i) the union of P and {C} non-trivially implies Q,
- (ii) {P} does not non-trivially imply Q, and
- (iii) {C} does not non-trivially imply Q.

(Sperber and Wilson 1986a:107-8)

A contextual implication is new information: it cannot be derived from {P} or {C} alone. It is derivable only from the union of old and new information.

A central function of the deductive device is thus to derive instantaneously and automatically, and therefore unconsciously, the

contextual implications of newly presented information in a context of old information.

#### 2.2.3.2. Relevance

To modify and improve a context is to have some effect on that context. Sperber and Wilson call such an effect a 'contextual effect' (1986a:108). An utterance can have contextual effects in a context in one of three ways. The first one is new information, together with old assumptions, yielding information which is not derivable from the new information or the old assumptions alone. The second one is new information strengthening old assumptions. And the last one is new information contradicting, and therefore weakening or leading to the abandonment of old assumptions. Assumptions placed in the memory of the deductive device come with varying degrees of strength, and hence a deduction may result in contradicting weak assumptions, which are then abandoned.

It can be recalled that our basic assumption has been that all humans automatically aim at the most efficient information processing possible, and that there is a single criterion for efficiency, which is 'relevance'. 'Relevance' here does not mean exactly the same thing as the English word 'relevance'. It is a universal concept, and natural languages need not lexicalise it.

However, Sperber and Wilson argue that scientific psychology needs a concept which is close enough to the ordinary language notion of 'relevance'. They also argue (1986a:119) that there is an important psychological property which the ordinary notion of 'relevance' roughly approximates, and hence it is appropriate to use the term in a related, more technical sense.

The notion of contextual effect helps to describe two essential properties of utterance comprehension: first, comprehension involves the joint processing of a set of assumptions; and second, in that set some assumptions stand out as newly presented information which are being processed in the context of old information.

Sperber and Wilson define 'relevance' as follows:

Relevance

An assumption is relevant in a context if and only if it has some contextual effect in that context.

(Sperber and Wilson 1986a:122)

This definition satisfies the intuition that the notion of relevance must involve the context in which an assumption is relevant.



It is worth emphasising that Sperber and Wilson define relevance purely in terms of the contextual effect. There is an intuitive question as to whether humans process a stimulus, striving for only more contextual effects. The reward humans aim at when they spend time and energy in processing a stimulus might include other kinds of advantages which are not analysable in terms of contextual effects. This is the question I shall come back to in my discussion of puns and covert forms of information transmission in Chapter 3 and 4 respectively.

The definition of relevance is insufficient without mentioning that relevance is a matter of degree. Intuitively, it is clear that the greater the contextual effects of a newly presented item of information, the more relevant it is. But this is not yet satisfactory. For, it might mean that, to this end, humans would continue to process a newly conceived phenomenon, combining it with an endless stock of information, in an attempt to see if it improves their representation of the world. This is where the concern over processing effort is so important. Sperber and Wilson define relevance in terms of contextual effect in combination with processing effort:

Relevance of a phenomenon

Extent condition 1: a phenomenon is relevant to an individual to the extent that the contextual effects achieved when it is optimally processed are large.

Extent condition 2: a phenomenon is relevant to an individual to the extent that the effort required to process it optimally is small.

(Sperber and Wilson 1986a:153)

Thus, other things being equal, the greater contextual effects the greater the relevance, and the smaller processing effort the greater the relevance. Let us consider a context which contains assumption (19):

(19) If Tom is going to the party, I will go, too.

Suppose that in this context, (20) was posed:

(20) Is Tom going to the party?

Now, let us assess the effects (21a) - (21c) would bring:

(21) a. Tom is going to the party.

b. John is going to the party.

c. Tom is going to the party, and John is going to  
the party too.

(21a) and (21b) have the same syntactic structure, and intuitively they would require approximately the same processing effort. However, in the context, (21b) would not have contextual effects which (21a) would carry, in other words, (21b) would not bear the relevance (21a) would have. Thus, in the context, (21a) would be more relevant than (21c). On the other hand, (21c) would yield the same relevance which (21a) has, but it clearly requires more processing effort than (21a). Hence, (21a) would be more relevant than (21c).

Earlier, we defined communication in terms of the communicator's ostensive behaviour. In order to succeed in communication, the communicator must attract the audience's attention. An act of ostension can be described as a request for attention. Now, someone who asks you to behave in a certain way, either physically or cognitively, suggests that there is a good reason to assume that you might benefit from complying with his request. This suggestion may be made in bad faith, but it cannot be wholly cancelled. If a request is made, the requester must have assumed that the requestee would have some motive for complying with it.

There is a significant difference between being exposed to an ostensive stimulus directed at oneself and being exposed to another kind of stimulus. For example, there is considerable difference between someone shouting at you, 'Watch out!' and you overhearing someone reading out a passage including such an utterance. With an ostensive stimulus, the addressee can not only hope that the stimulus may bear some relevant information for herself, but also has a precise expectation that the stimulus is intended to be relevant to her.

Thus, Sperber and Wilson argue that in ostensive-inferential communication, the communicator necessarily communicates that the stimulus he uses is relevant to the audience. In other words, an act of ostensive communication automatically communicates what they call a 'presumption of relevance' (1986a:158). By this they mean that what is communicated, to the best of the communicator's knowledge, is that the ostensive stimulus is relevant enough to be worth the addressee's attention.

As we have seen, the relevance of a stimulus is determined by two factors, namely, contextual effects and processing effort. Sperber and Wilson argue that, on the effect side, the presumption is that the level of effects achievable is never less than what is needed to make the stimulus worth processing. On the effort side, the level of effort required is never more than what is needed to achieve these effects. On the effect side, what is communicated must be relevant enough to make the stimulus worth processing, hence

the presumption is a matter of adequacy. It is worth emphasising here that the presumption of relevance is not a presumption of maximal relevance. On the processing effort side, unless the communicator chooses the most relevant stimulus to make his informative intention mutually manifest, he may be confronted by the addressee's refusal to make the required processing effort. It would be in the interest of both the communicator and the addressee that the stimulus chosen requires the least processing effort to achieve the intended effects. Thus, on the processing effort side, the presumption is one of more than adequacy.

This heavy emphasis on minimising processing cost will face an apparent counter-example in punning. I shall discuss this point in the analysis of puns in Chapter 3.

The level of relevance that will be presumed to exist takes into account the interest of both the communicator and the addressee. Such a level is called a level of 'optimal relevance' (1986a:158). Accordingly, the 'presumption of optimal relevance' is defined as follows:

Presumption of optimal relevance

- (a) The set of assumptions (I) which the communicator intends to make manifest to the addressee is relevant enough to make it worth the addressee's while to process the ostensive stimulus.

(b) The ostensive stimulus is the most relevant one  
the communicator could have used to communicate  
(I).

(Sperber and Wilson 1986a:158)

And the principle of relevance as follows:

Principle of relevance

Every act of ostensive communication communicates the  
presumption of its own optimal relevance.

(Sperber and Wilson 1986a:158)

Now, the fact that an ostensive stimulus carries a guarantee of optimal relevance does not necessarily mean that it is optimally relevant to the hearer. The speaker may be mistaken or he may be in bad faith. For example, I may say to you that they are showing *Richard II* at the nearby theatre and find out that *Richard II* is over and that they are now showing *Richard III*. In this case, the information is irrelevant to you. Then, my utterance does not comply with the presumption of optimal relevance. However, it will be consistent with the principle of relevance, so long as I rationally thought it would be optimally relevant to you.

Thus, saying that an ostensive communication bears the presumption of relevance only means that the intended interpretation of an utterance is consistent with the principle of relevance, if a rational speaker might have expected to communicate an adequate range of contextual effects at the least possible processing effort. It is this consistency with the principle of relevance which acts as the sole criterion in utterance comprehension.

Sperber and Wilson's claim is that the principle of relevance provides an adequate explanation of the role of contextual assumptions in all aspects of utterance interpretation. In their view, the responsibility for successful communication is not shared equally by the communicator and the addressee. It is left to the communicator to make correct assumptions about the codes and contextual information that the addressee will have accessible and will be likely to use in the comprehension process. The responsibility for avoiding misunderstanding also lies with the communicator. All that the addressee has to do is to recover the interpretation which is consistent with the principle of relevance.

#### 2.2.3.3. How context is determined

As shown above, relevance has been defined in terms of the contextual effect which an assumption yields in a given context. The

question to be asked, then, is how the context is determined. It is a question which must be answered in any adequate account of utterance comprehension.

In much of the literature, it is a common assumption that the context for the comprehension of a given utterance is provided, and is not a matter of choice. It is also assumed that the context is not only determined at any given point of a verbal exchange, but also that it is determined in advance of the comprehension process. The assumption is that what the hearer does is to combine the new, that is, what is explicitly expressed, and the old, that is, the context which is already present in her mind at the start of the communication. The view that context is fixed in advance is independent of the mutual knowledge framework. It is just a view that many semanticists and pragmatists happen to hold. Sperber and Wilson argue that the selection of an adequate context is part of the interpretation process, and must therefore be accounted for by a pragmatic theory.

In cognition, the individual aims to maximise relevance. Consideration of optimal relevance only comes in at the level of communication, when the hearer is trying to find out what information is being offered. Here, the criterion is consistency with the principle of optimal relevance.

The hearer of an utterance has available a set of potential contexts from which an actual context must be chosen. A context



consists of assumptions from different sources, such as long-term memory, short-term memory, perception, and so on. It does not mean that any arbitrary subset of the total set of assumptions available might become a context. Sperber and Wilson claim (1986a:138) that the organisation of the individual's encyclopaedic memory, and the mental activity in which she is engaged, limit the class of potential contexts from which an actual context can be chosen at any given time.

For example, it is generally accepted that encyclopaedic information in long-term memory is organised into some kind of units. They have been discussed in the literature under such terms as 'schema', 'frame', 'scenario' and 'prototype'. Here, I shall follow Sperber and Wilson and use the term 'chunk'. Chunks may themselves be grouped into larger chunks, and contain smaller chunks. It seems plausible to argue that the smallest units that can be transferred from encyclopaedic memory to the memory of the deductive device are chunks rather than individual assumptions. For instance, it might be impossible to remember and add to the context the information that an elephant has large ears without also remembering and adding that it has a trunk. Also, it seems that not all encyclopaedic information is equally accessible at any given time. For instance, it seems plausible to assume that the encyclopaedic entry which has just been accessed in the most recent utterance comprehension is more accessible than any other.

Let us assume that there is a small, immediately accessible context, fixed in advance, and consisting of the proposition which has most recently been processed, together with its contextual implications, and any assumptions used in deriving it. When new information is received, it will be processed in this most immediate context.

Now let us consider some examples. If the initial context is (22) and the proposition expressed by the utterance is (23), some degree of relevance is immediately achieved:

(22) If the opera is by Mozart, Peter will go.

(23) The opera is by Mozart.

What would happen, then, if the proposition expressed is (24a), (24b) or (24c), instead?

(24) a. The opera is by the composer you have just mentioned.

b. The opera is 'The Magic Flute'.

c. The opera is this (meaning the music which is

being played at the time of the utterance).

Unless the initial context is extended in some way, no degree of relevance can be achieved in the cases of (24a) to (24c).

If the goal of processing is to find an interpretation consistent with the principle of relevance, i.e. which a rational speaker might have thought would be optimally relevant to the hearer, the hearer will be forced to add to the initial context (22) further information, which will be remembered from earlier discourse, as in the case of (24a), or recovered from encyclopaedic memory, as in the case of (24b), or derived from perception, as in the case of (24c). The goal will be to find premises which will combine with the old assumptions and yield adequate contextual implications in return for the minimum processing effort.

As these examples have shown, the accessibility of potential contexts is partly determined by the content of the proposition being processed. The content may direct the hearer's attention to the preceding discourse, or it may direct it to encyclopaedic information, or to the physical environment, as we have seen in examples (24a), (24b) and (24c), respectively. There will be cases where more complex extension is required and simultaneous or sequential extensions of the context in a variety of different directions will take place. There is no principled limit on the number of extensions that may be needed to establish the relevance

of a given proposition. It is only the hearer's capacity for extending the context which will practically limit the number and complexity of extensions involved for communication to be successful.

General procedures of context selection are cognitive, and geared to maximising relevance. Questions about the intended context are answered by reference to the criterion of consistency with the principle of relevance.

It is a basic assumption in most of the literature that the comprehension process is as follows: firstly, the context is determined; secondly, the interpretation process takes place; lastly, relevance is assessed. Relevance is regarded as a by-product of the comprehension process.

However, Sperber and Wilson argue that from a psychological point of view, this is highly implausible. From a purely logical point of view, any of the hearer's assumptions could be used in the interpretation of the utterance. However, the constraints on utterance interpretations are not only logical, but also psychological. Humans are not in the business of simply assessing the relevance of new information. Their interest is to process information as efficiently as possible, that is, they try to obtain from each new item of information as great a contextual effect as possible for the smallest possible processing effort. The assessment of relevance is not the goal of the comprehension

process, but only a means to an end, the end being to optimise the relevance of any information which is being processed.

Thus, Sperber and Wilson's account of the determination of context is contrary to the pre-existing view in the literature: it is not that the context is determined, and then relevance is assessed; rather, humans expect that the assumption which is being processed is relevant, and they try to select a context in which their expectation is justified. In ostensive-inferential communication, relevance is guaranteed. It is relevance which is treated as given, and context which is treated as a variable.

Let us consider the following example and see how the speaker, with specific expectation about how his utterance will be relevant, directs his hearer towards an appropriate context:

(25) a. Kay: Would you like to go to Tosca?

b. Paul: I'm not keen on Puccini.

Here, Paul has not answered Kay's question directly, he has only implied an answer. Kay has to recover the implicatures, or some of them, of the utterance. She must supply certain premises, either by retrieving them from her memory or by constructing them by developing assumption schemas retrieved from memory. Consistency

with the principle of relevance will provide an adequate criterion. All she has to do is to supply premises which a rational speaker might have thought would lead to an interpretation which yields optimal relevance. One of the premises which Kay should be able to supply is:

(26) Tosca was composed by Puccini.

By processing Paul's reply (25b) against a context which contains assumption (26), Kay should derive the contextual implication (27):

(27) Paul would not like to go to Tosca.

Moreover, it is hard to see how Paul could have expected his reply to be optimally relevant without being processed in this way.

Sperber and Wilson distinguish (1986a:194-5) two kinds of implicatures: implicated premises, such as (26), and implicated conclusions, such as (27), and claim that all implicatures fall into one of these two categories.

They also argue that the kind of implicatures discussed above share two properties. Firstly, they are fully determinate. Paul

expects Kay to supply not merely something like premise (26) and conclusion (27), but a premise and a conclusion with just this logical content. Secondly, Paul is entirely responsible for their truth. Even if Kay did not know that Tosca was composed by Puccini prior to Paul's reply (25b), Paul has strongly encouraged Kay to supply assumption (26) by uttering (25b). He is just as responsible for the truth of (26) and (27) as if he had asserted them directly.

As Sperber and Wilson argue, this example shows that mutual knowledge is not a prerequisite for successful communication. Paul does not need to know if Kay has the information in (26), he would not even have to wonder whether it is shared by Kay. Kay would come to have this knowledge as a result of interpreting the utterance, if not before. By following the criterion of consistency with the principle of relevance, she will have to supply premise (26) and then to deduce conclusion (27). Paul may expect Kay to supply this premise, not because he has ground for thinking that it is already highly accessible to her, but rather because his utterance has made it accessible to her. In other words, by producing the implicit answer (25b), he has constrained her choice of context and directed her towards a particular interpretation.

#### 2.2.3.4. Descriptive use and interpretive use

So far, the analysis has been based on the assumption<sup>P</sup> that an utterance is used to represent things in virtue of its propositional form being true of that state of affairs. Let us consider the following exchange:

(28) a. Kay: What did Mary say?

b. Paul: She is tired.

Now, Mary might have said to Paul (29):

(29) I am tired.

Then, (28b) would be used in virtue of its propositional form being true of that state of affairs.

Sperber and Wilson argue that there is another way in which an utterance can be used, that is, an utterance can be used in virtue of resembling some phenomenon, rather than in virtue of its proposition being true. For example, Mary might have said (30):

(30) Tsukare-ta.



tire past

I am tired.

(30) is a Japanese translation of (29). It would be used because it resembles Mary's utterance (29), as it has the same semantic structure.

Instead, Mary might have said to Paul (31)

(31) I am absolutely over-worked and could do with a good rest.

Then, again, (29) would be used because of its resemblance to Mary's utterance. It would be a summary. Even though (29) has a different proposition to Mary's actual utterance, they share some logical properties and some contextual effects.

Or else, Mary might have said things which did not make much sense, which could be attributed to the fact that she was tired. In this case, (29) would share with Mary's utterance neither its logical and semantic properties, nor its contextual effects. It would be used, because it resembled the state Mary was in.

Thus, an utterance can be used to represent things in two ways. On the one hand, it can be used to represent some state of affairs, in virtue of its proposition being true of that state of affairs. On the other hand, it can represent some other representation which also has a proposition in virtue of some resemblance between the two propositions. Sperber and Wilson name (1986a:228-9) the former descriptive use and the latter interpretive use.

Any two phenomena resemble each other at least in some way. There is a question of how close the propositional forms of two representations must be, in order that an interpretive use be acceptable. Sperber and Wilson claim that the criterion is the principle of relevance.

This notion of interpretive use of language, that is, representation in virtue of resemblance, is crucial to the analysis of rhetorical devices, such as metaphor and irony. It also plays an important role in the analysis of how language is employed to present images of women in advertising, which will be the subject of Chapter 5.

### 2.3. Summary

In this chapter, I have argued that Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory provides the most comprehensive account of utterance interpretation. The framework is based on the notion of ostention, that is, the communicator's intention to communicate and to publicise this intention. It centres around the principle of relevance, which claims that an ostentive stimulus creates a presumption of optimal relevance. The task of the audience in this kind of communication is to process the communicator's utterance against background information and derive an interpretation which is consistent with the principle of relevance. The correct interpretation is the one that meets this criterion.

In the following chapters, I shall apply Relevance Theory to the analysis of advertisements, with a particular focus on wordplay such as puns, manipulative aspect of advertising, and images of women in advertisements.

## Chapter 3: The Pun in Advertising

### 3.1. Introduction

Punning is one of the most common forms of speech play, although it has long been regarded as having a somewhat low status. Lionel Duisit describes puns as the 'least literary' (1978, cited from Redfern 1984:4) of figures, while Dryden calls them 'the lowest and most grovelling kind of wit' (1926:237, cited Redfern 1984:4). Culler quotes Pope's dismissal of the pun, saying 'he that would pun would pick a pocket' (1988:4).

However, not everybody is in the business of condemning and dismissing the pun. Nor has it disappeared and been forgotten. Sherzer argues that today puns are 'most often considered to be humorous in intention, inappropriate for serious discourse' (1985:215). They are often used as 'the witty comebacks of conversation stoppers and the punch line of jokes' (1985:214).

Sherzer goes on to make the important observation that puns are 'highly appropriate for advertising' (1985:215). He does not develop this throw-away remark any further, and he does not explain how and why puns might be 'appropriate' for advertising. But it is indeed striking how ubiquitous puns are in British advertising, and how popular they also are among Japanese advertisers.

- (1) a. We're literally about to open.
  
- b. Literally the finest store in Europe.
  
- c. Book now for Christmas.
  
- d. High brows raised here.
  
- e. Browsers Welcome. (High brows and low brows)
  
- f. Over 5 miles of books.  
And they're all way over your head.
  
- g. Materially supplied for seats of learning.
  
- h. If you think this station's deep  
You should see our poetry department.
  
- i. Go to Dillon's. And be transported.

It looks as though people of letters in London appreciate the pun, for these examples have been selected from the captions used in a campaign run by Dillon's Bookstore after it was taken over by a large multinational corporation. According to their advertising agent (personal communication), Dillon's regard themselves as catering to the intellectual population not only of London, but

See next page

There is a suggestion that even people in advertising share the literary critics' low opinion of puns, although this is open to doubt. Redfern (1984) reports that when he wrote to twenty of the largest international advertising agencies to find out the status of wordplay in advertising, the most common reaction was to claim that it was out of date to pun in advertisements. His explanation for this is that the agencies were reflecting the age-old embarrassment connected with puns, and upholding claims to the dignity of the profession. Redfern quotes Hopkins, who is an ex-ad man:

Frivolity has no place in advertising. Nor has humour.  
Spending money is usually a serious business... People do  
not buy from clowns.

(Hopkins 1927, quoted from Redfern 1984:130).

As Redfern points out, this is contradicted by McDonald's advertisements, which make use of a clown, although the situation and the trend may have changed since the days of Hopkins.

Let us look at the following examples from an advertising campaign for a prestigious bookstore, which would appear to indicate that advertisers attribute a high status to puns:

*See previous page*

also of Britain, and possibly of Europe. They thought that the pun would appeal to their target audience because of its wit and humour. Apparently, the campaign has been very successful, Dillon's are happy, and this advertising campaign based on the pun continues for the moment.

A quick observation of advertisements, say at a tube station or in a magazine, would prove that the Dillon's campaign is not an exception. Use of the pun in British advertising is rife. This is perhaps not so much the case in Japan, but the pun is still a prominent form of wordplay found in Japanese advertisements. Even though I do not have more precise information on the statistical frequency of the occurrence of puns in British and Japanese advertising, there can be no doubt that puns are frequently employed and are not considered inferior advertising strategy.

The reasons for the discrepancy between the information provided to Redfern and the realities of the advertising world need not detain me here, for the focus of this study is how puns function in advertising. Redfern's research may be out of date (it was published in 1984) or what we are observing might be the usual difference between principles and practice. It is sufficient for my purposes to point out that punning is a much used rhetorical device in advertising both in the U.K. and in Japan. What this chapter aims at is to investigate how the device can be analysed in terms of the interpretation process involved. My assumption is simply that puns clearly offer advertisers advantages which they exploit.

The assumed low status of puns may explain why attempts to investigate them within an academic framework have not been abundant. This is especially striking if one compares work on puns to that done on other rhetorical devices such as metaphor. As there has not been any study on puns carried out from the viewpoint of how they are understood by the hearer, I shall not present a survey of the literature.

Nor do I intend to present any taxonomy of puns. Culler argues that of the studies which attempt to define and classify puns, 'the results have never met with much success' (1988:4). Redfern declines to categorise by quoting Mahood, saying, 'Naming the parts does not show us what makes the gun go off' (1984:5). On the assumption that the assignment of an utterance to this particular form of wordplay, namely the pun, or to a particular type of pun, is not part of what is communicated and does not play a necessary role in comprehension, neither definition nor classification of the pun make any significant contribution to the purposes of my study.

What makes the pun interesting to my study here<sup>is</sup> that it appears to be problematic for Relevance Theory. It is plausible to argue that a pun requires greater processing effort than an utterance which is not a pun. Then, is the extra processing effort justifiable? If it is so, how? If it is not, is punning a counter-example to Relevance Theory? These are the questions which I shall investigate in this chapter.



In Section 3.2, I shall attempt to analyse puns in advertising in the framework of Relevance Theory. Section 3.3 will consider ambiguity in the pun. Although a pun has more than one possible interpretation, it may not necessarily strike its audience as being ambiguous. I shall try to discuss why this is so. The comparison between puns and metaphors will be the subject of Section 3.4. Both a pun and a metaphor provide more than one possible interpretation. So what is the difference between them? This is the question I shall attempt to answer. In Section 3.5, I shall try to summarise the advantages of using puns in advertising. ✓

### 3.2. The interpretation of the pun

The process of interpreting a pun appears to be related to the advantages it offers advertisers. The work by Redfern, mentioned above, includes a chapter on puns in advertising, in which he explains the utility of puns in advertising as follows:

Advertising space is costly. Economy is essential, and puns are highly economical (two meanings for the price of one word or phrase), and are in fact much more of a labour-saving device than many of the products they seek to promote

(Redfern 1984:131).

Redfern's claims can be assessed in the light of the development of a pragmatic theory of relevance by Sperber and Wilson (1986a), which has provided an exciting new framework for analysing the comprehension of puns. As I have shown above, Sperber and Wilson argue that there is a single, necessary and sufficient criterion which the hearer uses in interpreting the speaker's utterance. This is consistency with the principle of relevance, which I repeat here for convenience:

Principle of relevance

Every act of ostensive communication communicates the presumption of its own optimal relevance.

(Sperber and Wilson 1986a:158).

When the communicator ostensively attracts the addressee's attention, a presumption is created that the ostensive stimulus is worth the addressee's attention. It is in the interest of the addressee that the stimulus is the most effective one the communicator could have chosen, that is, the most relevant one. However, this may not always be in the communicator's interest. What is in the communicator's interest is to make sure that he has

put the addressee to no unnecessary effort in achieving the intended effects. If the addressee is in doubt that this has been done and suspects that the communicator has deliberately chosen an obscure stimulus and caused her an unnecessary processing effort, she might doubt the communicator's genuine intention to communicate and refuse to make an effort to process the stimulus produced. Here the communicator's interest coincides with that of the addressee. It is in his interest to be understood and therefore to make it as easy as possible for the addressee to understand him. The stimulus he produces must be the most relevant one he could have used to achieve the intended effects.

All this does not seem to apply to a pun, for it demands extra processing effort. A pun triggers an alternative interpretation by its phonetic similarities. The addressee seems to be put to unnecessary processing effort into deriving an intended interpretation. Contrary to what Redfern says, a pun appears to be uneconomical. Or, is the extra processing effort imposed upon by a pun compensated for by extra contextual effects? I shall examine this point in this section.

Let us look at some examples of puns. The first one is from an advertisement for London Transport which appeared in the London tube stations and trains in 1981:

(2) Less bread. No jam.

The criterion of consistency with the principle of relevance helps the addressee recover its intended interpretation. Reading the words 'bread' and 'jam', she will most probably take the words to mean 'bread' and 'jam' as food. Those will be the most accessible interpretations for most people. 'Bread and jam' are stereotypical foods; whether separately or together, 'bread' and 'jam' will be thought of as food. However, those interpretations will have to be rejected, as inconsistent with the fact that it is an advertisement, that it is for London Transport, and that it is found in an underground station or train. Having rejected the interpretations which will come to her mind first, the addressee would hopefully remember that 'bread' can mean 'money' and 'jam' can mean 'traffic jam', and recover the proposition, 'less money, no traffic jam'. Having done this, she will have to resolve some further indeterminacies, such as what costs less money, costs whom less money, costs less money than what, and so on. Following the criterion of consistency with the principle of relevance and considering that it is an advertisement for London Transport, and that it is meant to promote London Transport, something like the following should be recovered:

- (3) If you travel by London Transport it will cost you less than travelling by car, and you will suffer no traffic jams, unlike when travelling by car.

Although this may seem ironical when the addressee reads it, being jammed in a train, it is unlikely that it was intended by the advertiser to be so.

Now, it scarcely seems economical to use the pun, contrary to Redfern's argument. In terms of the processing effort it costs the addressee to recover proposition (3), it can hardly be said that it was economically expressed. The addressee will have to reject the first accessible interpretations of 'bread' and 'jam', and search in her memory for more relevant interpretations. 'Money', for example, may not be a highly accessible interpretation of the word 'bread'. In any case, the advertiser could easily have used 'money' and 'traffic jam', and he must have been aware that these interpretations are not the first ones to be recovered by his addressee from the words actually employed. He is deliberately causing her an extra processing effort.

If a pun was uneconomical and caused the addressee unnecessary processing effort, it would breach the principle of relevance. Then, punning would be a counter-example to Relevance Theory. Does Relevance Theory fail to account for punning? Does the pun in (2) put the addressee to unjustifiable processing effort?

Although a pun may seem to contradict the principle of relevance at first sight, it does not require more processing effort than necessary, and Relevance Theory can account for it. In fact, it is precisely the advertiser's aim to get the addressee involved

in the advertisement. First of all, an advertisement must attract the addressee's attention. The caption will do just that because it was deliberately put there, but it seems so irrelevant at first sight. It will make her think, 'What does that mean?' It will be more successful in attracting the addressee's attention than a caption like, 'Take the tube. It is cheaper...', which she may entirely ignore. The purpose of this caption is not to convey a novel idea: there are not many new things to say about the tube. When the ultimate message is so obvious, namely, 'Take the tube', it may well be more appealing for the addressee when it reads initially as if it was about 'food', rather than London Transport.

Another point to note is that at first sight, the caption seems 'negative', which is unusual for an advertisement: from our experience we are used to advertisements always mentioning good things only. This caption is different, for it is saying less or none of desirable things, namely, 'bread' and 'jam'. 'Jam', especially, has a meaning of something desirable, as in the expression 'jam tomorrow'. Thus the caption strikes the addressee by sounding negative and makes her wonder what it is about.

Following on from this is the fact that since the caption costs the audience an extra processing effort, it sustains their attention for longer. This means that the caption may be remembered for longer. It is not a straightforward message, and it causes some thinking. Some of the audience may like it, because they think it is 'clever', or because it is 'unusual'. Some may not recover the

message immediately, and then they may think about it for a while until they finally get it, or they may ask someone else what it means. Some of the audience may decide that they are not very keen on it, for it is so 'obscure'. These different reactions will all be welcomed by the advertiser. An advertiser would like his audience to look at his advertisement, think about it, and react to it. Even if the reaction is negative, advertisers consider that any reaction is better than no reaction.

From the point of view of the addressee, it may seem at first sight that there is no extra reward to outweigh the extra processing effort caused by the pun. In recovering the intended message of the caption, the addressee will automatically process the 'food' interpretation of the words 'bread' and 'jam', for these will normally be the most accessible interpretations, which will trigger the recovery of some encyclopaedic knowledge about food. However, they do not give rise to contextual effects in themselves. These interpretations are intended by the advertiser to be recovered by the addressee, but they are not the intended interpretations. Rather, they are intended to be ultimately rejected in the search for the intended interpretations.

However, an extra reward which the addressee will get is the pleasure of solving the pun. Solving a pun can give a kind of intellectual satisfaction to many people. And the resulting pleasure may have been intended by the advertiser, and give rise to a number of contextual effects. For example, the audience could

have self-congratulatory thoughts, thoughts about the congeniality of the advertiser, and so on. So the addressee does get some reward - but at the price of recovering the advertiser's intended message, which she may otherwise have discounted or ignored.

There is also the point that if the pun had not been present, the addressee would have paid no attention to the advertisement, and hence it would have achieved no effects. So the effort needed to process the pun is still the minimum the advertiser was justified in demanding, given that he wanted to achieve the effects he did. Hence, the effort demanded is consistent with the principle of relevance.

According to Relevance Theory, the ostensive stimulus is the most relevant, i.e. most economical<sup>c</sup>, one the communicator could have used to achieve the intended effects. Does this apply to the case here? The answer must be yes. The caption is the most economical one the advertiser could have used to achieve the intended effects, for, without going through the whole process, the addressee would not get the message at the appropriate strength; she would not even pay attention to it if the caption was something like, 'Take the tube...'

Another aspect of Redfern's claim of the economy required in advertising is his characterisation of the pun as 'two meanings for the price of one word or phrase'. Are there really two meanings communicated in the London Transport advertisement? Is this



generally the case? Surely, it varies. Redfern does not clarify what he means by 'two meanings'. As far as the meaning which the communicator has intended his audience to retain is concerned, there is only one meaning. The advertiser has intended 'bread' to mean 'money' and 'jam' to mean 'traffic jam'. The 'food' interpretations are intended to be triggered, but they are also intended to be abandoned. They are not intended interpretations as such, and that is precisely why the audience will continue to search for other interpretations. If the addressee was to take these 'food' interpretations to be the only ones intended by the advertiser, she would stop processing and would not search for other interpretations.

It has been pointed out by Moeran (personal communication) that in the U.K., food is often used to promote technology. 'Apple Computer', 'Apricot' and 'Peach Software', for example, use food names as their brand names. Packard, in his classic *The Hidden Persuaders*, quotes some social science research, saying that food is 'loaded with hidden meanings'. (1981:87). It is possible that food names have some appeal to an audience, as it gives humans life.

The use of food names in the promotion of technology, or any products other than food, is not practised in Japanese advertising. On the contrary, it has been observed that new brand of snacks are often given names which have no apparent association with food (Kookoku Hiyoo, December, 1984). Some of the examples are 'Suzuki-san' (Mr. Suzuki), 'Sato-san' (Mr. Sato), 'Choonan' (the first son),

and 'Choojo' (the first daughter) for crispy snacks, 'Yama no Donguri' (the acorn in the mountain) for chocolate snacks, 'Kiri no Uki-fune' (the floating boat in the mist', for chocolate. The point may be worth investigating for cultural studies, although I shall not pursue it in this study.

Let us now look at another example, which is a caption for Papillon underwear. It reads as follows:

(4) The last thing you'll want to be seen in.

This caption is accompanied by an illustration, showing a woman in brassiere and panties. She has a white jumper around her neck and shoulders, which she is pulling with her hands in front of her throat. It seems that she is taking it off.

Reading the caption, (4), would immediately force the addressee to recover the following interpretation:

(5) You would not want to be seen in Papillon underwear.

This would give the addressee a context which includes the following assumption:

(6) One does not want to be seen in something because it does not look nice.

Considering that it is an advertisement for underwear, and that advertisements normally say positive things about the product being advertised, it is quite unlikely that the advertiser has intended to communicate (5) to his addressee. This element of surprise would contribute to drawing the addressee's attention to the advertisement. The advertiser has intended the addressee to reject (5). In fact, underneath the caption it reads:

(7) Much too pretty to hide.

On the assumption that (4) and (7) are somehow connected, the addressee might derive (8):

(8) The last thing you'll want to be seen in, because it is much too pretty to hide.

Then, the addressee would have access to another interpretation of (4). The advertiser has intended the audience to recover (5), but

then reject it, and eventually recover the alternative interpretation (9):

(9) The Papillon underwear is the final piece of clothing you want to be seen in as you undress.

If (9) is processed in a context which includes (7), it would give rise to further contextual effects, including (10):

(10) You want to be seen in Papillon underwear because it is so pretty.

It seems that examples (2) and (4) belong to the same category of puns. They trigger an interpretation, which is intended by the speaker, but also intended to be rejected, so that the addressee recovers an alternative interpretation, which is the one the speaker has intended to communicate. They have more than one possible interpretation. However, the speaker has intended to communicate only one of them. The rest are intended to be triggered, only to be eventually rejected. The immediately accessible interpretation, which is later rejected, is irrelevant in the case of (2), and 'negative' in the case of (4). These properties help the

advertisements catch the audience's attention. They also contribute to the increase in strength of the messages and the increase in memorability. Moreover, the audience get some satisfaction at solving a pun, which would give rise to a weak contextual effect.

There are more examples in this category, such as two captions for a Milton Keynes advertising campaign:

(11) a. Mind your own business. Move it to Milton Keynes.

b. You're welcome to London. Milton Keynes.

(11a) was found at the Milton Keynes railway station. (11b) was found on a billboard which can be seen from the train approaching London Victoria Station. In both cases, the first accessible interpretation of the first part of the captions would be rejected in favour of an alternative interpretation, which is the intended one.

The extent to which puns do or do not contribute to conveying the intended message varies from pun to pun. In the next example, unlike the London Transport advertisement, the processing of the advertisement as a pun does contribute to the overall message conveyed, despite the fact that the pun itself does not even provide an alternative propositional content. In 1977, the year of the

Queen's Silver Jubilee, Guinness presented an advertisement which reads as follows:

(12) We've poured throughout her reign.

In order to identify the proposition expressed by the above utterance, disambiguation of the word 'pour' and reference assignment to the two pronouns, namely, 'we' and 'her', must be undertaken. Consistency with the principle of relevance provides an adequate criterion. 'Pour' can mean either 'flow' or 'serve liquid'. Considering the fact that it is an advertisement for beer, the 'serve liquid' interpretation will be selected. From our experience, we know that the word 'we' in advertisements can refer to many things; an advertiser, audience, characters in it, the product advertised, and so on. Here, though, because of the verb which follows, namely, 'pour', it will be assumed that 'we' mean the Guinness company, which has been serving beer. The second pronoun will be more easily assigned. Because it is followed by the word 'reign', and because it is the Queen's Silver Jubilee year and one hears about it all the time in the media, it will be interpreted as 'the Queen's'. Thus, the following proposition will be recovered:

(13) We, the Guinness company, have served beer for as long as the Queen has been on the throne.

However, the addressee could not help thinking of 'pour' in the sense of 'flow' and 'reign' as 'rain'. Although it is spelled 'r-e-i-g-n', and not 'r-a-i-n', among the homophones, that is, the words with the same phonetic properties, such as 'rain', 'reign' and 'rein', 'rain' will probably be the most accessible one to the addressee. Reading 'reign', the addressee will think of 'rain', and they will be encouraged to do so by the word 'pour'. The advertiser further encourages his addressee along this line by deliberately omitting the word 'beer' after the verb. He could have said:

(14) We've poured beer throughout her reign.

but that would have invited the interpretation 'pouring rain' much less effectively.

The 'pouring rain' interpretation is only triggered; it cannot be claimed to be explicitly expressed, for the spelling used is 'reign' and not 'rain'. However, the image of 'pouring rain' will be within easy access of the addressee, because of the kind of weather she is used to, so the effect would be achieved without much difficulty. And once 'pouring rain' is triggered, it will give the addressee access to her encyclopaedic knowledge about rain, which will include that it is typical British weather, that it is typical Queen's weather, for it tends to rain on her big occasions, and so on. So, the association between 'beer' and 'rain' may be added to

the context in which the advertisement is finally processed, as an implicated assumption.

In Japan, 'beer' has the image of a 'summer drink', as opposed to *sake* (rice wine), which is traditionally regarded as a 'winter drink'. Beer is consumed cool and is advertised more before and during summer. When there is a bad or shorter summer due to an extended rainy season, the sales figures drop. However, in the U.K., where most beer is consumed lukewarm, the situation is different. It is a 'year round' drink, just as rain is a 'year round' weather. In Japan, beer is always advertised as a drink for hot and sunny weather. But in the U.K., it is reasonable that the advertiser should want to associate it with rain. The advertisement came out in the summer of 1977, when there was an unusually wet and bad summer. Guinness has always presented an image of a 'national drink'. It is surely not a coincidence that its advertiser has made an association with 'pouring rain', which is one of the prominent national characteristics of the country. So also is joking about the weather. Each of these additional contextual effects serves to enhance the desired effect of the advertisement that Guinness be seen as an integral part of Britain's national heritage, even though it could be argued that Guinness is in reality an Irish beer.

In this example, then, the pun is used to provide access to additional implicated contextual assumptions, which do give rise to intended contextual effects when the intended interpretation is eventually recovered and processed. The pun is not merely an



attention-getting device, but it actually contributes to the eventual intended interpretation.

Let us look at a Japanese example. The following is a caption for an airline advertisement, promoting its Okinawa flight, Okinawa being islands in the far south, known as a resort area:

(15) *Oo KIi Naa WAh.*<sup>2</sup>

The capital letters correspond to larger characters in the Japanese original. The underlined letters are in *katakana*, which is a syllabic script used for things like onomatopoeias, loan words, exclamations, and so on, while the rest are in *hirakana*, which is the unmarked form of syllabic script.

By picking up the larger letters only, it reads 'o-ki-na-wa', that is, 'Okinawa', the destination for the promoted flight. Reading all the letters, it reads 'oo-kii-naa-wah', where *ookii* means 'big', *naa* an exclamation particle, and *wah* in *katakana* an exclamation like 'wow'. Thus, the two different interpretations will be recovered:

(16) Okinawa.

(17) How big! Wow!

The question which (17) will raise is: what is big? Considering that it is an advertisement promoting an Okinawa holiday, it is likely that it refers to the Okinawa Islands. For the Japanese, who live in an over-crowded country, space is a major advantage, and it is reasonable for the advertiser to want to stress it. On the other hand, the audience could not help noticing that the girl in the illustration, in her bikini, is rather well-endowed, and wondering if *ookii* (big) refers to her breasts.

There are at least two possible candidates for the object described as *ookii* (big). However, the advertiser's intention in regard to them does not seem to be equally manifest. Among my several Japanese-speaking informants, some wondered if the 'breasts' one was a coincidence, and some did not question the intentionality of it at all. Some of the second group did not even think of the possibility of Okinawa being referred to, and incidentally, the second group were exclusively men. Considering that it is an advertisement, which is a carefully prepared work, where what Chomsky calls 'performance error' is unlikely, it is probable that the 'breasts' interpretation is invited intentionally, rather than accidentally.

Thus, the following interpretation might be derived:

(18) In the Okinawa Islands, there are a lot of beautiful girls with big breasts.

However, I would hesitate to say that the advertiser has intended to convey this on the basis of making his intention mutually manifest. Thus, the communicator's intention to convey an interpretation is sometimes made mutually manifest, and in others it is not. This question of the publication of the speaker's intention will be the topic of Chapter 4.

Nudity is shown to a greater extent in advertising and in mass media in general in Japan than in the U.K.. Even so, to show a well-endowed girl in a bikini and explicitly say, 'How big her breasts are!' will be regarded as irrelevant and too vulgar for an advertisement for an airline company. The advertiser's intention to refer to the girl is not made as manifest as it could have been; it may not become mutually manifest at all. It is vague, which leaves some room for the advertiser to deny the intention if necessary.

This example, then, may be regarded, unlike the two previous ones, as a case of deliberate equivocation, that is, unresolvable ambiguity. Or it may be that the pun is used only as an attention-getting device, with the 'space' interpretation being the only one made mutually manifest, and perhaps additional contextual effects about the sort of people you will find in Okinawa also being communicated.

Examples (12) and (15) seem to be different from examples (2) (4), (11a) and (11b) which, it could be argued, form another category. (2) and (4) force the addressee to recover interpretations which she eventually rejects as irrelevant. The extra processing effort caused by the unintended interpretations is compensated for by the increased strength of the messages and their increased memorability, or by the addressee's pleasure at solving the puns. In the cases of (12) and (15), the unintended interpretations provide access to encyclopaedic information, which is actually used in processing the intended interpretations, and thus contribute to additional contextual effects.

So far, I have analysed two categories of puns. The first is that which triggers a seemingly most accessible interpretation, which is eventually rejected as irrelevant and not contribute to the processing of the intended interpretation. In the second category, a pun also triggers an interpretation which is to be rejected as unintended. But this interpretation contributes to the processing of the intended interpretation by providing access to encyclopaedic information, against which the intended interpretation is processed and yields contextual effects.

There is a third category, in which a pun triggers two or more interpretations, neither of which is intended to be rejected by the speaker. Let us look at the following caption, which is a caption for a Mazda advertisement:

(19) The perfect car for a long drive.

The advertisement shows a Mazda car parked on a lengthy drive which leads to a mansion. The word 'drive' can mean 'a car ride', and on this interpretation the audience would derive (20):

(20) The perfect car for a long car ride.

Given that it is an advertisement for a car, (20) would yield a number of contextual effects, which include (21) and (22):

(21) The car is for people who have to go on long car rides.

(22) The car functions well for a long drive.

However, 'drive' can mean 'driveway' and the illustration showing a long driveway would encourage this interpretation. Thus, the addressee is encouraged to derive (23) from (19) as well:

(23) The perfect car for people who have a long driveway.

The illustration also shows a mansion to which the driveway leads, and it would encourage the addressee to extend her search for assumptions about the kind of life style which may be suggested by it. Thus, the addressee might derive further contextual effects, such as (24) and (25):

(24) The car is perfect for people who have a long driveway and a mansion.

(25) The car is perfect for people who enjoy a comfortable life.

In this case, both (20) and (23) yield substantial contextual effects and it would not be clear to the addressee which is the interpretation intended by the speaker. It is manifest to both the addressee and the advertiser that both interpretations are relevant enough to be worth the addressee's attention, and both were intended to be triggered. One reasonable inference for the addressee to draw is that both were intended to be retained.

The next example is an advertisement for women's underwear:

(26) Next to myself, I like Vedonis.

where 'Vedonis' is a brand name. The audience would probably derive interpretation (27) as the most accessible one:

(27) After myself, I like Vedonis.

However, the addressee would not be able to help thinking that it is a strange thing to say about underwear. For, underwear is not an obvious thing that one likes after oneself. It is more common to talk about, for example, one's mother.

'Next to' can be interpreted either physically or more abstractly. Considering that it is an advertisement for underwear, which one wears next to the skin, the addressee would also find a physical interpretation also possible, and thus recover proposition (27):

(28) Next to my skin, I like wearing Vedonis underwear.

This would give rise to further contextual effects, such as (29):

(29) Vedonis underwear feels good on one's skin.

However, there is no denying that the communicator has chosen an utterance which causes his addressee extra processing effort by using (26), when he could easily have said, for example, (30) instead:

(30) Next to my skin, I like Vedonis.

Moreover, it would be more common to say (31), rather than (26), if one intends to communicate physical contact to one's skin:

(31) Next to me, I like Vedonis.

The interpretation would therefore seem to be inconsistent with the principle of relevance, since the intended effects could have been more economically achieved. Perhaps, the speaker has also intended the more abstract interpretation (27), which I repeat here for convenience:

(27) Aiter myself, I like Vedonis.



Underwear is not exactly meant to receive public exposure. Unlike other outfits, which can be chosen on the ground of their appeal to the spectators, underwear has to be chosen on the ground that it appeals to the wearer. Interpretation (27) is based on that assumption. Furthermore, the advertiser would like his addressee to choose underwear on the ground that the wearer likes it, rather than that it is functional. He is trying to encourage his addressee to buy underwear which she likes, not just something sufficient, even though she may not be able to show it off to others. That seems to be the reason why the advertiser would want to tickle the addressee's narcissism.

The brand name 'Vedonis' can be analysed as a combination of 'Venus' and 'Adonis', which are both names of mythological figures famous for their beauty. In Greek mythology, Adonis was loved by Aphrodite for his beauty, and Aphrodite herself was the goddess of beauty, corresponding to Venus in Roman mythology. Hence the more abstract interpretation may further suggest (32):

(32) I like Venus and Adonis for their beauty after  
myself.

When I tried this hypothesis with native English speakers, the only person to come up with Venus and Adonis was an anthropologist, whose research interests include the language of advertising, and I

did wonder if we were reading too much into it. What has happened is, perhaps, that due to an unusually high level of attention which the anthropologist and I shared, we put more than the usual processing effort into the interpretation, and we extended our search in memory to a greater degree than a general audience would have done. It could be argued that the advertiser could not have expected the audience all to be familiar with Greek and Roman mythologies, or have such a high level of attention. However, it is unlikely that it was a coincidence. The advertiser could not have expected it to be unnoticed by everybody in his audience, either.

Obviously, it was not the advertiser but the company which chose the name 'Vedonis'. This choice may have been made for its association with Venus, Adonis and beauty, and a context of this type might be automatically accessed by at least some readers of the advertisement. This will in turn provide access to implicated assumption (33):

(33) Vedonis underwear is so beautiful that some people  
might like it after themselves.

and this assumption can be combined with the more physical interpretation (28) to implicate the following conclusion:

(34) I like Vedonis not only for its function, but also  
for its exceptional beauty.

Or, it could be argued that the advertiser exploited the fact that the brand name is a combination of Venus and Adonis, and used it to further tickle the addressee's narcissism by suggesting (35):

(35) I like Venus and Adonis for their beauty, but only  
after myself.

The advertiser has chosen the caption, being aware that it will make the addressee go through both abstract and physical interpretations (27) and (28). Yet, in choosing utterance (26), he is consistent with the principle of relevance. For, if he had chosen an utterance such as (30) or (31), which are more straightforward, the addressee would not have recovered (27) and would have missed any additional implications to do with the exceptional beauty of the underwear. Without going through the process of having to reach the physical interpretation after the abstract one, the addressee would not pay as much attention to the caption, either, and therefore would not get the message. In deriving the interpretation intended by the speaker, the addressee is encouraged to process both the abstract and physical interpretations. Then she will be automatically given access to

contextual assumptions needed for both interpretations, which include the functional qualities of underwear, narcissism and the mythologies. Thus, the relevance of (26) is established by recovering a wide range of weak contextual effects, arising from two distinct interpretations.

Thus, (19) and (26) are neither like (2), (4), (11a) and (11b), nor like (12) and (15), in that the communicator has intended both interpretations to be recovered and retained. In the cases of (2) and (4), the communicator has intended only one interpretation to be retained and the rest to be rejected as irrelevant. In the cases of (12) and (15), the communicator has intended only one interpretation. Nevertheless, the unintended interpretation is to be recovered to give access to encyclopaedic knowledge, which is to be used in processing the intended interpretations, so that additional contextual effects can be achieved. In the case of (19) and (26), neither of the two sets of possible interpretations, that is (20) and (23), and (27) and (28), respectively, is intended by the communicator to be rejected by the addressee. The communicator intends his addressee to process and retain both, together with their effects. Thus, (19) and (26) are not only ambiguous, but equivocal, i.e. unresolvably ambiguous.

Redfern's comment that puns provide 'two meanings for the price of one word or phrase' is valid in these cases. The word 'drive' means both 'car ride' and 'drive way', and they are both intended by the communicator, unlike the first two cases. The phrase 'next to'

can be understood both in the physical and in more abstract senses. In the cases of the first two types, there is only one intended interpretation. However, more than one interpretation is triggered, and gives access to various kinds of encyclopaedic information, which can be used in processing the intended interpretation. In the case of the third type, both interpretations are intended by the communicator.

It has been argued that puns can be categorised in terms of hierarchy among possible interpretations they provide. However, this is not to say that they are distinctive categories. I would argue that the boundaries are not clear-cut and are a matter of degree. It could be argued that these examples occur along a spectrum, with examples (2), (4), (11a) and (11b) belonging to one end of the spectrum, and example (19) and (26) belonging to the other. Other examples fall somewhere in between.

I have thus argued that Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory (1986a) sheds light on a variety of ways in which puns function in advertising:

1. They attract the addressee's attention; the extra processing effort involved may be said to be the price the advertiser has to pay to get his message noticed at all. Without going through the whole process, the addressee might ignore the message, and hence no effect would be achieved.

2. The extra processing effort demanded is compensated for by the increased strength of the message conveyed, or by increased memorability. An opinion which the addressee might discount as obviously of little credibility is strengthened and possibly remembered due to the extra processing effort involved.

3. There are extra contextual effects based on the addressee's pleasure and satisfaction at having solved the pun: these may affect the addressee's attitude to the advertiser and ultimately to the product advertised.

4. The extra unintended, or uncommunicated, interpretation provides access to encyclopaedic information which is used in processing the intended interpretation, and thus gives rise to additional contextual effects.

In all these cases, the advertisement achieves optimal relevance despite the extra processing effort, because it is still the most economical way of achieving the full range of intended contextual effects.

### 3.3. Ambiguity and the pun

I have argued above that a pun presents more than one possible interpretation and that the hearer selects the interpretation which is consistent with the principle of relevance, which should be the one intended by the speaker. Then, does a hearer of a pun see it as ambiguous? In this section, I investigate the relationship between the pun and ambiguity.

Leach argues that a pun 'forbids us to recognise that the sound pattern is ambiguous' (1964:25), without explaining how the hearer is 'forbidden' from seeing a pun as ambiguous. Whatever his reasons may be, I would argue that his comment is unsound. The audience must see the ambiguity of the pun in order to recognise it as a pun.

Attridge argues that a pun is not just ambiguity, but it is 'ambiguity *unashamed of itself*' (his italics) (1988:141). He points out that in spite of its polysemous nature, language works well enough because a context acts as a disambiguating device:

In place of a context designed to suppress latent ambiguity, the pun is the product of a context deliberately constructed to *enforce* an ambiguity, to render impossible the choice between meanings, to

leave the reader or hearer endlessly oscillating in semantic space. (his italics)

(Attridge 1988:141)

There is an underlying assumption in his argument that a context is determined prior to an utterance. However, this assumption is false, as argued by Sperber and Wilson (1986a) and discussed in Chapter 2. Attridge goes on to argue that a context, which normally helps disambiguation, enforces ambiguity in the case of a pun, although he does not explicate how a context 'enforces' the ambiguity of a pun.

Leach and Attridge seem to contradict each other. On the one hand, Leach argues that, although a pun is ambiguous, the audience does not recognise it as ambiguous, because there is something about a pun which prevents the audience from recognising it as ambiguous. On the other hand, Attridge's claim is that a pun is not only ambiguous - and presumably that the audience would recognise it as ambiguous - but also that its context is constructed in such a way that the ambiguity of the pun is enforced.

First of all, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by 'ambiguous' here. Utterances which are strictly speaking indeterminate are so ubiquitous in ordinary communication that it is difficult to find utterances which do not require any



disambiguation, reference assignment and enrichment. Let us look at the following examples.

(36) a. Kay went to the bank.

b. Paul has got his umbrella.

c. I will see you soon.

The word 'bank' in (36a) can refer to either a financial institution or a river bank and needs disambiguation. The umbrella mentioned in (36b) can be either Paul's or some other male human being's, and 'his' has to be assigned to an appropriate reference. The hearer of (36c) would have to enrich it by deciding how soon the word 'soon' means, whether it is a matter of a few minutes, hours, weeks, and so on.

However, hearers of (36a) - (36c) do not necessarily regard these utterances as ambiguous. Nor do the speakers usually intend these utterances to be ambiguous. They may be linguistically ambiguous - in fact, Sperber and Wilson would treat (36a) as ambiguous, and (36b) and (36c) as ambivalent or vague - but the ambiguity is almost invariably resolvable in context. Indeed, unless the ambiguity is resolved the utterance will not succeed as a vehicle for communication. What the hearer has to do in processing

utterances, such as (36a) - (36c), is to identify the propositions which meet the criterion of consistency with the principle of relevance.

However, there are cases in which the hearer is not able to identify the interpretation intended by the speaker. These utterances are then interpreted as ambiguous, and the hearer, by asking, 'Which bank?', 'Whose umbrella?', 'How soon?' and so on, has to seek clarification before being able to recover the speaker's intention. Such unrecoverable ambiguity is called equivocation.

Sperber and Wilson argue that the success of communication depends on the hearer's recovery of the speaker's intended meaning of the utterance (not merely on her recognition of its linguistic meaning) (1986a:23). Communication can succeed, even when there is more than one possible interpretation of the utterance. In principle, it can succeed with various types of indeterminacy of the utterance, so long as the speaker's intended interpretation is recoverable. Communication fails when ambiguity is unresolvable, for unless there is such resolution, the hearer will not be able to determine which intentions the speaker had. It becomes equivocal when the hearer is unable to disambiguate it and hence assign it a single intended interpretation.

Puns stand in striking contrast to this because conscious recognition of ambiguity as part of the utterance process is essential to processing the utterance as a pun. However, even in

these cases, there is a single communicative goal which a speaker is trying to achieve in using a pun, and this is what the hearer has to recognise. In some cases, this goal is transparent. Although two or more interpretations are intentionally triggered by the speaker, only one is intended to be retained, as we have seen examples (2), (4), (12) and (15). Let us look at example (11a), which is a caption for an advertisement promoting Milton Keynes, found at the railway station. I repeat it here for convenience:

(11) a. Mind your own business. Move it to Milton Keynes.

This is accompanied by a line underneath, saying:

(37) Curious to find out why so many top British companies  
are moving to Milton Keynes? Ring (the number).

The first sentence of (11a) is a pun. The expression 'mind your own business' can mean (38):

(38) Do not concern yourself with other people's affairs.

However, this does not yield enough relevance to outweigh the addressee's processing effort, as the addressee would have no idea what other people's affairs it is referring to. It would probably help to attract the addressee's attention, for the expression 'mind your own business' tends to be used as a harsh statement.

The addressee would then be encouraged to search for alternative interpretations in her memory, and she would hopefully remember that 'mind' can mean 'look after' and that 'Business' can mean 'firm', 'company' and so forth. Furthermore, the addressee would probably know that it is an advertisement, because of the kind of place in which it is found. (37) would help her to realise that it is an advertisement for Milton Keynes. She would then derive (39):

(39) Look after your own company.

Together with the latter part of the caption, the addressee would derive further contextual effects, such as (40):

(40) You can improve your company prospects by moving to  
Milton Keynes.

Thus, (39) would yield enough relevance to make the addressee's processing effort worth while.

The addressee would recover (38), but reject it, as it does not yield enough relevance to make it worth her while to process it. Then she would recover (39), which is consistent with the principle of relevance. It is manifest to both the addressee and the advertiser that the advertiser intends her to notice both (38) and (39). However, it is also made mutually manifest to both the addressee and the advertiser that (38) is to be rejected and that (39) is the interpretation which is intended by the advertiser. Ambiguity is not tolerable unless the communicator could have meant both. But the communicator could only have meant both if both contribute however indirectly to the single overall intended effect.

Example (11a) belongs to the first category of puns, as we have discussed above. There is only one interpretation that is intended by the speaker, namely (39). The other interpretation (38), which the audience would be likely to recover first, is intended by the speaker only to be triggered but eventually rejected as irrelevant.

Leach's comment that a pun forbids the audience from recognising it as ambiguous is acceptable insofar as the ambiguity of a pun is usually resolvable. The audience of a pun would be able to identify the intended interpretation, which is the key to successful communication. Moreover, the audience would appreciate

the ambiguity of the pun as essential for its success, and would not see ambiguity as failure.

However, what about the third category of puns, such as (19) and (26)? They have more than one interpretation intended by the speaker, both of which are intended to be retained, unlike the first two types of puns. I repeat the example for convenience:

(19) The perfect car for a long drive.

As discussed above, it has the following interpretations.

(22) The car functions well for a lengthy drive.

(25) The car is perfect for people who enjoy a comfortable life.

However, despite the independence of (22) and (25) from each other, they can combine the additional premise that people who have a long drive are the sort of people who drive long distances. So, despite the essential recognition and retention of the two triggered interpretations, there is a single overall message conveyed to which

the two interpretations jointly contribute. Thus, despite the ambiguity caused by the two interpretations, the pun does not lead to communication breakdown.

In this section, I have considered the relationship between the pun and ambiguity. It has been argued that there are different degrees and types of ambiguity in utterances in general. It has also been argued that there are different types of puns. In some cases, the ambiguity of the pun is resolvable, as in (11a), and in some cases, there is genuine equivocation, i.e. unresolvable ambiguity, as in (19). In either case, it is essential for a pun to be successful that the addressee should recover more than one interpretation. Two or more interpretations were intended by the speaker, whether some of them are only intended to be triggered and eventually rejected, or whether they are all intended to be retained. It could be argued that the essence of the pun lies in ambiguity.

#### 3.4. Puns and metaphors

It has been argued that interpreting a pun involves recovering one or more interpretations, after rejecting the most accessible one. A metaphor similarly involves the recovery of an interpretation, apparently via some literal interpretation which is

discarded. What then is the difference between pun and metaphor? This is the question I shall investigate in this section.

First, let us consider the following caption from an advertisement for British Rail:

(41) Will you end up at this station?

Underneath this caption is a picture of the blue light typically seen outside a police station, with the word police on it, and a second caption urging the audience to get the right ticket before travelling.

The word 'station' is a pun, used to trigger two separate interpretations, i.e. the train station and the police station. Then, (41) makes the audience process the following interpretations:

(42) Will you end up at this train station?

(43) Will you end up at the police station?



Both interpretations (42) and (43) are intentionally triggered by the speaker. However, it is mutually manifest that he intended (42) to be rejected in favour of (43). (43) is the one that the communicator intended to communicate.

Thus, (41) offers more than one interpretation, namely, (42) and (43), even though (42) is intended by the speaker to be derived and then rejected by the addressee. In processing (41), the addressee would have to search in her memory information about the word 'station' and derive more than one interpretation, i.e. (42) and (43).

Does this make (41) a metaphor? It has been established above that puns involve the triggering of two or more interpretations, with the addressee in some cases rejecting one of these, leaving just one interpretation as the intended one. On the other hand, metaphors similarly involve the recovery of an interpretation, apparently via some literal interpretation which is eventually discarded. There is no reason why the word 'station' should not be used as a metaphor. If (41) is not a metaphor, what then is the difference between a pun and a metaphor? This is the question which I shall investigate in this section.

First, I shall consider Sperber and Wilson's approach to the analysis of metaphor. Having done this, I shall compare puns and metaphors and consider what the differences between them are.

Crucial to Sperber and Wilson's analysis of metaphor (see 1986a) is the notion of interpretive use, which has been discussed in Chapter 2. Metaphor involves an interpretive relation between the proposition expressed by an utterance and the proposition of the thought it represents, perhaps the thought of the speaker. The two propositions resemble each other, that is they partly share contextual effects. However, unlike descriptive use, the proposition of an utterance need not be true of the state of affairs it is used to represent.

According to Sperber and Wilson, the relevance of a metaphor is established by recovering an array of contextual implications (1986a:236). The range and the strength of these implications are a matter of degree. On the one hand, in the case of a standardised metaphor, the addressee would be encouraged to recover a narrow range of strong implications. On the other hand, in the case of a novel metaphor, the addressee would be forced to look for a wide range of weak implications. The following is an example of a fairly creative metaphor:

(44) He was just a station in my life.

The addressee would have to search through her encyclopaedic knowledge of 'station' for a number of assumptions about the word. For, it is false to say that a person is a station and therefore it

is not possible to derive relevance from a strictly literal construal of (44). The addressee would then hopefully remember that a station is where one stops for a short time, that it is where only temporary stops are made, that the stops which one makes at the station are not important in the journey, and so on. When (44) is processed against this context, which contains such information, it will yield a fairly wide range of weak implications as follows:

- (45) a. He is just somebody with whom I had a short affair.
- b. The relationship with him was meant to be a casual affair.
- c. The affair with him was not very significant in my life.

However, the speaker could not have intended to communicate (45a) - (45c) alone. Had he done so, he would have used an utterance, such as (46), rather than (44):

- (46) He was just someone with whom I had a short, casual and insignificant affair.

For (46) would require less processing effort than (44). There are other contextual effects intended by (44) to outweigh the processing effort. Perhaps it could be the degree of casualness, which is more than the addressee might imagine otherwise. Or, the lack of commitment on the part of the speaker might be beyond the addressee's imagination. Perhaps, the speaker intended to suggest other characteristics of a station, for instance that a station is never a destination in itself, and that it is only en route to somewhere else, which the speaker could not have quite communicated with (46). Thus, there are contextual implications intended by the speaker of (44), which could not have been communicated by (46), and an extra processing effort caused by (44) would be compensated by them. The relevance of (44) is achieved by inferring weak contextual implications which are derived around the encyclopaedic information about 'station'.

Note that in the account of this example, there has been no mention of first recovering the literal meaning and then the metaphorical interpretation. Rather, the use of the word 'station', with its evocation of the contextual implications of being intended for a short and temporary stop was sufficient to trigger the single interpretation.

Puns, however, by definition involve processing more than one interpretation, although nothing precludes one of these being a metaphorical interpretation. In the case of (41), the addressee would be given access to two separate schemata, namely, the train

station and the police station, even though the access comes from a single word 'station'. Furthermore, these two schemata have a different status. The access to 'the train station' is triggered by the speaker, but it would not lead to the intended message, whereas 'the police station' is the one intended by the speaker. The speaker has intended to make (42) mutually manifest to the addressee and himself, but he has also intended it to be rejected by the addressee, so that she would go on to look for the intended interpretation that 'station' means the police station.

Thus, the relevance of the pun is achieved by rejecting the seemingly most accessible interpretation and finding the intended interpretation. The addressee would have to go ~~th~~<sup>r</sup>ough more than one schema triggered by a word, and the success of a pun depends on having access to those different schemata. The effect of a pun involves the contrast between the two schemata, that is, that of the train station and that of the police station in the case of the example above.

Interpreting a metaphor involves a single schema. Unlike puns, where the effect comes from the contrast of two or more interpretations, the effect of a metaphor lies in the condensation, in the fact that a single expression can offer a wide range of weak implicatures. This is one of the major differences between a pun and a metaphor.

As we have seen above, metaphor is based on resemblance between the proposition of the utterance used and the proposition of the speaker's thought. The two propositions share some contextual effects. However, there is no clear definition as to which contextual effects they share. In example (44), the speaker intends to communicate something along the lines of (46), but it cannot be paraphrased, partly because paraphrasing loses something, and partly because the message is not so definite. Thus, a metaphor conveys an indeterminate thought, that is, the speaker intends to communicate a range of implicatures, rather than a fixed set of them, and the communication would succeed when the hearer has recovered some of the implicatures within the range.

Moreover, in the case of a pun, none of the examples in our previous section involved indeterminacy of communicative effect. For example, the speaker of (41) intended to make manifest (42) and (43), even though he intended (42) to be rejected eventually, and he did not intend the addressee to look for further interpretations. A pun necessarily triggers two or more interpretations, which contrast with each other, but these interpretations are definite, unlike metaphors which convey an indeterminate thought.

Furthermore, a metaphor communicates a wide range of weak implicatures, while a pun may communicate as little as a single implicature, even though additional interpretations may be triggered, and this intended implicature can be strong. It must be added that the strength of implicatures communicated by a metaphor

varies: in the case of a standardized metaphor, the speaker intends to communicate a narrower range of stronger contextual effects, whereas in the case of a novel metaphor a wider range of weaker contextual effects are intended. However, in general, the contextual effects of a metaphor are relatively weakly communicated.

Thus, the pun and the metaphor are completely different, even though processing a pun and a metaphor both involve a search for relevance through a single expression. They are mutually independent of each other.

However, it must be pointed out that the pun and the metaphor are not mutually exclusive of each other. That is to say that an expression can be both a pun and a metaphor at the same time, and in fact, many puns are also metaphors, as in example (47):

(47) We colour pictures. Not facts.

(47) is a caption of an advertisement for The Mirror, and it is a pun and a metaphor at the same time. The addressee would eventually recover the following interpretation:

(48) We (literally) colour pictures, but we do not  
(metaphorically) colour facts.

Given that it is an advertisement for a newspaper, (48) would have implications, such as (49) and (50):

(49) We paint pictures, but we do not influence the facts.

(50) The Mirror has coloured pictures, and the facts are presented without distortion.

The 'colour the facts' metaphor would give rise to a wide range of contextual effects, such as the way the facts are transformed according to how they are presented, the degree to which they change, the similarities and contrast between colouring pictures and transforming facts, and so on. The relevance of (43) is established by recovering literal and abstract interpretation of the word 'colour', and a wide range of contextual effects is achieved from searching for resemblances between painting objects and affecting facts.

The main purpose of this section has been to compare the pun with the metaphor. I have argued that, whereas the relevance of metaphors is established by recovering an indeterminate range of weak contextual implications which are derived by searching memory around a single schema, the relevance of puns is achieved by inferring two or more determinate interpretations which come from



two or more contrasting schemata. The pun and the metaphor are mutually independent of each other, although they are not mutually exclusive of each other.

### 3.5. Conclusion

Sperber and Wilson say (1986a:217) that style is the relationship. They argue that the style which the speaker chooses reveals what kind of relationship he envisages between himself and his addressee:

From the style of a communication it is possible to infer such things as what the speaker takes to be the hearer's cognitive capacities and level of attention, how much help or guidance she is prepared to give him in processing her utterance, the degree of complicity between them, their emotional closeness or distance. In other words, a speaker not only aims to enlarge the mutual cognitive environment she shares with the hearer; she also assumes a certain degree of mutuality, which is indicated, and sometimes communicated by her style.

(Sperber and Wilson 1986a:217-8)

For the advertiser, it is crucial to attract the addressee's attention. For this reason, advertisers take advantage of various linguistic and non-linguistic devices to attract attention. As I have argued, the pun is one of them. It functions as an attention-getting device, enabling the advertiser to make seemingly negative or implausible statements, which would be highly relevant if true, for example, 'less bread', 'no jam', 'mind your own business' and so on.

This might help to raise the addressee's level of attention, making her more alert, and hence more prepared to work out the effect of the advertisement. Moreover, as the addressee has to reject the most obvious interpretation and infer the intended interpretation, it causes her an extra processing effort. This might help to sustain her attention for longer. Moreover, it might lead to higher memorability. These aspects would help to involve the addressee in the advertisement.

The wit and humour of the pun might also contribute to congenial feelings towards the advertiser. In spite of what literary critics and advertising agencies have said, there is some indication that the general public do enjoy puns. Deciphering a pun might create in the addressee a self-congratulatory thought. This pleasure would help the addressee form favourable feelings about the advertiser. Having said that the advertiser cannot expect a high level of attention from the addressee, a large number of advertisements using puns have been found in places such as stations

and trains, where the advertiser has not only a captive audience but also a bored audience, who might appreciate entertainment. By offering an amusing pun at a tube station, the advertiser is providing the addressee with some entertainment which she wants.

There is, perhaps, more to this humorous and aesthetic effect of the pun than Relevance Theory is capable of analysing, as it now stands. Relevance is defined and measured in terms of contextual effects and processing effort. However, it is possible that a pun provides a kind of humorous pleasure and aesthetic effect which are not fully analysable in terms of contextual effect alone. For example, in the case of the airline advertisement, the advertiser uses a pun to refer to the girl's breasts. Now, there is a problem in accepting that the message is relevant; it is possible to argue that the message is not relevant but provides some aesthetic pleasure to the addressee. Then, one could argue that the pun raises a problem for Relevance Theory in its present stage of elaboration. Further research on humour and aesthetics in the Relevance framework is awaited. I shall return to this from a different viewpoint, using the same airline advertisement as an example, in Chapter 4.

humour  
&  
relevance.

As I have shown above, the relevance of the pun is generally established by recovering two or more interpretations. The pun presents more than one interpretation, even though only one interpretation is intended by the speaker. This would give the addressee access to different schemata, from which she would derive

various contextual implications. It has also been argued that some puns are equivocal. However, it is clear that there is nothing equivocal about the ultimate message advertisements are conveying, namely, 'Buy this product!'.

Now, the advertiser does not aim to send his ultimate message by directly communicating this single message: rather, he would like to communicate an 'impression' or 'impressions' of the product or the company. In the Relevance framework, an impression is seen as a change in one's cognitive environment, which results from relatively minor alterations in the manifestness of a large number of assumptions, instead of major alterations of a few assumptions (Sperber and Wilson 1986a:59). The pun could help achieve this effect. For example, in the case of the Mazda car advertisement, the pun creates two separate impressions: one is the fact that it is a pun, hence witty, thus creating a feeling of complicity and cleverness in the audience; the other, through the 'long driveway' interpretation, allows access to assumptions about the lifestyle of the car's drivers, generating a certain impression of the car itself.

Thus, a pun can provide the advertiser with a way of communicating two or more impressions; one by the very fact that it is a pun, and the other(s) by its intended interpretation(s). If his advertisement manages to create an impression in his addressee, he would consider the advertisement successful. This must explain why there are so many puns in advertisements.

## Chapter 4: Covert Communication

### 4.1. Introduction

Crystal and Davy (1983:222) have argued that two of the main functions of the language of advertising are to inform and to persuade. However, these two functions are not of equal importance: there is a hierarchy between them. The advertiser does not inform for the sake of improving his viewers' knowledge about the world; he informs in order to persuade them to buy the product which he is advertising. He would be content if he managed to persuade them but failed to inform them of something (if that was possible), but not vice versa. It is certainly the ultimate goal of the advertiser to persuade his viewers to buy a product. In this chapter, I investigate how the process of communication is manipulated in language to achieve this goal and I try to show how Relevance Theory provides a useful framework for the analysis.

In Section 4.2, I examine in detail Sperber and Wilson's account of ostensive communication. In Section 4.3, I discuss examples in advertising which appear not to satisfy the requirements of ostensive communication, thus providing apparent counter-examples to their account of communication. Section 3.4 discusses the notion of ostention and the role it plays in communication. In Section 4.5, I examine weak implicatures and how they differ from covert

communication. Finally, in Section 4.6, I show how Relevance Theory can analyse covert forms of communication.

#### 4.2. Sperber and Wilson's ostensive communication

Sperber and Wilson's theory of utterance interpretation is based upon the definition of 'ostensive-inferential communication' repeated here for convenience:

Ostensive-inferential communication: the communicator produces a stimulus which makes it mutually manifest to communicator and audience that the communicator intends, by means of this stimulus, to make manifest or more manifest to the audience a set of assumptions (I).

(Sperber and Wilson 1986a:63)

Information is manifest to an individual at a certain time if the individual is capable at that time of representing it and accepting that representation as true or probably true. Information is mutually manifest to two individuals if it is manifest to both, and it is manifest to both that it is manifest to both, and so on

indefinitely. Moreover, manifestness is a matter of degree: the more likely the individual is to construct a certain representation, the more manifest it is to him.

According to this analysis, ostensive communication involves two layers of intention; a first-order intention to inform the hearer of something, which Sperber and Wilson call the informative intention:

Informative intention: to make manifest or more manifest to the audience a set of assumptions (I).

(Sperber and Wilson 1986a:58)

and a second-order intention, the communicative intention to make that informative intention mutually manifest:

Communicative intention: to make it mutually manifest to audience and communicator that the communicator has this informative intention.

(Sperber and Wilson 1986a:61)

There is thus in Sperber and Wilson's definition of ostensive communication a requirement of overtness, to the effect that the speaker's informative intention must be made mutually manifest. This requirement of overtness is crucial for Sperber and Wilson's theory. It is the assumption that the informative intention is being made mutually manifest which helps the hearer to recover the intended message - that is, the set of assumptions (I) which the speaker intended to make manifest, or more manifest, to the hearer. Only if the speaker's informative intention becomes mutually manifest does ostensive communication take place.

When this requirement of overtness is not fulfilled, that is, when the informative intention is not made mutually manifest, Sperber and Wilson believe that this is not a genuine instance of ostensive communication. They give the following example of 'non-ostensive' non-verbal communication:

Suppose, for instance, that Mary wants Peter to mend her broken hair-drier, but does not want to ask him openly. What she does is begin to take her hair-drier to pieces and leave the pieces lying around as if she were in the process of mending it. She does not expect Peter to be taken in by this staging; in fact, if he really believed that she was in the process of mending her hair-drier herself, he would probably not interfere. She does expect him to be clever enough to work out that this is a



staging intended to inform him of the fact that she needs some help with her hair-drier. However, she does not expect him to reason along just these lines. Since she is not really asking, if Peter fails to help, it will not really count as a refusal either.

(Sperber and Wilson 1986a:30)

Sperber and Wilson argue (1986a:30) that there is 'an intuitive reluctance to say that Mary "meant" that she wanted Peter's help, or that she was "communicating" with Peter in the sense we are trying to characterise', and that this reluctance is 'well-founded' and comes from the fact that Mary's second-order intention to have her first-order informative intention recognised is hidden from Peter.

I shall investigate cases of verbal communication which, it will be argued, are parallel to Sperber and Wilson's example of non-verbal, non-ostensive communication. The language used in advertising often exhibits examples of 'covert forms of information transmission' (Sperber and Wilson 1986a:30) .

#### 4.3. Non-ostensive communication in advertising

Let us look at the example of All Nippon Airlines again. I repeat it for the sake of convenience:

(1) *Oo Kii NAa WAh.*

As I have pointed out in Chapter 3, there are the following two possible readings:

(2) Okinawa

(3) How big! Wow!

The question which (3) raises is: what is big? The problem here is that there are at least two possible candidates for the object described as *ookii* (big). That is, the Okinawa Islands, which are the destination of the flight promoted in the advertisement, and the big breasts of the girl shown in the illustration. The second interpretation would lead to (4):

(4) In those islands, there are a lot of beautiful girls with big breasts.

However, though the advertiser may have intended (4) to be manifest to the audience, he surely did not intend (4) to be manifest on the basis of making this informative intention mutually manifest. Thus, the communicator's intention to convey an interpretation is sometimes made mutually manifest, and in others it is not.

Nudity is shown to a greater extent in advertising and in mass media in general in Japan than in the U.K. Even so, to show a well-endowed girl in a bikini and explicitly say, 'What big breasts she has!' would be regarded as irrelevant and vulgar in an advertisement for an airline company. Since there is an alternative interpretation, the advertiser's intention to refer to the girl is not made as manifest as it could have been; it may not become mutually manifest at all. It is vague, which leaves some room for the advertiser to deny the intention if necessary.

There are some more examples of this sort. (5) is the caption of an advertisement for men's toiletries, the brand name of which is Tech 21, for which I have provided the translation in (6):

(5) *Otoko wa seino.*  
man topic capacity

(6) For a man, it is capacity (which is desirable).

Considering that it is an advertisement, the following premise must be added to the context:

- (7) The product advertised helps the buyer attain what is desirable.

When assumptions (6) and (7) are combined, the conclusion in (8) can be recovered by the audience:

- (8) The product helps the buyer attain his capacity.

The word *seinoo* (capacity) refers to functional capacity and is usually used to describe machinery, such as a car, a camera, etc. It is not a common collocation to use the word for a description of people. However, the brand name, Tech 21, has some overtones of machinery, and it may be the company's principle, not the advertiser's, to advertise it in association with machinery. Perhaps, after all, it is not just women who are treated as sex machines in advertising.

Two Chinese characters are used to transcribe the word *seinoo*, each with its own meaning, that is, *sei* (sex) and *noo* (ability). Thus, the following interpretation is possible:

(9) *Otoko wa sei noo.*

man topic sex ability

which can be translated into English as follows:

(10) For a man, it is sexual ability (which is desirable).

This interpretation is reinforced by the illustration, which shows the face and torso of a young Western man with long hair (arms not shown).

When (10) is processed in a context which contains assumptions (7) and (8), the conclusion in (11) can be recovered:

(11) The product helps the buyer attain his sexual  
ability.

However, it could hardly be argued that the advertiser has communicated (9), and consequently (10) and (11), by making mutually manifest his intention to do so. *Seinoo* (capacity) is one word, even though it is transcribed in two separate Chinese characters and therefore can be broken down into two words, namely, *sei* (sex) and

*noo* (ability). The advertiser could not be said to have overtly communicated (9), (10) and (11).

It is not surprising that an advertiser, promoting men's toiletries, should want to associate the product with sexuality, especially when one recalls that homosexuals consume far more toiletries than heterosexuals, and are therefore a potential target group for advertisers. In fact, there are in the illustration some overtones of a picture from a 'gay' magazine. However, at the same time, it is reasonable that the advertiser should not want explicitly to make an association with sexuality, for that might be regarded as vulgar and distasteful, particularly as men's toiletries are often purchased by women as a gift, and such women might be put off by an obvious association between toiletries and sexual ability.

The next examples are both captions, advertising the same miniature television set:

(12) *Mi-tai mono o gamansuru to ningen*  
watch-want to thing obj. forbear if personality

*ga chijimimasu.*

topic shrink

If you go without watching what you want to watch,  
your personality will shrink.

(13) *Mi-tai*            *mono o gamansuru to jinsei*

watch-want to thing obj. forbear if life

*kuraku narimasu.*

depressing become

If you go without watching what you want to watch,  
your life will be depressing.

These captions are accompanied by somewhat similar illustrations.

(12) is shown with three young Western people, two girls dominating the picture, intimately holding each other. A boy is holding one of the girls from behind with one hand, and he has a miniature television set in the other, with the faint suggestion of an orgy. Caption (13) is illustrated by two Western girls intimately close to one another, with one girl dominant and holding the other from behind. The girl who is being held is playing the piano, on the keys of which is placed a miniature television set. There are strong overtones of a lesbian relationship, and a sense of forbidden romance.

There is also some text attached to these captions. (14) and (15) accompany (12) and (13), respectively:

(14) *Jinrui hatten no rekishi, kore sunawachi kookishin  
juusoku no rekishi. 'Are mo mitai, kore mo mitai' no  
yajiuma-konjoo koso, ningen-seichoo no gendooryoku-na  
no de arimasu...*

(15) *Are-kore to, mamananaru-koto no ooi kono yononaka.  
Semete, mi-tai mono gurai jiyuu ni mire-nakya, mani  
ga tanoshimi de ikite-iru no ka wakara-naku narimasu  
yo ne...*

I have provided the following translations for these two texts:

(16) The history of the development of mankind is the history of the satisfaction of curiosity. 'Want to see this. Want to see that...' The curiosity which drives a mob is the source of energy which has driven mankind to grow this far...

(17) Can't do this, can't do that... There are many things forbidden in this world. What's the point of living unless we can at least watch what we want to when we want to?...



The caption and text are closely related. (12) and (14) both encourage curiosity. (12) says that if you give up your curiosity you will 'shrink', and (14) says that it is curiosity which helps people grow. There is a contrast between *chijimu* (shrink) and *seichoo* (growth). The word *chijimu* (shrink) is normally used to describe an inanimate object, and it is unusual for people to be said to 'shrink'. The word has a slight hint of the lack of erection. Thus, (12) may be interpreted as follows:

(18) If you refrain from watching what you want to watch,  
your penis will shrink.

or, to the extent that the illustration suggests an orgy;

(19) If you refrain from having an orgy, your penis will  
shrink.

Both (13) and (15) are about taboos; (13) says that life is depressing when one goes without the forbidden, and (15) asks what is the point of living if we are to go without what is forbidden. With the illustration suggesting a lesbian relationship, which is taboo, the following interpretation is possible:

(20) If you go without a lesbian relationship, your life will be depressing.

Moreover, there is a caption, written in English, found in both advertisements:

(21) Anytime OK! Everywhere OK!

What is OK anytime and everywhere is ambivalent. Considering that it is an advertisement for a miniature television set and that the caption is apparently talking about not being able to watch something, the following interpretation is possible:

(22) With our television set you can watch television anywhere at any time.

On the other hand, in a context in which (18) and (19), or (20) are present, (23) and (24) may be recovered, respectively.

(23) You can have an orgy anywhere at any time.

(24) You can have lesbian sex anywhere at any time.

However, there is an intuitive reluctance to say that the advertiser has overtly communicated (18), (19), (20), (22), (23) and (24) by means of (12), (13), (14), (15), and (21). (23) and (24) are inconsistent with the fact that they are advertisements and that they are advertising a miniature television set. They are advertising neither an orgy nor a lesbian relationship, and there seems to be no reason why an advertisement for a television set should be encouraging an orgy or a lesbian relationship, which are not only irrelevant to the advertisement, but are also taboo in Japanese society. Even though it is known that sex is used in advertising in order to catch the attention and provide stimulation (Key 1973), the discussion goes onto a 'subliminal' level, and it does not apply to ostensive communication. It cannot be argued that the advertiser has intended to inform his audience of (18), (19), (20), (22), (23) and (24) by making mutually manifest to himself and his audience his intention to do so.

In some forms of communication, such as the one we have just seen, although the speaker has an informative intention - he intends to make certain information manifest - he does not intend to make that informative intention mutually manifest to his hearer and himself. In advertising, and indeed in communication in general, the success of the communication, i.e. the recovery by the hearer of the intended information, is not always achieved by making the

informative intention mutually manifest. In some cases, as I shall show, the fulfilment of the speaker's informative intention can actually best be achieved if the speaker's communicative intention, i.e. his intention to make his informative intention mutually manifest, is concealed from his hearer.

The cases just described would be considered by Sperber and Wilson as cases of 'information transmission' but not ones of 'ostensive communication' governed by the principle of relevance. Sperber and Wilson argue (1986a:2) that there is no general theory of communication, and they propose a theory specifically to account for ostensive communication.

According to Sperber and Wilson (1986a:158), the principle of relevance only applies to ostensive communication, where the speaker, by his linguistic behaviour, intends to affect the mutual cognitive environment of himself and the hearer, i.e. the set of assumptions mutually manifest to both the hearer and the speaker. When the mutual cognitive environment of the hearer and the speaker is affected, i.e. when the speaker's informative intention is made mutually manifest, further assumptions are made mutually manifest to both interlocutors. As a result, their social relationship is affected, in particular their possibility of future linguistic or non-linguistic interaction.

In a case of information transmission, on the other hand, the mutual cognitive environment of the speaker and the hearer is not

affected. Information transmission only affects the cognitive environment of the audience. A set of assumptions (I) become manifest to the hearer; the speaker's informative intention may become manifest, too, but it does not become mutually manifest to the hearer and the speaker. As a result, no new social relation is created between the speaker and the hearer, that is, their mutual cognitive environment is not affected. This may itself be a reason for the advertiser to engage in these forms of communication. I shall call these forms of communication 'covert communication', as opposed to ostensive communication.

The advertisement captions, discussed above, can be explained along these lines. The advertiser of the Japanese airline intended to make manifest to the audience assumption (4), but he has avoided a possible accusation of pornography or a protest from feminists by not making that informative intention mutually manifest to himself and to his audience. Similarly, the advertiser of Tech 21 intended to make manifest to the audience assumptions (10) and (11), but has avoided negative reaction to explicit statements about sexuality.

The advertiser of the miniature television set intended to make manifest to the audience assumptions (15), (16) and (17), but he has not made his informative intention mutually manifest to the audience and himself, for those assumptions are apparently inconsistent with the principle of relevance and they may be offensive to viewers.

The advertiser of the television set seems to have calculated that his advertisements would not be too offensive to his audience, as they both appeared in a Japanese magazine equivalent to the supplement to *The News of the World*. It is worth noting at this point that a different advertisement for the same television set appeared in a magazine equivalent to the supplement to *The Sunday Times* around the same time in 1986, showing four people: a middle-aged woman, apparently a housewife, a schoolboy with a baseball cap, a young woman with a magazine, and a young boy, apparently a student. Apart from the young woman holding her magazine and looking at the camera/ audience, everybody else is watching the miniature television set, with caption (25):

(25) *Chikagoro, tsuukin-densha ga shumi desu.*  
recently commuting-train topic hobby is

Recently the commuting-train has become my hobby.

Because everybody, except for the girl looking at the audience, is watching television, a further interpretation can be derived:

(26) Recently, watching television on the commuter train  
has become my hobby.

There is no trace of sexual suggestion either in the writing or in the picture. The English caption (21) has been replaced by the following Japanese caption:

(27) *Itsu-demo doko-demo TV taimu.*

when-even where-even TV time

TV-time, anytime, anywhere.

where 'TV' is written in the English alphabet, and *taimu* (time) in *katakana* characters, which are used for foreign loan words. From this, interpretation (28) can be derived:

(28) You can watch television anywhere at any time.

In (27), the topic, television time, is specified and there is no other possible topic. In the earlier advertisements, the topic in the English caption is not specified and it is left ambiguous as to what 'O.K.' might refer to. Considering that it is an advertisement for a miniature television set, watching television is an obvious candidate for being 'O.K.', but the pictures suggest an orgy and a lesbian relationship. Thus, the audience are left with two possibilities.

These advertisers intended to affect the cognitive environment of their audience by making them recover assumptions (4), (10), (11), (18), (19), (20), (22), (23) and (24), and yet they avoided any modification of the mutual cognitive environment of the audience and themselves by failing to make this intention mutually manifest to themselves and to the audience. By this sort of manipulation, the advertiser has avoided the social consequences of making his intention mutually manifest to his audience and himself, and he has allowed himself the possibility of denying having had that intention in the first place.

A cognitive environment is a set of assumptions that are manifest to an individual. A mutual cognitive environment is a set of assumptions that are mutually manifest to two or more individuals. Sharing a mutual cognitive environment is the basis for cooperation between 'equal' interlocutors.

Mutual manifestness may be of little cognitive importance, but it is of crucial social importance. A change in the mutual cognitive environment of two people is a change in their possibility of interaction.

(Sperber and Wilson 1986a:61-62)



However, in many cases of verbal exchange in advertising, and in communication in general, although the speaker intends to transmit some information and intends to make his addressee recognise that information, and perhaps the intention behind it, he does not want to affect the mutual cognitive environment that he shares with his addressee, precisely because he wants to avoid the social implications that such a modification of the mutual cognitive environment necessarily brings with it.

In the Okinawa case above, the speaker does not make his informative intention mutually manifest to himself and the addressee because of the possible social consequences. The advertiser intends to inform the addressee of (4), but making his informative intention mutually manifest may have unwanted side effects, such as provoking accusations of pornography or sexism. The fulfilment of his informative intention, that is, the recovery of the intended information by the addressee, is not helped by his obscuring his informative intention. However, the picture of the well-endowed girl in a bikini is sufficient to help the addressee to get the message. That is why, even though some of my informants were not sure if the association between the word *ookii* (big) and the girl's breasts was intended by the advertiser, the advertiser's intention was achieved, because these audience could not help making the connection between the two.

In the men's toiletries advertisement, the advertiser does not make his informative intention mutually manifest to himself and his

addressee, because he wishes to avoid being accused of vulgarity and bad taste, or of encouraging homosexuality. The advertiser intends to inform the addressee of (10) and (11), but wishes to avoid the unwelcome social consequences it may bring to make this intention mutually manifest to the addressee and himself. He hopes that the addressee will be able to recover (10) and (11) on their own, with the help of the illustration.

In the case of the miniature television set advertisements in the Japanese equivalent of *The News of the World*, the advertiser intends to inform the viewer of (18), (19), (20), (22), (23) and (24), but does not intend to make his informative intention mutually manifest, in case doing so may cause some unwanted reaction, such as accusations of pornography or dislike of the advertiser. He has chosen a Japanese equivalent of *The News of the World* for his advertisements, as the readers of such a paper are unlikely to have negative reactions to these advertisements, but he is still careful not to make his informative intention mutually manifest and not to take entire responsibility for these interpretations.

The addressee who recovers interpretations (18), (19), (20), (22), (23) and (24) has to take a larger share of the responsibility than usual, being helped by the illustrations. When these interpretations are recovered without the addressee responding negatively to them, it may even create a feeling of solidarity with the advertiser for being daring and interesting. For the Japanese equivalent of *The Sunday Times*, the advertiser has chosen a

completely different version, for he is aware that the readers are more likely to find the advertisements in the other magazine unacceptable. The readers of the Japanese equivalent of *The Sunday Times* would not have felt solidarity with an advertiser showing sexually suggestive illustration. They would have been dismayed, if not appalled.

As we have seen in this section, there are examples in advertising, in which advertisers attempt to communicate something without making their informative intention mutually manifest to the audience and themselves. In contrast, ostensive communication, which is defined in terms of the principle of relevance, requires some overtness: the speaker's informative intention must be made mutually manifest to the audience and the speaker himself.

Is covert communication no longer a case of communication? Is it a deviation from the norm not to have the speaker's informative intention made mutually manifest? The issue here is not just a terminological one. As was pointed out above, Sperber and Wilson maintain that there can be no general theory of communication, and propose a theory to account for a specific type of communication, i.e. ostensive-inferential communication, which is defined in terms of the principle of relevance. The interesting questions are: how can one explain covert communication or information transmission? Can Relevance Theory provide a useful framework for this process, and if so how? These are the questions I shall consider in the following sections.

#### 4.4. Communication and ostension

Sperber and Wilson argue that it is not hard to see how the fulfilment of the communicative intention, that is, the communicator's intention to make it mutually manifest to both the audience and himself that he intends to inform the audience of something, can lead to the fulfilment of his informative intention:

...the realisation that a trustworthy communicator intends to make you believe something is an excellent reason for believing it.

(Sperber and Wilson 1986a:163)

As it stands, the argument is sound. However, it raises the question: who is a trustworthy communicator? It is idealistic and unrealistic to assume that communication always takes place between a trustworthy communicator and a trusting addressee. Let us look at Sperber and Wilson's argument again:

There are situations in which the mere fact that an intention is recognised may lead to its fulfilment.

Suppose that Mary intends to please Peter. If Peter becomes aware of her intention to please him, this may in itself be enough to please him. Similarly, when the inmates of a prison recognise their warden's intention to make them fear him, this may be enough in itself to make them fear him. There is one type of intention for which this possibility, rather than being exceptional, is regularly exploited: intentions to inform are quite generally fulfilled by being made recognisable.

(Sperber and Wilson 1986a:21-22)

Although it is not stated explicitly, in Sperber and Wilson's example, Mary and Peter are presented as a couple living together, apparently on equal terms, and are portrayed as a trustworthy communicator and a trusting addressee. In this case, the fact that the communicator intends to make the addressee believe something is an excellent reason for the addressee to believe it. There is underlying 'cooperation' between the interlocutors which justifies the addressee in believing something, on the grounds that the communicator intends to make the addressee believe it. In the case of a prison warden and inmates, the warden is in a position where he could make the prisoners' life difficult, if he were to set his mind to it. Again, this is a case where, for the addressee to believe something, it is sufficient that the communicator should intend to communicate it. The communicator is clearly in possession of a

social power which enables him to achieve his intention over his addressee, regardless of the addressee's reaction.

Let us look at some examples. Suppose that Peter has said to Mary (29):

(29) I'll make a meal because you are tired.

In this case, the mere fact that Mary has intended to make Peter believe (29) is an excellent reason for her to believe it.

Or, let us suppose a prison warden has said (30) to his prisoners:

(30) You'd better be cooperative, or you may find life here unpleasant.

It is a good enough reason for the prisoners to believe (30) that he has intended to make them believe it.

However, this does not mean to say that these cases are the norm and that anything that does not work in the same way is a deviation from normal communication. The point which Sperber and

Wilson make, as illustrated in these examples, is that the strength with which the communicated assumptions will be entertained is commensurate with the hearer's trust in the speaker. If the hearer does not trust the speaker, she would not believe what he says; if she trusts him a little, she will believe it a little; and if she has a great trust in him, she will believe it to a great extent. Moreover, the speaker can not only satisfy the hearer's expectations - he can also exploit them.

However, as Sperber and Wilson are aware, there are cases in which the assumptions about a trustworthy speaker and a trusting hearer do not hold. For example, when a double-glazing salesman intends to make his customer believe that she would benefit from his services, it is unlikely that the customer would regard the fact that the salesman intends to make her believe it as a good reason to believe it. Similarly, neither side in a court case, whether plaintiff or defendant, would accept as a good reason to believe something the mere fact that the communicator intends to make the audience believe it. Suppose that (31) has been said by a double-glazing salesman, and (32) by a defendant in a court:

(31) You would find the room much quieter.

(32) I am innocent.

The customer and the jury would not regard it as a good reason to believe (31) and (32), respectively, that the salesman and the defendant had intended to make them believe these statements. It is obvious that (31) and (32) have been said for the respective speaker to achieve his own goals. Each speaker might have said (31) or (32) even if these statements were inconsistent with the truth, that is, not worth the hearer's while to believe.

These cases, where it is not a sufficient reason for the addressee to believe something that the communicator intends to make her believe it, are not exceptional. The kinds of communication which take place in advertising, political debate, and academic discussion, for example, all seem to belong to this category. Indeed, even in our daily social conversation, these cases are rife. Suppose someone is trying to impress you, the realisation that the communicator intends to make you believe something would not be a good reason for you to believe it. On the contrary, it is likely that it would prove to be an excellent reason for you not to believe it.

As Sperber and Wilson show, the hearer can recover the set of assumptions (I) intended by the speaker without actually believing them. As argued above, the strength which the hearer assigns to these assumptions depends on her confidence in the speaker. All this applies to ostensive-inferential communication. The hearer has to firstly recognise the informative intention, and secondly decide whether she believes what she is being told. The success of



communication has been defined as the hearer recovering the speaker's informative intention, and not as the speaker making the hearer believe something.

Communication can take place between interlocutors who trust each other, hold this trust to be mutual, and strive towards the same goal, that is, the enlargement of the mutual cognitive environment, as in the case of Peter trying to please Mary. It is mutually manifest that there is social cooperation between them.

Communication may also occur between socially unequal interlocutors, as in the case of the prison warder frightening his inmates. The warder possesses a power over the inmates which enables him to do things to them regardless of their will, or even against their will. The inmates cannot but take the warder's communicative intention seriously for their own interest. They are forced to cooperate with the warder.

The case of the double-glazing salesman persuading his customer is different again from either category just mentioned, except that it has in common with the case of the prison warder and his prisoners the fact that communication takes place between unequal interlocutors. Here the addressee does not necessarily regard the communicator as trustworthy, and the communicator intends to inform the addressee of something without her trusting him, or even despite her distrusting him. It is mutually manifest that the intended effect of the communication is for the communicator's benefit, and

not necessarily for the addressee's, even though the communicator may claim otherwise. It is the addressee who has a power over the communicator. The communicator cannot afford to rely on the addressee's cooperation.

This is not to argue that the hearer's trust and co-operation are necessary for ostensive communication. When it exists, it is just one contextual factor among others. However, it does help the fixation of belief, which is presumably why people engage in communication. The point is that there is a social aspect to be taken into consideration when studying communication.

It must be pointed out here that the language of advertising is a language of unequal interlocutors, unequal in the sense that the speaker and the hearer are not on equal terms. They are not a trustworthy speaker and a trusting hearer, who cooperate with each other, and strive for the same end. It is like the type of communication which takes place between a double-glazing salesman and his customer, or a defendant and the jury, rather than that between a prison warder and his prisoners. It is manifest to both the advertiser and his addressee that he is saying something because he wants her to buy the product or service for his own benefit, and not because he genuinely believes that she would benefit from the product or the service. It is not a good reason for the addressee to believe something that the advertiser has intended to make her believe it. The advertiser must make his addressee believe

*frame*

*frame!*

something without her trusting in him, or, indeed, despite her distrusting him.

At this point, it is worth distinguishing 'cooperation' at the social level from 'cooperation' at what one can call 'the cognitive level'. Cooperation at the cognitive level is always present when communication of any kind takes place, and it is a prerequisite for it to happen. Even when war is declared against an enemy, the enemy pays attention to the stimulus the communicator is using, the enemy processes it, and then communication becomes successful. The two sides may not be cooperative with each other socially, but they have cooperation at the cognitive level.

There are cases of communication in which there is cooperation between the communicator and the addressee, not only at the cognitive level, but also at 'the social level', as in the case of Peter offering Mary to make a meal. Sometimes a communicator can rely on the fact that he is regarded by the addressee as a trustworthy communicator, that she is a trusting addressee, and that it is an excellent reason for her to believe something that he intends to make her believe.

Sometimes a communicator can depend on the addressee's cooperation at both cognitive and social levels, but not intend to bear responsibility for the social consequences which result from the communication, as we have seen in the case of Mary getting Peter to mend her hair-drier. The communicator can rely on both cognitive

and social cooperation from the addressee, even if the communicator does not reciprocate by being willing to modify the mutual cognitive environment, as in this case.

Furthermore, there can also be a communicator who does not expect cooperation at the social level. He has to aim at the intended effect by means of his stimulus, and not by means of the addressee's willingness to cooperate. The double-glazing salesman is an example of this category. All these communicators have their addressees' cooperation at the cognitive level, or otherwise communication does not happen at all, but it is cooperation at the social level which varies depending on the situation.

This distinction between the cognitive and the social level in cooperation between communicator and addressee is crucial to my analysis of advertising. The advertiser does not take for granted that he has his addressee's cooperation at either level. Firstly, he works at drawing the addressee's attention and thus at obtaining her cooperation at the cognitive level, by using various stimuli, not only linguistic but also audiovisual. Secondly, even when he has managed to gain the addressee's cognitive cooperation, he cannot expect her cooperation at the social level. It is mutually manifest to the advertiser and to the addressee that they are not equal partners engaged in communication and striving to reach the same goal. The addressee would not treat the fact that the advertiser intends to make her believe something as a good reason for believing it. On the contrary, she might even regard it as an

excellent reason to disbelieve it. The communicator has to resort to other ways of making his addressee believe his message.

In ostensive communication, the speaker provides a guarantee of optimal relevance, and asks for the hearer's cooperation at a cognitive level. However, as Sperber and Wilson point out, the speaker needs not live up to the guarantee of relevance: he may give it in bad faith. So, the cognitive co-operation of the speaker is not required even for ostensive communication to take place.

Relevance Theory can provide a useful framework to analyse ostensive communication in terms of the two layers of intentions, namely, the informative intention and the communicative intention, and the notion of mutual manifestness. I will repeat here the definitions of informative and communicative intentions for the sake of convenience:

Informative intention: to make manifest or more manifest to the audience a set of assumptions (I) .

(Sperber and Wilson 1986a:58)

Communicative intention: to make it mutually manifest to audience and communicator that the communicator has this informative intention.

(Sperber and Wilson 1986a:61)

The goal of communication can be described as the fulfilment of the communicator's informative intention. However, communication may succeed without the communicator's informative intention being fulfilled, for it is possible that the addressee disbelieves or disagrees with assumptions which the communicator intends to make manifest or more manifest to her. The communicator's informative intention can be recognised without its being fulfilled. All the communicator can do is to hope that the addressee will believe what is intended to be made manifest or more manifest to her by the communicator's stimulus.

In ostensive communication, the communicator hopes to increase his chances of success in communication, that is, of his informative intention being fulfilled, by means of his communicative intention, i.e. by making his informative intention mutually manifest to both the addressee and himself. He hopes that the fact that he intends to inform his addressee of something will be a good enough reason for her to believe it.

What happens, then, after the communicator's informative intention has been made mutually manifest, is described by Sperber and Wilson as follows:

By making her informative intention mutually manifest, the communicator creates the following situation: it becomes mutually manifest that the fulfilment of her informative intention is, so to speak, in the hands of the audience; if the assumptions that she intends to make manifest to the audience become manifest, then she is successful; if the audience refuses to accept these assumptions as true or probably true, then she has failed in her informative intention.

(Sperber and Wilson 1986a:62)

Whether the communicator's informative intention is fulfilled or not, in ostensive-communication, the communicator's communicative intention is, by definition, fulfilled. This then alters the mutual cognitive environment of the communicator and the addressee, regardless of the fulfilment of the communicator's informative intention. In other words, the mutual cognitive environment is affected whether or not the communicator achieves the fulfilment of his informative intention.

What is crucially involved in ostensive communication is the alteration of the mutual cognitive environment between the communicator and the addressee, and this inevitably causes the alteration of the social relationship between them. By engaging in ostensive communication, the communicator leaves the fulfilment of

his informative intention 'in the hands of' the addressee, as Sperber and Wilson put it (1986a:62). The addressee can accept it or reject it. Either way, this creates, as a result, some change in the relationship between the communicator and the addressee.

I have examined situations, such as the case of Mary getting Peter to mend her hair-drier, in which the communicator makes his informative intention manifest to the addressee, without making it mutually manifest to both the addressee and the communicator himself. This can be put in the following way: the communicator may intend to have his informative intention fulfilled without reference to his communicative intention. In all the relevant cases I have referred to above, the communicator uses other means of communication to help, such as the display of a hair-drier being set apart, or the illustrations used by the advertisers. Perhaps, these non-linguistic stimuli act as an aid to the fulfilment of his informative intention, which could be helped with the communicator's communicative intention in the case of ostensive communication.

Here, the communicator aims at the fulfilment of his informative intention without having a communicative intention of the type described above. He intends to make his informative intention manifest to the addressee, in other words, to have his informative intention recognised by the addressee, but not to make it mutually manifest to the addressee and himself: no communicative intention is formed. His motivation for doing this is to avoid any alteration of the mutual cognitive environment of the addressee and himself, and



thus any social consequences the alteration may bring with it. Having recognised the communicator's informative intention to make a set of assumptions manifest, the addressee is given a choice of accepting these assumptions as true or probably true. However, because the communicator's informative intention is not made mutually manifest, whether the addressee accepts these assumptions as true or not, the mutual cognitive environment of the communicator and the addressee stays unchanged. Consequently, the communicator is saved from any social implications that may result if his informative intention is made mutually manifest to the addressee and himself.

In the case of the double-glazing salesman persuading his customer, the communicator intends to fulfil his informative intention without making this intention manifest to his addressee. In other words, the communicator may intend to make manifest or more manifest a set of assumptions, concealing his informative intention. In this case, the reason for the communicator to engage in such communication is that he is aware that revealing his informative intention to the addressee may have adverse effects on the fulfilment of his informative intention.

The examples of the advertisements discussed above which contain sexual stimuli seem to belong to a yet another type. Having his informative intention mutually manifest to the viewer and the communicator himself may bring unwanted social implications, as the advertiser of the Okinawa advertisement may face protest from

feminists. Or, it may have adverse effects on the achievement of his aim, as viewers of advertisements in general may distrust advertisers. Moreover, it may not be crucial for the communicator to make the addressee believe a set of assumptions to be true. As long as concepts of sex are triggered, the addressee will entertain them, as humans are inclined to be drawn to them, and the addressee will presumably form favourable assumptions and associate them with the advertisement, and consequently with the product advertised in it.

In the case of ostensive communication, it is hoped that the recognition by the addressee of the communicator's informative intention should lead to the fulfilment of his informative intention. The cases of non-ostensive communication are different and achieved without the communicator's communicative intention formed, that is without the communicator's informative intention mutually manifest. In the case of Mary getting Peter to mend her hair-drier, the recognition by the addressee of the communicator's informative intention would help with the fulfilment of this intention. However, the social implications which the modification of the mutual cognitive environment between the communicator and the addressee may bring must be avoided, and therefore the communicator's informative intention is not made mutually manifest. The double-glazing salesman does not make his informative intention mutually manifest, as doing so may interfere with the fulfilment of this intention. In the examples of advertisements containing sexual stimuli as discussed above, the communicator merely intends to

trigger concepts of sex, and it is not crucial for him whether the addressee should believe his message to be true.

In this section, I have examined the notion of ostension and the role it plays in communication. Ostension is based on two layers of intentions, namely, the informative intention and the communicative intention. The fulfilment of the communicative intention, i.e. the recognition of the informative intention, can lead to the fulfillment of this informative intention, which is presumably the communicator's ultimate goal. However, for the communicative intention to successfully lead to the fulfilment of the informative intention, there has to be some kind of cooperation between the communicator and the addressee. I have considered the significance of cooperation between the communicator and the addressee, and distinguished between cognitive cooperation and social cooperation. For communication to take place at all, cooperation at the cognitive level is a prerequisite.

Although social cooperation is not a requirement for communication to occur, it can play a crucial role in the fixation of beliefs, and hence in the fulfilment of the communicator's informative intention, that is the intention to make a set of assumptions manifest to the addressee. However, there are cases in which the communicator has to make his addressee believe something without having her social cooperation. In these cases, the communicator may resort to covert communication. He intends to make his informative intention manifest without forming any communicative

intention, i.e. intention to make his informative intention mutually manifest to both the addressee and himself. Or, the communicator may engage in covert communication, not necessarily because he does not have the addressee's social cooperation, but possibly because he wishes to avoid the social consequences which engaging in ostensive communication may cause.

Communication does not always occur between a trustworthy communicator and a trusting addressee, or between socially equal participants. It may bring adverse effects for a communicator to engage in ostensive communication, making his informative intention mutually manifest to the addressee and himself. Or, it may have social implications, which the communicator does not welcome. Thus, the communicator may not form any communicative intention, or he may conceal part or all of his communicative intention. These would not be cases of ostensive communication; they are cases of covert communication. Sperber and Wilson's notions of informative and communicative intentions provide an adequate framework to analyse the difference between ostensive communication and covert communication.

#### 4.5. Weak implicatures and non-ostensive communication

Before I try to analyse covert forms of communication, it will become important to distinguish weak implicatures, which are nonetheless ostensibly communicated, from covert forms of communication, which are non-ostensive. In this section, I shall examine weak implicatures which conform to Sperber and Wilson's notion of ostensive communication and therefore can be analysed in terms of the principle of relevance.

In indirect but ostensive communication, some implicatures are strongly backed by the speaker, whereas some are very weakly implicated and, therefore the hearer has to take a great responsibility if she is to believe them. Nevertheless, these weak implicatures are ostensibly communicated. It is worth recalling here that in ostensive communication the communicator's informative intention must not only be made manifest to the addressee, but must also be made mutually manifest to both the addressee and the communicator himself. This overt aspect of communication is crucial to Sperber and Wilson's account of ostensive-inferential communication. Weak implicatures, which are ostensibly communicated, however weakly communicated they may be, comply with this requirement of overtness. They must be distinguished from covert forms of communication, which are non-ostensive and therefore do not conform to this overtness.

In Sperber and Wilson's account of ostensive communication, the communicator's informative intention is not an intention directly to modify the addressee's thoughts. What he does intend instead is to

modify the cognitive environment of the addressee, by making a set of assumptions manifest or more manifest to her. Let us suppose that Paul has said (33) to Kay:

(33) I went to Glyndebourne last Saturday.

Now, where is the hearer supposed to look for the relevance of (33)? The explicatures of (33), that is, assumptions obtained by development of the logical forms encoded by (33), include the following assumption:

(34) Paul has said that he went to Glyndebourne on the previous Saturday.

It can be said that Paul has explicitly communicated (34). It is also plausible to argue that he has expected Kay to supply premise (35) and derive (36):

(35) Glyndebourne is known for its opera company.

(36) Paul went to the opera at Glyndebourne.

The question is, what more, if anything, has Paul implicitly communicated? Are there further assumptions which are members of (I), that is, assumptions which Paul has intended to make manifest to Kay? Kay could provide premises (37)-(40), for example:

(37) Tickets for Glyndebourne are expensive.

(38) People who can buy expensive opera tickets are wealthy.

(39) People who go to the opera are cultured.

(40) People who go to Glyndebourne belong to a certain social class.

Processing (33) in a context which includes (37) - (40), Kay might derive (41) - (43):

(41) Paul is wealthy.

(42) Paul is cultured.

(43) Paul belongs to a certain social class.

However weak these implicatures may be, in many circumstances Paul would overtly communicate (41)-(43), even if he did not intend Kay to derive these particular conclusions. It cannot be argued that he strongly backs them up; she takes the responsibility to a degree for supplying these particular premises and conclusions. On the other hand, Paul could have made a certain assumption about Kay's knowledge and guessed that she would supply just these premises and conclusions.

Thus, it could be that Paul has said (33) in order to impress Kay with his financial and social background, that he is wealthy, cultured, and belongs to a certain social class. He has probably succeeded in making mutually manifest his intention to make these assumptions manifest to her, hence implicated them. What he cannot be sure of is that she will actually access and use just these assumptions, or all those that were manifest. That is what makes them weak implicatures in many circumstances. Because they are weakly implicated, he is dependent on the hearer's ability and willingness to supply these premises and derive the intended conclusions. But he could try to raise his success rate by making a right assumption about Kay, about what information she is likely to have accessible.

Thus, the communicator can achieve successful communication through weak implicatures. Even though he cannot be sure of success, he can make a right assumption about his addressee that she



is likely to access and use certain assumptions in interpreting his utterance, and aim at high probability.

It has been argued that there is a sole criterion by which the hearer identifies assumptions ostensibly communicated by the utterance, namely, consistency with the principle of relevance. Thus, (33) opens up a number of possibilities of implicature. The hearer supplies premises which are accessible in her cognitive environment, and then derives implicatures consistent with the principle of relevance. These are implicatures which a rational speaker might have thought would yield enough effects to make her processing effort worth while, and put her to no unjustifiable processing effort in achieving these effects.

The question here is, how far should Kay seek for possibilities? In other words, how far should she keep adding premises to the context and recovering further conclusions? For example, should Kay add (44) to the context and derive (45)?:

(44) People who go to Glyndebourne do not like hunting,  
shooting and fishing.

(45) Paul does not like hunting, shooting and fishing.

It is very doubtful that Paul has given his hearer Kay any encouragement to supply the premise in (44) and derive (45). The conclusion to be drawn from these examples is that there may be no cut-off point between assumptions strongly backed by the communicator, i.e. implicatures, and assumptions derived from the utterance, but only on the addressee's sole responsibility, i.e. non-implicated contextual implications.

It can be argued in the example above that (35) is a strongly implicated premise and (36) a strongly implicated conclusion, which are strongly backed by the speaker. In contrast, (44) is a very weakly implicated premise and (45) a very weakly implicated conclusion. Though there is some backing from the speaker, the backing is very weak, and the hearer has to derive them on her own responsibility. Nevertheless, both strong and weak implicatures are ostensibly communicated, and therefore are consistent with the principle of relevance.

On the one hand, from the hearer's point of view, there are actually two criteria which she uses in deciding how far she is to investigate. Firstly, the hearer uses the criterion of consistency with the principle of relevance. Secondly, in deciding how far she should go in providing premises, adding them to the context, and deriving conclusions, she uses the criterion governing her own cognitive activities, namely, the search for maximal relevance. That is, she goes as far as she finds it relevant to go. She would not go beyond the point where her processing effort outweighs the

effects she gets out of the derived conclusions. If the effect obtained from the derived assumptions is weighed against processing effort, there will be a point at which it is not worth going any further. On the other hand, from the speaker's point of view, the sole criterion is consistency with the principle of relevance.

It has been argued that the communicator can achieve successful communication through weak implicatures. Even if he cannot be absolutely sure of success, he can rely on a high degree of probability that his addressee will access and use certain assumptions in interpreting his utterance. However, because each individual has a different cognitive environment, and different cognitive preferences and abilities, what is worth the processing effort depends on the individual. Let us suppose that Paul has said (46):

(46) I like Beethoven.

In uttering (46), Paul has in mind symphonies and concertos by Beethoven, as many people might have. On the other hand, his hearer, Kay, has just seen the opera *Fidelio*, and has (47) immediately accessible in her mind:

(47) Beethoven composed *Fidelio*.

Thus, she adds premise (47) to the context and derives (48):

(48) Paul likes *Fidelio*.

However, it is quite possible that Paul did not have *Fidelio* in mind on uttering (46) and did not expect Kay to derive (48). Indeed, Paul may not even like *Fidelio* at all. But since Kay has just seen *Fidelio*, she finds it the most accessible piece by Beethoven. Providing premise (47) thus does not cause her much effort. From Kay's point of view, (48) is a conclusion easily derived from Paul's utterance (46). From Paul's point of view, he has certainly not strongly encouraged his hearer to derive (48); he only very weakly implicated it. Thus, as mentioned above, in the case of a weak implicature, the hearer must take considerable responsibility if she is going to treat it as true.

The communicator can take advantage of this indeterminacy, as we shall see in the examples below. Since there is no clear boundary between assumptions implicated by the communicator and non-implicated assumptions derived on the addressee's responsibility, and since the addressee is always to some extent responsible for weakly implicated assumptions she derives, there is no fool-proof way of determining which assumptions are weakly implicated by the communicator and which are merely non-implicated premises and conclusions: that is, there is no way of proving which assumptions

are weakly, ostensibly communicated, and which are not ostensibly communicated at all.

Let us look at the following exchange between Malcom Turnbull, the lawyer who acted for Peter Wright, and Sir Robert Armstrong, who was the main witness, representing the British government, in the Spycatcher trial. During the trial, seeing Armstrong nervous and rattled by the suggestion that he had told an untruth in order to protect the sources of operations of M15, Turnbull ploughed on. He turned to a letter, which was written by Sir Robert Armstrong to William Armstrong, chairman of the book's publishers, on 23 March 1981, which reads as follows:

I have seen the extracts in the Daily Mail today from Chapman Pincher's forthcoming book, *Their Trade is Treachery*. The prime minister is in my judgment likely to come under pressure to make some statement on the matters with which Mr. Pincher is dealing ... I should like to be able to put her in a position where she could make a statement this Thursday (26th March), if she could wish to do so. I should therefore be very grateful if you would be willing to make one or (preferably) two copies of the book available to me as soon as possible ...

(From 'The wily colonial boy versus the upper

class Brit' in the 15th March, 1987 issue of  
*The Sunday Times*)

Sir Robert agreed that the letter was designed to give the impression that the government did not have a copy of the book, whereas it had somehow obtained the page proofs some six weeks previously. He was communicating the following implicature:

(49) The government did not have a copy of *Their Trade is Treachery*.

This was followed by the exchange below:

T: I put it to you that this letter contains an untruth.

A: It does not say that we have already got a copy of the book, that is quite true.

T: So it contains a lie?

A: As one person said, it is perhaps being economical with the truth.

(Edited extracts from 'The wily colonial boy versus the upper class Brit' in the 15th March, 1987 issue of *The Sunday Times*, where 'T.' stands for Turnbull and 'A.' for Armstrong.)

Armstrong did intend to communicate, even though by implication, (49). It was, perhaps, indirectly and weakly communicated, nevertheless, it was ostensibly communicated by Armstrong making his informative intention mutually manifest to the publisher and himself.

Thus, in this case, the speaker was trying to take advantage of the fact that he was communicating certain assumptions by implicature, rather than explicature, and he was denying his backing for these assumptions, despite the fact that he had ostensibly communicated them. These cases are not exceptional; implicatures are often denied by speakers who ostensibly communicated them but want to shift the responsibility for them to their audience.

The examples I have considered in this section involve weak implicatures. However weakly they may be implicated, they are ostensibly communicated, and therefore can be analysed in terms of the principle of relevance. They all conform to the requirement of overtness, i.e. the communicator intends to inform his audience of

something by making his informative intention mutually manifest to the audience and himself.

In the next section, I shall go back to examples of covert forms of communication, where this overt aspect of communication is lacking, and I shall consider how they can be analysed.

#### 4.6. Covert communication

In Section 4.3, I examined examples of covert communication, in which the speaker does not form <sup>2</sup><sub>^</sub>communicative intention, that is, he does not intend to make his informative intention mutually manifest, for example, advertisement captions (1), (5), (12) and (13). These are not cases of ostensive communication, and therefore the principle of relevance does not apply to them, for it applies only to cases of ostensive communication. In Section 4.5, I have also considered examples of weak implicature, which are ostensively communicated, and therefore can be accounted for by the principle of relevance.

Now, can Relevance Theory account for covert communication? Sperber and Wilson's notions of informative intention and communicative intentions provide an adequate framework to define covert communication. On the one hand, in ostensive communication,



the speaker aims at the fulfilment of his informative intention by fulfilling his communicative intention, that is, his intention to make it mutually manifest to the addressee and himself that he has this informative intention. On the other hand, in covert communication, the speaker intends to achieve fulfilment of his informative intention without forming any communicative intention, i.e. without intending to make his informative intention mutually manifest to the addressee and himself. In these cases, the speaker intends to affect the cognitive environment of his addressee by making her recover certain assumptions, yet he avoids modification of the mutual cognitive environment of the addressee and himself by not making this intention mutually manifest to his addressee and himself. The difference between ostensive communication and covert communication has been described as follows:

Ostensive communication: an overt form of communication where there is, on the part of the speaker, an intention to alter the mutual cognitive environment of the speaker and the hearer.

Covert communication: a case of communication where the intention of the speaker is to alter the cognitive environment of the hearer, i.e. to make a set of assumptions more manifest to her, without making this intention mutually manifest.

(Bencherif and Tanaka 1987)

Relevance Theory deals not only with a specified type of communication, that is, ostensive-inferential communication, but also with cognition. I argue that the notion of relevance can be extended to account for non-ostensive stimuli, and that considerations of relevance offer an appropriate explanation of how covert forms of communication are carried out.

In non-ostensive communication, the hearer does not have the speaker's guarantee of optimal relevance, which offers a criterion for deciding what the speaker intends to communicate, and thus directs the hearer's attention to certain <sup>S</sup>assumptions. However, the principle of relevance is not the only factor involved in human cognition. Human cognition is organised in such a way that it is perhaps more susceptible to certain stimuli than others.

According to Sperber and Wilson, human cognition is designed to pick out relevant stimuli, and to process them in the most efficient way. The notion of relevance proposed by Sperber and Wilson is not only valid in ostensive-inferential communication, but describes a general cognitive tendency determining which of the available stimuli are likely to be processed, and in what way.

It can be argued that covert communication exploits this human susceptibility to certain stimuli. The communicator intends to

communicate something without being overt about it, that is, not by making his informative intention mutually manifest to the addressee and himself, but by relying on the addressee noticing certain things, given the way her general cognitive system is organised. We have considered examples in which sex is used as a stimulus which draws the audience's attention to something. In Chapter 3, it was suggested that perhaps food was one of the stimuli which appeal to human cognition as relevant.

In example (1), the advertiser intends to convey (4) without making the informative intention behind it mutually manifest. He can expect to succeed in conveying (4), even though he does not make his informative intention mutually manifest, because he knows that his audience will probably notice the girl's breasts. The audience are likely to notice the breasts, not because the advertiser made it mutually manifest that he intended them to notice it, but because their mind is organised in such a way that it is susceptible to such stimuli, that these stimuli are relevant to them.

In (5), the suggestion of sex is carried out through both the Chinese character which can mean 'sex' on its own and the illustration, showing a naked torso of a young man. This information transmission is achieved, because the audience are likely to pay attention to these phenomena, even though the advertiser does not make his informative intention mutually manifest to them and himself.

The advertiser of (12) and (13) succeeds in making some assumptions about sex manifest or more manifest to his audience without having to make his informative intention mutually manifest to them and himself, and therefore without giving his guarantee of relevance. The slightest hint of an orgy and a lesbian relationship draws the audience's attention, because their cognitive system is organised in such a way that it is more susceptible to this kind of information. Quite generally, covert communication manipulates triggers of the sort which the human mind cannot avoid responding to.

Despite the *prima facie* inconsistency of some aspects of communication in advertising with Relevance Theory, the central concepts of the theory in fact make it possible to provide an explanation of these very aspects. Thus, we have used the concepts of mutual cognitive environment, mutual manifestness, informative and communicative intentions to bring out the distinction between equal and unequal partners in acts of communication.

Sharing a mutual cognitive environment is the basis for the cooperation and coordination which underlie all genuine acts of communication between 'equal' partners, where the speaker is sincere and the hearer trusts him, and where they both strive towards the same end, that is, maximising the relevance of all new information in order to modify their knowledge of the world.

However, in unequal partnerships, such as in advertising, the communicator, though intending to transmit some information and intending to make the audience recognise that information, does not wish to affect the mutual cognitive environment that he shares with his audience, because he wants to avoid the social consequences that such modification of their mutual cognitive environment necessarily brings with it.

#### 4.6. Conclusion

The notion of ostention is crucial to Sperber and Wilson's analysis of ostensive-inferential communication. Ostensive communication must have the overtness of the speaker intending to alter the mutual cognitive environment shared by the hearer and himself.

The main purpose of this chapter has been to consider examples of discourse which do not conform to ostention. In this type of communication, covert communication, the speaker intends to alter the cognitive environment of the hearer but does not intend to make this intention mutually manifest to the hearer and himself and thus alter their mutual cognitive environment. The reason for this may be that the speaker believes that revealing his informative intention would have an adverse effect on the fulfilment of his informative intention. Or, it may be that the speaker wishes to avoid the social consequences which might ensue from engaging in ostensive communication.

Now, does Relevance Theory offer <sup>λ</sup> contribution to analysing this type of communication, which does not conform to ostensive communication? I have argued that the notion of informative and communicative intention provides an adequate definition of covert communication and distinguishes it from ostensive communication.

The notion of relevance is defined in terms of contextual effect and processing effort: everything being equal, the more contextual effect, the more relevant; everything being equal, the less processing effort, the more relevant. The hearer processes a stimulus and derives contextual effects as a reward. Contextual effects are derived through inference.

In covert communication, however, the hearer does not get her reward entirely through inference. Nor does the speaker rely on the hearer to receive enough contextual effects to compensate for her processing effort. The speaker exploits the fact that humans are susceptible to certain stimuli, such as sex and food. In advertising, for example, the advertiser includes a sexual illustration in the advertisement, which acts as a reward to compensate for the audience's attention.

It could thus be argued that there are elements in covert communication, such as the fact that humans are susceptible to certain stimuli, which are not fully accounted for by Relevance Theory as it stands. The theory provides a useful framework to define covert communication and delineates the position of such elements, but it does not explain how they work. Further research is awaited to explain how factors such as human susceptibility and emotions function in communication and how they interact with the principle of relevance.

## Chapter 5: Images of Women in Advertising

### 5.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses some specific examples of the language used in contemporary advertisements in Japan and the U.K. which target young women. The projection of the image of women in advertising has been the subject of a vast literature in various disciplines, such as linguistics, anthropology, and sociology. My aim in this chapter is to show how assumptions of Relevance Theory can be used as the basis for a detailed analysis of how individual concepts are manipulated in advertising. The focus here is on words which are frequently used in relation to women in advertisements. 'Intelligence', 'individualism' and 'feminism' have been chosen to illustrate this process. I am concerned to reveal what these words actually mean within the particular medium of advertising, and what values they present, by analysing how they are used in a number of concrete cases.

What follows is not a systematic sociological study of the manipulation of Japanese or British women by advertisers, but rather an attempt to see how studying the language used by advertisers may indicate some of the techniques of manipulation. Moreover, in doing so, I attempt to show the position of women in the respective societies.



The examples have been culled from Japanese monthly magazines for young women, *J.J.*, *Can.Can*, *More*, *With* and *Cosmopolitan*, between September 1984 and December 1987 as well as the British equivalents, such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Vogue*, *Elle*, and *New Women*. It is worth noting that these Japanese magazines all have English titles. As will be seen later on, a certain cultural dependence on the West informs much of the interpretation of these words.

Section 5.2 is the discussion of theoretical framework. After a brief examination of how word meaning has been analysed in various linguistic approaches, I shall argue that Relevance Theory provides a principled account for the analysis of the words in question. In the sections which follow, namely, Sections 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5, I shall describe the particular examples 'intelligent', 'individualism' and 'feminist' and their use in advertising.

## 5.2. Word meaning and concepts

There are a number of different linguistic approaches to word meaning. Among them, there seems to be a general agreement that the 'meaning' of a word can be analysed in terms of the associated concept. The classical view is that the meaning of a word is a set of semantic features or a complex concept. This approach is called componential analysis and claims that word meaning is provided by a

definition which expresses the necessary and sufficient conditions. According to this approach, the word 'bachelor' would mean ADULT AND MALE AND HUMAN AND UNMARRIED. This analysis suffers from various defects, however, one of which is that it is not plausible that a total and exhaustive account of a particular word can be provided by a componential analysis of the word.

Based on this criticism, some linguists have adopted an approach, called meaning postulates, as an alternative to componential analysis. This approach views the meaning of a word as a simple concept with meaning postulates or inference rules attached. In this approach, the word 'bachelor' would mean BACHELOR, plus inference rules showing that propositions about bachelors entail propositions about unmarried adult human males. This approach does not suffer from the assumption about exhaustive decomposition of the meaning of a word into an integral number of so-called universal components, nor is it based on any assumptions about atomic components. It has considerable advantages over componential analysis.

Componential analysis presupposes that the meaning of a word is firmly fixed. But some linguists stress the lack of clear-cut boundaries. The alternative approach might be called the fuzzy meaning approach. It is based on the assumption that the meaning of a word is an inherently fuzzy concept and its main claim is that it is impossible to assign a firm definition to any word. What is claimed to follow from this is that there is no point in asking

whether a certain container that seems to fall somewhere between being a cup, a mug, a bowl and a vase is really any one of them. Rather, these concepts are fuzzy, in such a way that any one of them can accommodate our container as a marginal case, even though its level of so-called cuppiness, mugginess, and so on, is low. The advantage claimed for the notion of fuzzy concepts over that of well-defined classificatory concepts is that it offers an account of a wider range of data than the latter can possibly cover.

Sperber and Wilson agree with Fodor, and in fact many others, in that they see the advantages of meaning postulates over componential analysis (see Sperber and Wilson 1986a). They argue that the meaning of <sup>the</sup> majority of words cannot be decomposed into more primitive concepts, and that words such as 'bachelor', to which componential analysis provides a convincing analysis, are exceptional (1986a:91). They point out that one only has to think of a word such as 'yellow' to realise the difficulty of analysing all words in terms of componential analysis.

Incidentally, the meaning postulates approach is compatible with the fuzzy meaning approach. The meaning of a word can be a fuzzy concept and can be analysed in terms of meaning postulates. Sperber and Wilson's main claim is that there is not a single format which maps different words on to their respective meanings and that different words may have meanings of different formats (1986a:90). What seems to follow from this suggestion is the possibility that some words are classificatory and some are fuzzy.

However, this distinction between classificatory words and fuzzy words does not concern me here. The point I am making in this chapter goes well beyond the question of whether 'intelligent' and so on are fuzzy concepts, although Sperber and Wilson would treat them as fuzzy (Wilson, personal communication; Sperber, workshop presentation, Essex University, June 1989). My point is that in the advertisements I examine, words, such as 'intelligent', are being used in ways which clearly go beyond their standard meanings, whether these meanings are classificatory or fuzzy. To say that a concept is fuzzy is not to say that it can be stretched indefinitely far: the word 'cup' may be reasonably applied to various objects, as Labov has shown (see 1973), but to call a computer a 'cup', for example, would be unacceptable. I shall show with examples that the concepts which are dealt with in this chapter are being stretched beyond what most people would consider normal limits. What concerns me in this chapter is not normal fuzziness of meaning, but over-extensions of meaning.

Having accepted that some or all simple concepts may be fuzzy, Sperber and Wilson argue that existing arguments for fuzziness are inadequate. There is a pitfall: the baldness paradox (see Sperber and Wilson 1986b). To summarize their argument, one is led into this paradox by accepting, first, that a man with no hair is bald, and secondly, that if a man with no hair is bald then a man with one hair is bald, and then, via the general principle that if a man with  $(n)$  hair is bald then a man with  $(n + 1)$  hair is bald, to the conclusion that a man with a full head of hair is bald.

Sperber and Wilson offer a solution to this paradox. It starts off by accepting that 'bald' is classificatory concept after all. The underlying assumption is that existing accounts for fuzziness have not shown fuzziness at all. A classificatory concept offers a way of avoiding the baldness paradox. 'Bald', they claim, has a necessary and sufficient condition: having no hair. It follows from this that to describe a man with one hair as bald is strictly speaking false. However, they show, with examples, that many utterances which are strictly speaking false are nonetheless pragmatically appropriate. The use of 'bald' to apply to a man with very little hair would fall into this category. I outline their solution below.

Sperber and Wilson suggest that what is often analysed as literal use of a fuzzy concept might instead be analysed as loose use of a classificatory concept (see Sperber and Wilson 1986b). In the example above, 'bald' may well have clear-cut boundaries and still be used loosely, but acceptably, to refer to a person who falls outside these boundaries.

In this approach, the notions of descriptive use and interpretive use are crucial. As I have outlined in Chapter 2, an utterance can be used to represent a state of affairs which makes it true, namely, descriptive use; or an utterance can be used to represent another utterance or thought which it resembles in meaning, i.e. interpretive use. Utterance (1), for example, may be descriptively used to represent a certain state of affairs, or

interpretively used to represent another thought or utterance which it resembles in meaning.

(1) I'm starving.

A proposition, in isolation from any context, has a number of analytic implications. However, propositions are entertained not in isolation but in a context of background assumptions. When a proposition P is processed in a context {C}, P may yield a number of contextual implications. As shown in Chapter 2, a contextual implication of P in the context {C} is a proposition implied neither by P alone, nor by {C} alone, but by the combination of P and {C}. According to Sperber and Wilson, two representations with P and Q as their propositional content interpretively resemble one another in a context {C} to the extent that they share their analytic and contextual implications in the context {C}. Thus, by definition, interpretive resemblance is context-dependent.

In normal circumstances, a descriptive use of (1) would be false, for the speaker is not really starving. However, the truth of an utterance is not necessary for successful communication. As discussed in Chapter 1, Sperber and Wilson argue that there is no requirement for a maxim of truthfulness. They further argue that the sole criterion that the hearer uses in utterance comprehension is a presumption of relevance, that is, the speaker, in choosing his

utterance, has caused his hearer no unjustifiable processing effort in conveying his message. Utterances are used to represent the speaker's thoughts, and the assumption is that the speaker will choose the most economical means of conveying the thought in question.

Now, Sperber and Wilson call an utterance 'literal' (1986a:233) if it has the same proposition as the thought it is used to express. That is to say that all the implications of the proposition expressed are endorsed by the speaker. When only some of the implications of the proposition expressed are endorsed by the speaker Sperber and Wilson call an utterance 'loose' (1986a:234). I argue that the notion of loose use of language, provides an adequate framework for the ways in which words such as 'intelligence' are used in advertising.

Sperber and Wilson argue that loose use of language is rife in ordinary communication, in fact they argue that cases where an utterance is used strictly literally are a limiting case (see Sperber and Wilson 1986a, 1986b). One may recall that in Relevance Theory, no maxim of truthfulness is required. The only consideration that the speaker has is considerations of relevance, which is defined in terms of contextual effect and processing effort. The speaker will aim at optimal relevance, rather than at literal truth. Often the most economical means of communicating the speaker's thought is not a literal interpretation of it: more often than not, it is a loose one. From the hearer's point of view,

unless there is a specific reason for her to believe that the utterance is literal, she would assume that some, and not necessarily all, of the implications of the proposition expressed by the utterance are communicated by the speaker.

This matches our intuition. For example, my flat is in the building which is located exactly opposite the main entrance of the British Museum. All my visitors are informed of this in advance, but every single one of them points out on their arrival, with a tone of surprise, that my flat is exactly opposite the British Museum. This seems to confirm that the hearer does not take for granted that an utterance is literal, and that all the implications of the proposition expressed are endorsed by the speaker, and assumes that only some of the implications are communicated. My hearers follow this, despite my effort to convey that my utterance is literal.

Thus, utterance (1), which is strictly speaking false, may be good enough for pragmatic purposes, and may indeed be better, than a strictly speaking true one, such as (2), for (1) shares many contextual implications with (2), and yet is easier to process than (2), and thus causes the hearer less processing effort:

(2) I'm extremely hungry and want to eat immediately.



The question here is: how, of all the implications of the proposition expressed by the utterance, does the hearer identify the intended subset? Sperber and Wilson argue that a presumption of optimal relevance provides the sole criterion. When an utterance is made by the speaker, the hearer assumes that it is intended as an interpretation of one of the speaker's thoughts. She processes the utterance and computes those implications which may be relevant to her. She continues to do so as long as it is consistent with the principle of relevance, that is, so long as she gets enough contextual effects to make her processing effort worth while. This process is done in order of accessibility. It is plausible that the literal interpretation is exceptional, rather than the norm, for the literal interpretation may not necessarily be the most accessible one.

Sperber and Wilson's approach deals with loose use without abandoning truth-conditional semantics. When a proposition or concept is loosely used, it is not necessarily the case that it is a vague proposition or concept: it is not that a guarantee of approximate truth is given to the proposition expressed, for no guarantee of truth is given to this proposition at all in the first place. Instead, only some of its logical and contextual implications are taken to be accompanied by a regular guarantee of truth, whereas others are simply ignored.

There is a point at which looseness becomes unacceptable. This is context-dependent (see Sperber and Wilson 1986a, 1986b). To call

a man with one hair bald is just as false as calling a man with a full head of hair bald. The difference between them is not the fact that one is true and the other false, but the fact that one is an acceptable loose use because many of its logical and contextual implications are true, whereas the other is unacceptable since the hearer would be able to derive from it virtually no true descriptive information about the state of affairs it purports to represent.

Thus, the notion of loose use offers a better alternative to the fuzzy meaning approach, which supersedes assumptions of fuzzy meaning but does not share its defects.

It has been mentioned above that the meaning of a word is provided by the associated concept. According to Sperber and Wilson (1986a:86), a concept holds three distinctive types of information, namely, logical, encyclopaedic and lexical. Firstly, the logical entry for a concept is a set of deductive rules. These deductive rules apply to logical forms of which the concept is a constituent, and thus determine its analytic implications. For example, the logical entry for the concept 'elephant' would indicate that it is an animal. Secondly, the encyclopaedic entry for a concept consists of information about the extension of the concept. This type of information contributes to contextual implications of the concept. The encyclopaedic entry for the concept 'elephant' would include assumptions about its tusks and trunk. Finally, the lexical entry of a concept is information about its counter-part in the natural language. The lexical entry of the concept 'elephant' would contain

that it is expressed by the word 'elephant' in English. The structure of a concept analysed in terms of these three types of information will be crucial to the explanation of over-extended ways in which words may be used, in one of the cases leading to a shift in word meaning, as I shall show in the following sections.

Relevance Theory provides a comprehensive framework for analysing a variety of ways in which words may be used. In this section, I have examined different linguistic approaches to word meaning. I have argued that the notion of fuzzy concept offers an apparently attractive analysis of many words. However, it has been argued by Sperber and Wilson that the existing arguments for fuzzy concepts are not satisfactory: they do not show real 'fuzziness'. I have discussed the alternative approach by Sperber and Wilson which centres around the notion of loose use. It has also been accepted that word meaning can be analysed in terms of its associated concept. The structure of a concept has been discussed within Sperber and Wilson's framework.

In the following sections, 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5, I shall examine how a selection of words and concepts are used in Japanese and British advertisements. In doing so, I hope to explore the ways in which women are presented in advertising in the respective societies.

### 5.3. Intelligence

In this section, the following examples are designed to show how the words *chisei* (intelligence) and *chiteki* (intelligent) are used in Japanese advertising. In advertisements found in the magazines studied, and in recent advertisements in general, these words have become ubiquitous. It appears that these words are used in Japanese advertisements to mean something like 'sophisticated', 'elegant', 'fashionable', and so on, to indicate a desirable quality about women, in particular, about their appearance. This, however, is not an indication of a fuzzy concept of 'intelligence'. Rather, I argue that it is a straightforward case of loose use. Let us examine the following:

(4) *Chiteki-de jochin-na shiruku burause.*

intelligent noble      silk      blouse

(Tokyo Blouse)

An intelligent and noble silk blouse.

(5) *Chotto ereganto-de chotto interijensu-na inshoo...*

a bit elegant      a bit intelligent      impression

(Paco Rabanne)

The impression of being a bit elegant and a bit intelligent...

(6) *Intelligence.* (written in English)

*Sore ga kimi no utsukushisa.*

that sub. you of beauty

*Kite-iru fuku ni chisei o kanjiru.*

wear-ing clothes in intelligence obj. feel

*Tatta ippon no kuchibeni kara mo...*

only one of lipstick from even

(Kanebo)

*Intelligence.* (in English)

That is (the secret of) your beauty.

Your intelligence is seen in your clothes. Even in the lipstick you wear.

(7) *Chisei to yasei. San Rooran no ganchiku.*

intelligence and wildness Saint Laurent of suggestion

(Yves Saint Laurent)

Intelligence and wildness. Saint Laurent's suggestion.

These are only a few among many examples of advertisements using *chisei* (intelligence). They are all for women's fashion and they all suggest that women should express their intelligence through their clothes, lipsticks, handbags, and so on. This suggestion is in direct contrast with the fact that in Japanese society, intelligence is regarded as a desirable quality in a man, but not in a woman, and that it is regarded as desirable that women should not be as intelligent or well-educated as men (see Hosoi 1986, Smith 1987). Can we thus take this phenomenon as a sign that Japanese society is changing, and that now intelligent women are accepted and encouraged? This may be a premature conclusion. It is obvious in the examples above that *chisei* (intelligence) in these advertisements is a superficial quality, a sort of quality which clothes, cosmetics, and accessories can give women. It seems to be synonymous with 'elegance', or 'femininity', or 'sophistication', rather than 'brightness', 'cleverness' and so on as a thesaurus would tell us. It is used for appearances, rather than for one's mental state.

Words such as *chiteki* and *chisei* are usually, though not exclusively, used for women in advertising, that is, they describe women in advertisements which are targeted at women. It may be that

women are being seen as a *chiteki* gender, *chiteki* in a limited, superficial sense. And this is all desirable, even though women are still not encouraged to exercise their mental ability to the full. Perhaps women are accepted as *chiteki* in their own, small ways, so long as they do not cross the border and invade men's fields and threaten them. Example (8) provides support for this suggestion:

(8) *Egao mo onna no chisei kashira.*  
smiling face also woman of intelligence it appears

(Narisu Cosmetics)

It appears that a smiling face is also women's intelligence.

In (8), the caption refers to smiling face as 'women's intelligence', implying that there is a distinction between intelligence for women and that for men, and that a smile belongs to the former, not the latter. It might be that 'intelligence' as we have observed it in the examples above is not 'intelligence' in an ordinary, general sense, but in a marked sense, i.e. intelligence for and only for women.

It has been argued above that 'intelligence' in these examples is synonymous with 'elegance', 'femininity' and 'sophistication'. To be sure, 'sophistication' entails some mental quality; after all, it is derived from the Greek meaning 'wisdom'. But again the word is used here in a limited sense. It manifests itself in one's outfits and make-up. It might be that it is desirable for a woman to be intelligent in her choice of clothes and cosmetics. It is not that a woman is encouraged to be intelligent in a general sense, nor is it that she is encouraged to be silly. It is virtuous for a woman to be intelligent, but only in a restricted way. Japanese women are expected to rule the home, and it is they who are responsible for its day-to-day operation, the care of the children and the management of the household budget. They are encouraged to exercise their brain in their jobs, as managers of households, mothers and consumers.

It is possible to argue that Japanese society has long valued women's mental qualities, albeit in limited domains, for an ideal woman has been described since the Meiji era as *ryoo-sai ken-bo*, that is, 'good wife, wise mother' (see Smith 1987:7). One could argue that a *chiteki* (intelligent) woman as depicted in contemporary advertising is a kind of modernisation of this Meiji slogan.

It is worth noting at this point that in Japanese society women are the prime consumers not only of commodities but also of art and culture (Moeran 1983:101). It is possible that these two facts are connected. Advertisements seem to suggest that a *chiteki* woman is



someone who wears smart clothes and decent make-up, smiles sweetly and goes to art exhibitions. Here is an example to illustrate this point:

(9) *Bijutsukan e iku josei ga fuete-imasu.*

art gallery to go women subj. increas-ing

*Purachina o tsukeru josei ga fuete-imasu.*

platinum obj. wear women subj. increas-ing

(Platinum Promotion Forum)

The number of women going to art galleries is increasing.

The number of women wearing platinum is increasing.

These images of women seem to parallel the kind of education received by women in contemporary Japan (see Hosoi 1986, Smith 1987). Before the war, there was an enormous difference between the education received by men and women. After 1945, however, educational opportunities for women were improved. In fact, looking at the figures for boys and girls attending senior high school and college or university, it looks as though Japanese women are enjoying equal opportunities. But if one investigates the kind and quality of education received by men and women, one realises that

there is a significant difference: women tend to go to junior colleges, which are regarded as 'a modern version of the old schools for brides' (Smith 1987:11) and study so called women's subjects, such as home economics, education, language and literature.

It has been argued that the meaning of the word *chisei* (intelligence) is restricted to 'intelligence' which is to be manifested in limited domains. These are traditionally categorised as women's domains, such as fashion, the household, and the consumption of commodities and culture. Sometimes the mental quality of the word even seems to be repressed altogether, leaving the word to mean simply some kind of desirability and appeal to men.

It is revealing to look at a feature carried by *J.J.* (October, 1986). It is entitled, 'Suggestions for intelligent elegance' (*Chiteki eregansu no teian*), and includes the following suggestions (my translation):

(10) a. In choosing a dress... (remember that) 50% of the creation of an impression<sup>5</sup> of intelligence depends on your neck-line. An appropriate round-neck and golden buttons are the key to success.

b. The main trend of this year's suits is towards those which have a tightly shaped waist. ...a tight waist-line leads to an expression of

intelligence.

- c. You cannot omit black, for it is a front runner  
for an intelligent-looking colour.

(10a) - (10c) give us a good idea of what an 'intelligent' woman should look like: she wears a black dress with a roundneck and a tight waist-line, with golden buttons. There is no reason why a roundneck should be more 'intelligent' than a v-neck, for example. Nor is it self-evident why a small waist, the colour black, and golden buttons should be associated with 'intelligence'. The point is that all these features are in fashion at present. Moreover, this ensemble conforms to what Japanese men find desirable in women. I shall come back to this point.

Let us look at another example:

(11) *Chiteki eregansu. Jetta.*

intelligent elegance Jetta

*Chiteki-na machi o chiteki-na josei to*

intelligent town obj. woman with

*Chiteki-ni hashirimasu.*

intelligent drive

(Volkswagen)

Intelligent elegance. Jetta.

It drives through an intelligent town with an  
intelligent woman in an intelligent manner.

Whatever 'intelligent elegance' may mean, clearly the word *chiteki* here means something different from the English word 'intelligent', or even from what the Japanese word *chiteki*, is supposed to mean. In Japanese, let alone in English, 'intelligent town' and 'The car drives in an intelligent manner' are pragmatically unacceptable, and 'intelligent elegance' pragmatically questionable. Only 'intelligent woman' is well-formed. However, what does it mean to say that a woman is *chiteki* (intelligent) here? Because the same word is used for a car and a town, which cannot have the quality of being 'intelligent', it is dubious whether the advertiser meant to describe the woman along these lines. The word is used to express some desirable quality, but not one exactly to do with intellect. It is some sort of pleasant quality for a woman to have, such as being 'fashionable' or 'sophisticated'.

It is worth noting that although the car advertised is German, the background to the advertisement is a European-style, red brick building, with a sign indicating that it is a French restaurant. Apparently, a French restaurant is seen as 'intelligent'. Possibly, the word *chiteki* is synonymous with 'fashionable', since

that is how France is regarded by Japanese women. Or, it might be that German technology and French cooking are seen as *chiteki* assets of the respective countries.

The usage of the word *chiteki* (intelligent) as seen above can be accounted for in terms of loose use. The word is used not in virtue of truth-conditions, but in virtue of resemblance. There is some resemblance between the content the advertisers wish to communicate and what the word *chiteki* expresses. I assume, as pointed out above, that word meaning can be analysed in terms of the associated concept or concepts. I also assume, following Sperber and Wilson (1986a), that a concept consists of subsets of implications. Some of the implications of the concept associated with the word *chiteki* (intelligent), which have to do with desirability and good presentation, have been retained, while others, which have to do with mental ability, have been suppressed.

However, it is the latter implications which are, in normal circumstances, more accessible than the former. What we have seen can be analysed as loose use of the word, and loose to a large extent it is. But the communicator can trust the addressee to achieve the intended interpretation of the word, that is, the implications to do with desirability and presentation, rather than those to do with mental ability, because of the context in which the word is used. Our cognitive system is organised in such a way that it would just reject inconsistency or contradiction. In processing (11), for example, it would cause too much friction in the context

to interpret the word as meaning 'mentally excellent', and there is no reason to believe that the word is being used to refer to some mental property, some of the normal implications are simply suppressed.

The images of women we have seen in the examples above all conform to a stereotype of Japanese women; presentable and a capable house-keeper but not intellectual or academic. Here, I rely on the notion of stereotype, which needs to be clarified in further research. But it seems plausible to argue that this stereotype helps the audience process these examples above by giving the audience access to an adequate context in which they should be processed.

It has been argued here that the words *chiteki/chisei* (intelligent/intelligence) are used in Japanese advertising for women not to imply much about their mental quality, but rather to imply desirability to men. (12) is a clear example of this:

(12) *Kono aki no shuryuu wa yahari*

this autumn of main stream subj. as expected

*chiteki-de sekushii.*

intelligent-and sexy

(Robe)

The main trend this autumn, as you may have guessed, is to be intelligent and sexy.

*Can.Can*, a rival magazine of *J.J.* (mentioned above), carried a feature entitled 'the Declaration to become a "desirable woman"' (*'Ii onna' e no henshin sengen*) (December 1987). The suggestions made there almost completely overlap with those in *J.J.*, for 'intelligent elegance', including the colour black, a small waist and golden buttons. The feature also recommends visits to art galleries, which supports the point made above. Furthermore, one of the three cars listed as 'Cars for "desirable woman"' was Jetta, which is mentioned above, for the very reason of being 'intelligent-looking'. Thus, 'intelligence' and desirability, that is, appeal to men, seem to be virtually interchangeable. Moreover, the implications which are carried by both attributes, on the face of it, appear much more related to desirability than to intelligence.

I have argued that in Japanese advertising words such as *chiteki* (intelligent) and *chisei* (intelligence) are used to mean some desirable quality for women, which is to do with their appearance and possibly to do with their capability as a house-keeper, rather than with their mental quality. I have also argued that this is achieved via the loose use of the words. More specifically, I have argued that, assuming that a concept consists of subsets of implications, one subset of the implications of the concept 'intelligent', which have to do with mental quality of a

person, is suppressed, and the rest simply retained. Thus, the words mean some desirable attribute for women, without the drawbacks of being associated with assumptions about mental excellency, which are regarded as undesirable for women in Japanese society.

This is a clear case of intentional loose use of the words 'intelligent' and 'intelligence'. In Japanese advertising they are used to imply sophistication, femininity, and elegance, which are regarded as desirable for women, which are, in turn, desirable selling points from the advertiser's point of view. In the next section, I shall examine another type of loose use.

#### 5.4. Individualism

It is known that in Japan there has been a strong ideological emphasis on the importance of the group over the individual, and the necessity for the individual to subordinate her interests to those of the primary group to which she belongs. However, there has been an increasing number of advertisements which place an emphasis on the importance of *kosei* (individuality). Does this mean that Japanese group ideology is seriously threatened, a point raised by Moeran (1983:105, 1984:262)? Does it, in other words, mean that Japanese conceptual structures are shifting? I shall argue that an analysis based on Relevance Theory reveals how the word is being



used on the contrary to buttress such group ideology. Let us examine some examples.

(13) *Watashi wa interia-dezainaa. ...Ronjin no*  
I subj. interior designer Longines of  
  
*konquesto wa... chisei-bi dokusoosei ni*  
Conquesto subj. intelligence-beauty originality of  
  
*afure, kiwadatte kosei-teki.*  
full strikingly individualistic

(Longines)

I am an interior designer. ...Longines' Conquest is full of intelligent-beauty and originality, and is strikingly individualistic.

Here, it is worth noting that the watch is described in terms of *chisei-be* (intelligent-beauty).

What is 'individualistic' about the Longines watch remains to be explained. The illustration shows a young European-looking woman, apparently an interior designer, in black and white on the left, and a pair of Longines watches in full colour on the right.

It is worth noting that the woman is engaged in a so-called *katakana* profession, that is, a profession which is described in *katakana* script, which is the marked form of writing used for Western loan words. *Katakana* professions, such as *kopii raitaa* (copywriter), *sutairisuto*, and so on, due to their Western flavour, are regarded as fashionable and therefore desirable. The design of the watches is not dissimilar to that of the classical Rolex 'oyster', which is regarded as prestigious and are in fashion in Japan at the time.

The clue to what is meant by the word *kosei-teki* may be found in the way in which the word is used in the same magazine, *With* (July 1987) (My translation):

- (14) a. This year's popular colour, green, plays an important role in emphasising individuality...
- b. You should wear a vivid-coloured polo-neck shirt to emphasise your individuality.
- c. Your fringe should be cut short and 'individualistic'...
- d. The key to making you look fresh and individualistic is to have your hair in an off-the-face style.

(14a) suggests that the colour green provides you with individuality, for it is the colour in fashion. In the same issue, it is mentioned that green is the most fashionable colour in Paris at the present moment. (14b) widens the selection, as it suggests any vivid colour. (14c) and (14d) are suggestions about hair style; the former recommends a short fringe and the latter an off-the-face style, which is recommended every summer, since it is only sensible to keep one's hair short and off one's face to survive the hot and humid summer in Japan.

What (14a) - (14d) are suggesting is that wearing a certain colour or having a certain hair style makes one *kosei-teki* (individualistic). It is not a matter of having your own style, but of doing things which are supposed to be 'individualistic', which include using a colour which is in fashion at the present time. An 'individualistic' woman of 1987 wears a vivid-coloured polo-neck shirt, carries a green handbag, has her hair up and has a short fringe. Using a colour because it is in fashion, or because it is popular in Paris, is hardly an individualistic thing to do. Vivid colours have always been popular in summer, rather than winter, because of their association with the tropics. It has been recommended every summer that a woman should wear her hair short, or, if long, put it up, for commonsensical reasons. The word *kosei* in (14a) - (14d) implies 'fashionable', rather than 'individualistic'. It is used to mean doing things which are in fashion and which, therefore, other people are doing, rather than doing things one's own way.

This interpretation of the word *koseiteki* as doing things which are fashionable is not limited to advertising. A survey in 1972 (see Suzuki 1975) asked the question 'Do you think that you can achieve greater individualism by following fashion?' 61.5% of women and 48.2% of men answered positively to the question. Whereas only slightly more women than men replied positively, it is interesting to note that nearly twice as many men as women answered with a clear no (41.9% vs. 22.9%), whereas a larger number of women were undecided.

Let us look at another example:

(15) ... *Itaria no ii iro, ii katachi Guccini.*

Italy of good colour good shape Guccini

*Jinsei o kosei-teki ni tanoshimu josei-tachi*

life obj. individualistic in enjoy woman-pl.

*no tame ni.*

of sake for

(Guccini)

Good Italian colour and shape, Guccini. For women who enjoy their life in an individual style.

Individualism should be about accepting that every person is different and that each person should be allowed to believe or do whatever she thinks is right. But here in example (15), it means doing a particular thing, namely, buying certain table-ware; this comes from Italy, which is regarded as a country which produces high fashion and kitchen ware. Here are some more examples:

(16) *Jibun-rashisa ni kodawarimasu.*

self-like      to stick

(Hermes)

I stick to my own self.

(17) *Shinayaka-ni watashi no tempo de ikite-yuku.*

gracefully    I      of tempo at live-go

(Les Sportique)

I am going to live gracefully at my own pace.

Examples (15) - (17) promote European goods, all high-class and expensive. Being oneself is using Italian table-ware and wearing French suits. These advertisements apparently endorse the idea of doing one's own thing, but in practice they advise buying European

products which are expensive and have high status, and which are, therefore, approved of by society. There is a suggestion that the 'individualism' seen in examples (15) - (17) is equivalent to elitism: to be individualistic is to be able to afford expensive European goods, such as Italian tableware and French outfits. Also, there is a hint that 'doing your own thing' is doing things Western, as in example (18):

(18) *Kono natsu, jibun no kami o*

this summer self of hair obj.

*Amerika no onna no ko no yoo ni*

America of female of child like

*Yooroppa no onna no ko no yoo ni*

European of female of child like

*Jibun de heaa-dezain shichao.*

self by hair-design let's

(Benezel)

Let's design our own hair this summer. Just like  
American and European girls.

Thus, designing your own hair is doing what American and European girls do. Here, 'doing your own thing' is acceptable and desirable because, firstly, American and European girls are already doing it, and secondly because America and Europe are regarded as culturally superior by the Japanese.

As noted above, there is also a sense in which 'individualism' is equivalent to elitism: doing things European or American is desirable, for they are superior. Individualism is accessible only to an elite group, who can afford to buy European or American goods.

Let us look at one more example:

(19) *Watashi no iro o motte-inai to, hazukashii.*

I of colour obj. have-not then embarrassing

It is embarrassing not have my own colour.

(Casio)

This advertisement is promoting identical wrist watches in different colours. It is recommended to have one's own colour, for, otherwise it will be embarrassing. Thus, having one's own colour is a way of seeking social approval.

We have examined advertisements which make use of the notion of individualism. References are always superficial, about clothes, accessories, hair style, and so on. Moreover, what is regarded as individualistic in these advertisements is what is in fashion at the time. Thus, being 'individualistic' means being fashionable. Whereas individualism should be about each person acting in her particular way, in Japanese advertising it is used to mean a specific thing, such as wearing a suit of a certain brand, having a handbag of a certain colour, and having one's hair done in a certain style. Considering that advertising is a form of mass communication and is thus targeted at a mass audience, it will mean everybody doing the same thing. What is described as 'individualistic' is something which has already gained social approval, by being in fashion, having high status, originating in the West, and so on.

I argue that Japanese groupism is far from being threatened by individualism. What is happening here is an extension of word meaning via loose use of the word. And yet it is different in kind from the case of *chiteki* (intelligent) considered in the previous section. In the case of the word *chiteki* (intelligent), the implications of the word about one's mental property are suppressed. The transformation of the word 'individualistic' is achieved rather more subtly. What is required is to add an extra premise to the context. The philosophy of individualism is being able to do what one wants; to this context, add the premise that what a woman wants is what the rest of society wants; then, in this context, the



philosophy of individualism becomes doing what the rest of society wants.

Here, too, however, some of the implications of the concept 'individualism' are abandoned: the implications which have to do with each person doing unique things are forgotten. This is due to the fact that doing unique things does not go along with doing what the rest of society wants, where there is a strong emphasis in the society that one should behave as others do and that one should not stand out. As the human mind is organised in such a way that it rejects contradiction and inconsistency, it is part of a reasoning process to eliminate implications to do with doing unique things once it is accepted that 'individualism' is doing what the rest of society wants. The assumption that advertising messages are 'positive' would also help this comprehension process: if 'individualism' is promoted in advertising, it must mean something positive and desirable, so it is unlikely to mean something like behaving differently from others and standing out in the crowd.

Thus, Japanese group ideology is rescued from supposed threats, absorbing them into the conventional. The use of the word *kosei-teki* (individualistic) in Japanese advertisements suggests a way of resolving a clash of cultures by apparently absorbing a notion of the new culture, but interpreting it in the old context against conventional premises. This conclusion is consistent with the findings of Moeran (1984:262) that *kosei* is not equivalent to what we know as 'individualism' in the West and that *kosei* is neatly

absorbed in 'Japaneseness' and thus the Japanese have been saved from a clash with group ideology.

However, there is a question yet to be asked: how does the notion of 'individualism' occur in Western advertising? Is its usage consistent with what we know as 'individualism', that is that each one of us acts in our own particular way? An immediate reaction would be to suspect that individualism in this sense is not promoted. For, if advertising is about selling things to a mass audience, how can it coincide with the ideology that people should be doing different things? The association between 'individualism' and elitism can be traced in advertising in the Western press, as is shown by an advertisement for Citizen Watch, which appeared in the *Sunday Times* colour supplement (13th December, 1987).

The picture, in grey or neutral tones, shows a naked girl who is said to be 'average' in height, hair colour, age and weight. The only thing that does not make her average is her Citizen watch, picked out in luminous gold on her wrist. The caption reads as follows:

(20) There is no such thing as the average Citizen.

There is a pun on the word 'citizen': on the one hand, it is the brand name, and on the other hand, it means a member of society.

As it is written with capitals, just like the brand name in the advertisement, (21) would be recovered as the most accessible interpretation:

(21) There is no such thing as the average Citizen watch.

By adding to the context assumption (22), the audience would derive (23):

(22) An advertisement tends to say how superior the advertised product is.

(23) A Citizen watch is better than average.

However, the alternative interpretation of the word, that is, 'a member of society' is also encouraged by the fact that the advertisement shows the woman as well, rather than only showing a watch, and the fact that her features are described as 'average'. Thus, the following interpretation is also made accessible:

(24) There is no such thing as an average member of society.

The woman who, according to (20), is not 'average', is naked, and there is no overt sign of any social group or class about her. Moreover, she is described in the advertisement as 'average' in height, hair colour, age and weight. Her only obvious distinguishing feature is the watch she is wearing. Thus, the wearing of a Citizen watch implies that she is a very special person. Here, just as women in Japanese advertisements become *kosei-teki* (individualistic) by wearing an outfit of a particular brand or having a handbag of a certain colour, an apparently average woman in this British advertisement is made special by wearing a certain brand of watch.

It is worth noting that, although the woman in the advertisement is described as 'average' in various ways, the model looks anything but 'average' with her beauty and mysterious looks. This seems to suggest that it is not just that a Citizen watch makes one special but that special people like this beautiful woman wear a Citizen watch.

Thus, there is also a sign of elitism associated with 'individualism' here in a British advertisement: to be 'individualistic' means to be able to afford an expensive watch. It is emphasised by the fact that the model, who is described as 'average', is strikingly beautiful and apparently belongs to a privileged group.

The next example is a caption for Kotex Fems Tampons, which reads as follows:

(25) Fems. Doing things your way,

which comes with the following text:

(26) Kotex Fems Tampons are designed for today's woman.

The woman who chooses to do things her way.

Both the caption and the text apparently endorse the notion of individualism.

There are two kinds of illustrations found with the above caption. One of them shows a young woman dressed casually in a shirt and trousers with conspicuous pink punk hair with an orange-dotted, black bow. She has a dog which is in exactly the same pink colour with the same bow on its head. In interpreting (25) and (26) against this background, the audience would extend the context to the immediate visual environment, and interpret this woman as 'the woman who chooses to do things her way'. The audience would be given access to a context in which women are oppressed and cannot do things their way, and therefore do not have such unconventional

hair or pets. The context would also contain a premise such as the following:

(27) Dyeing your hair pink is doing things your way.

The other illustration shows a tall office building. Out of its many windows comes a typewriter, apparently thrown by someone inside, breaking the window pane. The only way (25) and (26) could be relevant would be to interpret them as describing a woman who cannot be seen in the illustration but is throwing the typewriter out of the window. The audience would be encouraged to imagine a situation in which a woman has been working over a typewriter but has lost her temper and is throwing the typewriter out of a window. The audience would also be encouraged to extend the context by thinking of another situation in which a woman is repressed and not able to show her temper and throw a typewriter out of a window; she would be a woman who does not do things her way. The context chosen for the interpretation of the advertisement would include a premise such as the following:

(28) Throwing your typewriter out of the window is doing things your way.

Here, individualism manifests itself in dyeing one's hair pink and throwing a typewriter out of a window. However, these forms of behaviour are not part of mature and responsible adulthood. They are trivial, irrelevant, irrational, and irresponsible. Individualism might imply doing something that other people do not do. The use of the concept in these advertisements has retained only this implication: it shares only some implications of the concept, and not others, such as being responsible for the consequences of one's own behaviour.

The notion of individualism here is reduced to that of doing things which are childish and silly. The women portrayed in these advertisements exercise their individuality by dyeing their hair pink and throwing a typewriter out of a window, rather than doing something that is responsible and significant and yet unique. One does not have to be outrageous in order to be individualistic. However, in the advertisements, outrageousness is emphasised.

Thus, in Japanese advertisements, individualism means doing what other people are doing, or elitism, which particularly manifests itself in the possession of expensive Western goods. In the U.K. also, individualism implies elitism, as we have seen in the Citizen advertisement; or it implies doing something childish and irrational. This last description fits a stereotype of women. Thus, it can be argued that in the U.K., as well as in Japan, the notion of individualism is being used to endorse stereotypes, rather than reflecting real changes in women's status in the respective

societies. The basis of the explanation of such apparently inappropriate uses of the concept can be provided by context-extension. Here again, as in the case of 'intelligence', stereotypes of women help the audience process utterances which involve the concept of individualism by providing easy access to a context which includes certain assumptions about women, thus leading to intended interpretations.

#### 5.5. Feminism

In this section, I examine a case which cannot be explained in terms of loose use, but rather in terms of what Wilson would call (personal communication) 'loose understanding'. One of the situations where loose understanding may happen is where a word is borrowed by one society from another, thus resulting in a change of meaning.

First, let us look at the following example of a caption used in a series of advertisements for Tokyo Gas, one of the city gas companies. This series was so successful that it won the 1984 Asahi Advertising Prize.



(29) *Toshi gasu-tte feminisuto ne.*

city gas feminist tag-q

(Tokyo Gas)

City Gas is a feminist, isn't it?

Why is the gas company called a feminist? The answer may lie in the pictures shown in the advertisements. One of them shows a large pot boiling over on a gas cooker. Another depicts a woman wearing an apron and holding a plate, doing the washing up. Yet another shows the same woman's reflection in a mirror, putting on lipstick. She is not looking at herself, for her attention seems to be diverted by something else. These advertisements are for a gas cooker with a special sensor, which automatically stops the gas supply when the fire is extinguished, a gas boiler with similar sensor equipment, and an alarm for gas leaks. These are all new apparatuses produced by the company. The company is described as 'feminist' on the grounds that it has come up with these instruments to help women with their house work.

The use of the particle *ne* in (29) marks the utterance as distinctively feminine. Thus, the audience is encouraged to imagine a woman's voice praising the gas company for improving kitchen equipment and thus helping women in their household chores.

It is obvious that the loan word *feminisuto* in these advertisements does not mean what the original English word means. A Japanese audience would know what the word *feminisuto* means in Japanese, whether or not they know what the word 'feminist' means in English. However, it is not necessary for the audience to know the meaning of the word in advance. If someone saw the advertisement and read the description, she would realise that *feminisuto* does not mean the same thing as the original English 'feminist'. Apparently, it does not take very long for students doing Japanese at a British university to learn, once they are in Japan, that a *feminisuto* is someone who readily opens the door for women whereas a feminist might get offended by such a male chauvinistic gesture. They learn it not because of their previous knowledge of the English word, but despite their knowledge about it, through the contexts in which the Japanese word is used.

The word *feminisuto* is used in the advertisements to describe a desirable quality. It is meant as a compliment to Tokyo Gas that they should be called *feminisuto*. The company is being praised for improving kitchen instruments, because they help women to perform their household chores. It is chauvinism, rather than feminism, to assume that a way of gaining women's praises is to improve kitchen instruments. Despite the use of the word *feminisuto*, which originated from English 'feminist', the attitude behind the advertisements is sexist. These kitchen instruments are made for the use of women. And some women do not even question why this is so; they simply compliment the gas company by calling it *feminisuto*.

For these women, housework is part of being a woman, just as putting on lipstick is. According to Hosoi (1986:80), 89 per cent of women accept that housework is the women's responsibility. The very concept of a feminist might be foreign to them.

What seems to have happened to the word is that when the English word 'feminist' was absorbed into Japanese, it only retained part of its meaning, namely, the part that involved being somehow nice to women and being worth receiving women's praises. The part that involved being nice to women by treating them equally was ignored. From the point of view of the original meaning of the word, the Japanese usage was loose. And it would have been an unacceptable loose use of the word within an English-speaking community, for it contradicts many of the logical and contextual implications of the word 'feminist', such as accepting women as equal to men. When the word was introduced into Japanese to express male chauvinistic behaviour, there was no clash between the way the word was used and people's knowledge of the word, given that the word did not exist in Japanese. Thus, it was a completely acceptable use of the word. It could be argued that the Western notion of feminism was introduced into Japanese-speaking society in a distorted form. Moreover, the Japanese meaning has ended up by being more contrary than similar to the original meaning. It must be noted that the word 'feminist' has a different meaning in Japanese society in general, not just in Japanese advertising for women.

This meaning shift can be explained using Sperber and Wilson's framework for word meaning. And so, it seems, can historical meaning change and the meaning changes that arise during language acquisition. Let us assume that most words express simple concepts, which have logical entries which determine their analytic implications, and encyclopaedic entries which contribute to their contextual implications. When one first hears the word 'feminist', for example, one opens a new conceptual address, and begins, in a gradual way, to build its logical and encyclopaedic entries. Possible changes of meaning may occur in at least the following ways: (a) a hearer with radically different encyclopaedic assumptions about the world may fail to notice some of the contextual implications intended by the speaker, and recover other, unintended ones which may become part of the encyclopaedic stereotype associated with the concept; (b) something that for the original speaker was an analytic implication, determined by a logical entry, may be perceived as a contextual implication determined by an encyclopaedic entry, and vice versa. In either case, 'loose understanding' occurs, and as the result a change of meaning happens.

In the case of 'feminist', I suspect that the first process mentioned above happened. That is to say that a Japanese-speaking hearer, who held drastically different encyclopaedic assumptions about women and their position in society failed to understand a subset of implications intended by the speaker, which have to do with women being independent and having equal opportunities, and

only recovered other implications , which have to do with being nice to women. This latter subset of implications may have been unintended by the speaker, but they may have been relevant and easily accessible to the hearer because of the kind of society she was in.

Thus, in Japanese the loan word *feminisuto* means something quite different from the original English word 'feminist'. The Western notion of feminism was introduced into Japanese-speaking society in a distorted form which was contrary to the original meaning. the Japanese have managed to alter the meaning, not necessarily by redefining it, but by altering its implications. It could be argued that the distortion in the meaning of the word is an indication of the fact that Japanese society was not prepared for feminist concepts.

In this section, I have examined an example which involves a shift of word meaning which may occur when a word is borrowed by one language from another. In Japanese the word *feminisuto* (feminist) is used in a way which is drastically different from the original. I have argued that this shift can be explained in terms of what Sperber and Wilson would call 'loose understanding', where a hearer of a new word, due to different assumptions about the world in general, fails to notice some of the contextual implications intended by the speaker using the word, and only recovers other implications unintended by the speaker, which become attached to the concept. In this case, the word 'feminist' has retained

implications about being nice to women and inviting women's praises, but has lost implications about treating women equal to men and respecting women's rights. Wilson suggests (personal communication) that loose interpretation is the source of much change in word meaning: children understand adults loosely (i.e they recover some analytic or contextual implications, but not others); foreigners understand foreign words loosely, and so on. Relevance Theory provides a comprehensive framework to analyse such changes in word meaning.

I am aware that there is much more work to be done in this area. However, I hope to have provided a sketch of how the change of word meaning may be analysed in the new pragmatic framework. This is no more than a suggestion for a whole new area of research.

## 5.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have considered some concrete examples of advertisements using a small number of specific words and shown how extension and shift of word meaning may be analysed in a framework based on Relevance Theory by Sperber and Wilson (1986a). The words which have been examined in this chapter are 'intelligent', 'individualistic' and 'feminist'. I have deliberately selected an extremely small data set to exemplify how different kinds of extension of word meaning, which may result in the change of word meaning, can be explained using the assumptions of the theory.

Section 5.3 discussed Japanese examples involving the word 'intelligent', and showed how the word is used as synonymous with words such as 'feminine', 'sophisticated', and 'elegant'. I have argued that this can be analysed using the notion of 'loose use' (Sperber and Wilson 1986a, 1986b), where some of contextual implications associated with the word are abandoned, while others are retained. Contextual implications about one's mental quality are suppressed in the examples, whereas those about presentability and desirability to men are emphasised.

Section 5.4 focused on 'individualism' and examined Japanese and British examples. It was argued that in advertisements in both societies 'individualism' is used as closely associated with

eliti- sm, that is to say that those who can afford to buy special expensive goods, often Western goods in the case of Japanese examples, achieve 'individualism'. It was also argued that, rather than reflecting true individualism, the word in the examples tends to maintain stereotypes of women. My claim was that this may be analysed as yet another type of loose use which involves the addition of an extra premise to the context.

The loan word *feminisuto* (feminist) has been examined in Section 5.5. Examples have shown that in Japan the word has a drastically different meaning from the original. I have argued that this can be analysed in terms of what Sperber and Wilson would call (personal communication) 'loose understanding'. The analysis is based on the assumption that some contextual implications associated with the word intended by the speaker may be lost by the hearer because she has assumptions, easily accessible, about the world which are not shared by the speaker, and vice versa.

In my analysis of how these words are used in advertising, I also demonstrated the ways in which women are portrayed. Contrary to the frequent use of words such as 'intelligent' and 'individualistic', which might suggest new images of women, a close examination reveals reinforcement of the traditional role models. Women's 'intelligence' manifests itself in their choice of clothes and cosmetics and their sweet smile. 'Individualism' turns out to be a search for high fashion and social approval. A 'feminist' is someone who provides sophisticated kitchen gadget and thus helps



women to do what is regarded as their job, i.e. housework. Rather than reflecting a real change in the attitude to women, these words are used in ways which support and emphasise stereotypes of women.

The observation of the advertisements using words such as 'individualistic' and 'feminist' has shown ways in which a society may absorb new notions from another society. Japanese society seems to have coped with potential threats from the introduction of concepts such as individualism and feminism by interpreting them against the background of traditional values, or removing some of the contextual implications attached to the concept which may contradict conventional premises. Thus, Japanese group ideology and male chauvinism have been rescued, and potential cultural clashes have been resolved.

## EPILOGUE

The purpose of this thesis has been to evaluate some of the basic assumptions of Relevance Theory and apply the theory to an analysis of the language used by advertisers. In so doing, I hope to have shed new light on some of the theoretical assumptions and to have added to an understanding of the overall style of advertising language.

The heterogeneous nature of the thesis is the result of an attempt to analyse a recognisable style. I take style to be a jigsaw puzzle; a picture consisting of numerous pieces of different shapes and colours. A particular style of writing is a complex conglomerate of various aspects of language use. Chapters 3 - 5 have isolated for analysis some of the most striking characteristics of one particular style. Thus, Chapter 3 examined the use of the pun in advertising. This took us through considerations of ambiguity and metaphor. The focus of Chapter 4 was audience manipulation via covert communication, as opposed to ostensive communication which is the core of Sperber and Wilson's analysis of communication. This gave us an opportunity to re-examine fundamental properties of communication. Chapter 5 discussed how individual words can be used in extended ways, in one case leading to a definitive shift in word meaning. In doing so, we were faced with sociological considerations of the status of women.

The apparently narrow analytical focus of these chapters in this way has led us through a whole array of theoretical and descriptive problems in semantics, pragmatics, rhetoric and sociology. Despite the low respect which advertising is accorded in the intellectual world, advertising has thus in a sense proved an avenue toward understanding the human mind.

Notes

- 1 Contrary to Sperber and Wilson's usage, I systematically consider the speaker to be male and the hearer to be female, on the grounds that advertisers are nearly always men and their targets tend to be women.
  
- 2 Vowel sequences such as aa, ii, and oo are frequently considered to be long vowels. A true long vowel, however, can only be assigned a prominence, that is, high tone or stress, on its initial element. But it is possible for the second element of a so-called long vowel in Japanese to bear such prominence. Therefore, they should be written as sequences of two vowels.

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