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Deliberate ambiguity in slogans

Recognition and appreciation

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In slogans used in public information, politics, and advertising, and also in titles of books, documentaries, or articles, ambiguity is often employed to pique the interest of the reader in the message that is conveyed. According to several theories of text processing, this deliberate ambiguity may gain greater appreciation than slogans employing other rhetorical means. A special form of deliberate ambiguity is studied in this contribution: slogans that may be taken literally. The notion of salient meaning explains what happens when idiomatic meaning is reinterpreted into literal meaning, to fit the context. Instead of the esthetic experience often attributed to metaphorical expressions, this kind of ambiguity evokes humor. An experiment shows that deliberate ambiguity in slogans has a positive effect on appreciation. Recognition of the ambiguity is a strong factor in the appreciation of these slogans. Even nonambiguous slogans are appreciated more if they are recognized as ambiguous.

Introduction

In the year 2000, Ken Livingstone was elected Mayor of the City of London as an independent candidate. The advertising agency Euro RSCG Wnek Gosper designed his campaign. After Livingstone's election, some public information campaigns in the City of London were fashioned after his election campaign. These advertisements use the character of Ken, or the Mayor of London, making a statement on a current state of affairs. This statement is usually the slogan on the billboard, together with a picture of Ken. Public transport in London was an issue in both the election and the public information campaigns. The example in (1) was one of the slogans used in the election campaign. In Figure 1, the complete advertisement is shown.

(1) Where Ken stands on the tube

Figure 1 shows the background of the slogan in (1) to be a picture of Ken among several others in the standing space of an Underground train carriage, looking at the reader. The interpretation of (1) is deliberately ambiguous. A salient meaning of 'to stand' in combination with 'where' is "to have a (strong) opinion". The slogan in (1) announces the opinion of Ken on the topic of the London Underground. However, in the context of the advertisement in Figure 1, the slogan describes quite literally the whereabouts of Ken. It takes little imagination to read Ken's opinions from his face, and this is where the two interpretations twist. In this ar-

Figure 1   Advertisement from the election campaign of Ken Livingstone
(courtesy of Euro RSCG Wnek Gosper)

ticle, we aim to investigate the interpretation and effects of deliberate ambiguity.

Deliberate ambiguity has been associated with the London Underground earlier. Bürli-Storz (1980) already noticed that billboards, especially in the London Underground, quite often expressed ambiguous messages. The British are known for their appreciation of puns. This phenomenon of deliberate ambiguity is, however, used in the text and picture of advertisements in many countries. Apparently, advertisers believe that it is effective to use deliber-

ate ambiguity in advertisements.

In studies on the visual interpretation of advertisements, it has been noted that pictorial metaphors are appreciated (Forceville, 1996). In general, the textual and visual rhetorical devices known as tropes are appreciated more than those that follow fixed schemes like rhyme (McQuarrie & Mick, 1999). A general effect of rhetorical devices might be that more attention is paid to their processing, given an extended dual-process model of advertisements (Meyers-Levy & Malaviya, 1999). If the rhetorical device is humor, it has a positive effect on appreciation, but this effect is not unproblematic (Spotts, Weinberger, & Parsons, 1997; Zhang, 1996). In advertising and elsewhere, the interpretation of metaphor, idiom, and ambiguity is not unproblematic either (Attardo, 1994; Giora, 1999; Lakoff & Turner, 1989).

The phenomena discussed with respect to (1) do not have their effects in advertisements only. Typically, slogans are elliptical utterances, leaving the interpretation of anaphoric expressions more open, and inviting more inferences. Moreover, slogans stand alone: a slogan does not occur between the other lines of a text, but on top of it, usually in a larger font (or in speech: shouted by a crowd, or the 'sound bite' of a public speaker). Catchphrases, headings, punch lines, political mottos, mission statements, headlines in newspapers, and titles of books, television series, or documentaries share the properties of deliberate ambiguity that slogans may have. The focus of this paper will be the use of slogans in advertisements.

In the next section an analysis is given of the interpretation of deliberate ambiguity, and its possible effects in advertisements. Subsequently, experimental research on the appreciation of deliberate ambiguity in relation to the recognition of ambiguity is reported.

Linguistic theory and interpretation of deliberate ambiguity

In this section, a definition of deliberate ambiguity is developed from a linguistic perspective and possible effects of

deliberate ambiguity are discussed as is the relation between appreciation, recognition, and persuasive communication. Also research questions for the experiment are formulated.

Priority of interpretation: Literal or salient?

One of the main problems with the interpretation of ambiguity is the determination of the consecutive stages in which a reader or hearer recognizes and resolves the ambiguity. The interpretation of (1) as depicted in Figure 1 might be called literal. The abstract 'stand', meaning 'having an opinion,' however, reflects the interpretation without context. The abstract meaning is thus prior to the literal meaning. Rather than literal meaning, some notion of default meaning determines priority in linguistic interpretation.

Especially with respect to the interpretation of metaphor, the problem of literal interpretation has been addressed quite often (see, e.g. Black, 1962; Ortony, 1979; more recent contributions are discussed below). A distinction between literal and figurative interpretation suggests that literal interpretation is prior to figurative interpretation, but this distinction is not viable (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In this section, we try to formulate an alternative for literal and figurative meaning. We will not focus on metaphor, but on deliberate ambiguity in general.

Ambiguity is often based on wordplay, but we want to distinguish between wordplay and deliberate ambiguity. Three examples of wordplay are given in (2).

(2) a. Appethai (name of Asian restaurant)
    b. Hair we are! (Smith hairdressers) (Bürli-Storz, 1980)
    c. The prose without the cons (The Times) (ibid.)

According to Attardo (1994), verbal humor is based on a paronym: a word or sentence that is used in two different interpretations. In the kind of wordplay that is exemplified in (2a)–(2b), the paronym is the only ingredient. In (2a), the name of the restaurant sounds like *appetite* when pronounced with an Asian accent. In both interpretations, there is only an association with notions in the context. In (2b), the slogan as a whole has only one interpretation, namely the announcement of the presence of Smith hairdressers ('Here we are'!). The interpretation given on the basis of the word *hair* is nonsensical. Only the association with 'hair' and 'hairdressers' remains. The humor is in the pronunciation of the paronym, not in its meaning. In (2c) it is not just the paronym that creates two meaningful interpretations of the slogan: if you buy the Times, you'll get the advantages without any disadvantage; when you read the Times, you'll read prose without any deceit (there are, in fact, two paronyms here). Because of the spelling, and the context provided by the name of the newspaper, the latter interpretation seems to be prior to the former. In the remainder of this paper, wordplay as such will not be considered: we will focus on forms of ambiguity that create meaningful interpretations of the slogan as a whole.

We stated that literal meaning is not always prior to figurative meaning. Why is that a problem? This can be illustrated by (3), a slogan in the campaign to make the country more aware of the discrepancy between the value of London for its economical contribution and the consequent benefits for Londoners: 'Londoners are punished by paying over £20 billion more in tax than they receive in public spending' (City of London website, 2001).

(3) The mayor wants to abolish capital punishment

This is a punishment for the capital. But of course, the first interpretation a reader of (3) will have is that the Mayor wants to abolish the death penalty. The meaning of the nominal compound 'capital punishment' is prior to the compositional interpretation of adjective and noun in a literal interpretation. Now, the problem is this: compositional interpretation is one of the basic principles of formal semantics; literal meaning (or more precisely, an autonomous and static relation between a word and its meaning) is essential to maintain the principle (Gamut, 1991).

Examples like (3) made Lakoff & Johnson (1980) abolish the concept of literal interpretation. They claimed that formal semantic theories were intrinsically wrong. Lakoff & Turner (1989) introduced the concept of conventional interpretation as an alternative: an expression is conventionally

interpreted when it is known by heart. The difference with literal interpretation is that there is no need to build the meaning of an expression compositionally: *capital punishment* is directly understood as death penalty. More recently, it has also been claimed that people actually produce collocations like 'capital punishment' and other idioms in one piece (Jackendoff, 1995; Schilperoord, 1996).

These new ideas on idiomatic expressions may save the formal semantic theories as well. Leezenberg (1995) claims that a theory of lexical meaning, in which contexts determine which meaning is prevalent, may save the idea of compositionality while the idea of literal meaning is relaxed. Pustejovsky (1993) presents a theory of the organization of the lexicon that is based on such principles. What their theories amount to is that the co-occurrence of words in a sentence determines their specific meanings. If these meanings do not fit in the context of the sentence, other meanings will be employed to come up with a satisfactory interpretation. So priority of meaning is determined by the interaction of words and their contexts. This way of looking at interpretation dispenses with literal interpretation.

There is only one problem: the analysis of ambiguity should contain a twist in the interpretation. The abstract interpretation of (1) collides with the interpretation of its context, and this collision creates the other interpretation. The humorous or pleasant effects of deliberate ambiguity are partly explained by the collision. A distinction between prior and contextual interpretation is necessary to explain the effects of deliberate ambiguity. This distinction can be made by introducing the concept of saliency of meaning. "The salient meaning of a word or expression is its lexicalized meaning, i.e., the meaning retrievable from the mental lexicon rather than from the context" (Giora, 1999). It consists, among other things, of idioms and collocations. Expressions are almost always understood in their salient meaning, whether or not they fit the context. The meaning of 'capital punishment' as a collocation is salient. Because it does not fit the context, the literal compositional interpretation of the two separate lexical meanings is activated.

Salient meaning does not correspond to idiom in all cases. An example of this is given in (4). The slogan is presented within a context on a billboard (together with a picture of Ken).

(4) *Ken's transport policies*
    "Put more wheels on buses"
    More London buses to have wheelchair access
    Claptrap or clever? Phone 0800 019 01199

The salient meaning of the word 'wheels' is literal (car wheels), which would result in an awkward transport policy: technical adaptation of buses is usually not part of transport policies. A *pars pro toto* meaning of the word 'wheels' is wheelchairs, and this meaning fits the context. In co-occurrence with *buses*, wheelchair is not the lexical meaning that becomes salient. In (3) and (4), the same interpretation process is followed: in (4), in collocation with *buses*, the interpretation of car wheels is prior to wheelchairs. In both (3) and (4), salient meaning gets priority.

In short, a definition of deliberate ambiguity that takes into account the difficulties with literal and conventional meaning might be: A slogan that contains an expression of which the salient meaning does not fit in the context, whereas an alternative interpretation of the slogan with less salient meaning does, is called deliberately ambiguous.

In this section we have discussed some of the interpretation problems of deliberate ambiguity. We did not discuss possible effects of deliberate ambiguity. This will be done in the next section.

Effects of deliberate ambiguity: Humor and other pleasant feelings

Giora (2002) refers to Freud (1905) when she characterizes the pleasure in figurative language as recognizing the familiar in the novel. She does not distinguish between humor and other pleasant feelings conveyed by figurative language. In this section, we want to define two patterns of interpretation of deliberate ambiguity: one leading to humor, and one leading to other pleasant feelings.

With respect to (literary) metaphor, pleasure from esthetic aspects is studied more often than humorous effects. Goatly (1997) mentions humorous effects of metaphors briefly. In his terms, inactive metaphors may be revitalized. According to Steen (1994), metaphors that have a figurative, conventional meaning as their primary meaning may convey humor. Their humorous effect lies in the recognition that the literal (or rather, compositional) interpretation, normally the less salient meaning, has become contextually more appropriate. This explanation has become difficult in the view of the definition of deliberate ambiguity in the previous section, where salient meaning and less salient meaning were meant to define all kinds of deliberate ambiguity, humorous and pleasant. Is it possible to make a distinction between esthetic and humorous ambiguity?

When talking about effects of interpretation, it is important to keep in mind that different readers of slogans may experience different effects. Between individual lexicons, saliency of lexical meanings may differ. Moreover, contextually appropriate interpretations may differ from individual to individual. We are trying to describe patterns of interpretation that may convey an effect, rather than specific interpretations of utterances. With respect to deliberate ambiguity, two patterns may be distinguished: an open-ended and a closed interpretation of contextually appropriate meaning. Before we illustrate these patterns, we give an explanation of the way in which the effects of the interpretation may come about.

If it is a writer's intention to communicate purely informatively with his or her reader, he or she has to obey the conversational maxims (Grice, 1975). If something is stated that does not fit the context, the expression is obscure. In this case, the maxim of Manner is violated. A reader does not assume immediately that the writer did not want to communicate (following the cooperation principle; Grice, 1975). Therefore, the reader changes to the non-bonafide mode of humor (Attardo, 1994). In this mode, the reader does not assume the message is informative, but looks for humor in the message instead. Any interpretation of the message that fits the context and explains the paronym may be used. In

(4), for instance, 'more wheels on buses' is obscure in its context, but in the new interpretation it explains the use of the paronym 'wheels'. Given the new interpretation, the old interpretation may still be revived as an alternative state of affairs. This explanation of humorous interpretations marks the incongruence between salient meaning and context, and explains the importance of recognizing the incongruence. A violation of a Gricean maxim is not always followed by a humorous interpretation: metaphorical and argumentative interpretations are possible as well (Levinson, 1983; Lagerwerf, 1998). We may expect that these alternative interpretations are guided by less salient meanings of a specific lexical item.

How can literary metaphors be distinguished from humorous, 'revitalized' metaphors? An example of a metaphorical slogan is given in (5), again from the Greater London Authority. In Figure 2, the advertisement is shown as a whole.

(5) Let's not turn sardines into guinea pigs

In Figure 2, the background for the slogan is a black and white picture of a crowded Underground train carriage. There are two differences between this advertisement and the examples (1), (3), and (4): Ken is not present in the advertisement, and the picture is artfully blurred, giving it a gloomy effect. The salient meanings of 'sardine' and 'guinea pig' are the animals they refer to. Their co-occurrence makes the interpretation of the slogan obscure. The less salient meanings 'packed sardine' and 'people used as laboratory animals' may be used to find a contextually appropriate interpretation. Knowledge of the context (given in the accompanying body of small font text, and the background already described) provides the key to a solution: 'The Mayor of London is against proposals to break up the Tube'. Sardines are personified as people in the crowd, 'packed like sardines', and they should not be turned into guinea pigs, or laboratory animals, personified as people undergoing severe suffering from irresponsible experiments with the Underground. The interpretation of (5)

GREATER**LONDON**AUTHORITY

Let's not turn sardines into guinea pigs.

The Mayor of London is against proposals to break up the Tube. The proposals will mean dividing up maintenance and repairs between three different companies, with yet another running the trains. It's a juggling act that the Mayor fears will endanger lives. London's new transport commissioner, Bob Kiley, turned around the New York subway. He believes that lessons must be learned from what happened on Britain's railways. The main lesson is that safety and efficiency require unified management. Two out of three Londoners agree the tube must not be broken up.* Put simply, a break up of the tube rings too many alarm bells. The Mayor wants to stop those bells turning into sirens. **For more information about the debate on the future of the tube visit www.london.gov.uk GLA Romney House, Tufton Street, SW1P 3PY.**

*Source: MORI

The Mayor of London keeping Londoners informed.

Figure 2   Advertisement from the issue campaign on public transport in London (courtesy of Euro RSCG Wnek Gosper)

might give a pleasant effect, rather than humorous (although individual differences are very likely).

An explanation for the distinction between pleasant and humorous might be the following. In (3) and (4), the interpretation that fits the context narrows down to an unambiguous interpretation that indeed fits the context. The straightforwardness of this closed interpretation (often compositionally derived) contrasts with the obscurity of the salient interpretation. In (5), the interpretation that fits the context is still open to associations with people being packed like sardines in the Tube, or being manipulated like guinea pigs by traffic managers. These open-ended (interactive) interpretations are characteristic for metaphor (Black, 1962). Whether or not interpretations are experienced as open-ended or closed is dependent on the experience of individual readers. The distinction between closed and open-ended interpretation refers to different patterns of interpretation, not to different specific interpretations of examples. In the next section, deliberate ambiguity is taken to be ambiguity with a closed interpretation and with humorous effect.

Appreciation of deliberate ambiguity in slogans

From a corpus analysis of London Tube billboard texts, Bürli-Storz (1980) concludes that deliberate ambiguity is highly appreciated. She assumes that in German-speaking countries, deliberate ambiguity is less popular. The appreciation of humor may differ between cultures and social groups (Kuipers, 1999). It is interesting to see how deliberate ambiguity is appreciated in a Dutch setting, twenty years after Bürli-Storz (1980) completed her research. We expect deliberate ambiguity to have a humorous effect, but more esthetic effects are possible as well.

An important aspect of advertisements is that they are documents with a persuasive communicative function. Humor in slogans is probably used for persuasive purposes. How does humor enhance the effectiveness of advertisements? An interesting model for the processing of advertisements is given in Meyers-Levy and Malaviya (1999). The model is a thorough extension of dual-process models like the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Essentially, the model reflects that the degree of attention a consumer has for an advertisement determines the way he or she processes the advertisement. There are three possible approaches to processing an advertisement: experiential, heuristic and systematic. In the experiential approach, only peripheral cues are processed. In the heuristic approach, rules of thumb may guide the consumer through

the interpretation of pictures and text. In the systematic approach, the consumer processes the advertisement carefully, taking all the information provided into consideration. The degree of attention that determines the way of processing depends on several different factors: The consumer's state of mind, the product type, fear appeal or the presence of information in the advertisement may affect the involvement of the reader. A new element in comparison with the ELM is a check on consistency: Having processed the advertisement in one of three possible ways, the consumer judges whether or not he or she is satisfied with the information as processed. If the processed information satisfies expectations, the process is completed (if little attention is expected, experiential processing may provide a sufficiently satisfying result). If expectations are inconsistent with the information as processed, the model is reentered, but with more attention. The consumer may finish the process when he or she is satisfied, or leave the process in a state of disappointment.

The interpretation process of humor (and indeed of metaphor, according to McQuarrie & Mick, 1999) fits nicely in this model. If heuristic processing is assumed for reading the slogan and experiencing the context, the check on consistency will mark the interpretation as inconsistent, and the reader reenters the model with more attention, in this case using a systematic approach. If the second run provides a satisfying interpretation of the deliberate ambiguity, the process is closed with satisfaction. If no interpretation is found, the reader leaves the process disappointed.

McQuarrie & Mick (1999) discuss the use of rhetorical devices in advertisements and distinguish between tropes and schemes. Tropes are rhetorical devices that allow for novel interpretations, such as metaphor. Schemes are rhetorical devices that play with conventions of form, such as rhyme. There is no novel interpretation involved, but certain persuasive effects are expected. Next to rhyme, we find the use of second person pronouns ('the army needs you'); the imperative ('join the navy!'); contrast ('make love, not war'), lists of three ('no man, no woman, no dime for the army'); and positive evaluative terms ('unique job opportunities in

the army'). In Dutch advertisements, one scheme with supposedly strong effects is the use of the English language in slogans (Gerritsen, Gijsbers, Korzilius, & Van Meurs, 1999). According to McQuarrie & Mick (1999), tropes may be appreciated more than schemes, but only when they are recognized and correctly interpreted.

The appreciation for deliberate ambiguity can be explained by the combination of effort and satisfaction: if the model needs to be run twice, there is more appreciation for the satisfying interpretation. On the other hand, if the model is run twice without a satisfying interpretation, there will be less appreciation. Deliberate ambiguity thus has its dangerous side: There is more appreciation when it is recognized and interpreted, but less appreciation when it is recognized without a satisfying interpretation. Other rhetorical means in the form of schemes may receive less appreciation, but do not contain the risk of misinterpretation.

Research questions

In all cases, recognition of the salient meaning that does not fit the context is crucial for interpreting (humorous) deliberate ambiguity. Therefore, the research questions aim to reveal the relation between recognition and appreciation, as follows:

1. Are deliberately ambiguous slogans appreciated more than other slogans?
2.1 Are slogans that are recognized as ambiguous appreciated more than other slogans?
2.2 Are deliberately ambiguous slogans that are recognized as such appreciated more than deliberately ambiguous slogans that are not recognized as such?
2.3 Are (incorrectly) recognized slogans appreciated more than (correctly) unrecognized slogans?

In general, the expectation is that recognition enhances appreciation. However, the ambiguity needs to be resolved satisfactorily. We expect appreciation to increase when the ambiguity is recognized and resolved. Conversely, we expect appreciation to decrease when interpretation fails.

In the experiment, deliberate ambiguity is expected to convey humor. Deliberately humorous slogans are expected to differ more from other slogans on the aspect of humor than on the aspect of beauty.

Deliberately ambiguous slogans differ from other slogans in their rhetorical nature (see previous Section 2.3): Compared to rhetorical means in the form of schemes, they are expected to be appreciated more. However, one scheme that is widespread in Dutch advertisements is the use of the English language. It may be that this particular scheme is appreciated more than other schemes, and perhaps more than deliberate ambiguity.

The experiment

Pilot study

In order to explore possible biases in judgments of ambiguous slogans, a pilot study was performed. Fifteen Dutch students each graded 43 ambiguous slogans on a scale from 1 to 10. The students were not informed of the purpose of the questionnaire, or the ambiguity of the slogans. Most slogans were in Dutch. The slogans were assembled from billboards, signboards, books, and documentaries. In addition to the students' judgments, the slogans were judged based on linguistic and pragmatic criteria (Lagerwerf, 1999): Deliberate ambiguity should be present, and the slogans should have two sensible interpretations that both have positive appeal (see also Tanaka, 1992).

We present some of the results here, by presenting only the worst three and the best three slogans, based on the mean ratings of the students. These results are analyzed and compared with the expert's analysis. Differences may identify biases.

In (6), the three worst slogans are given, with a translation of each interpretation, and the mean value between brackets (scale from 1 to 10).

(6) a. written on a coach for group touring parties
       Goed uit met Ruys (3.6)
       (salient meaning) Well off with Ruys!
       (meaning with contextual fit) Party with Ruys!
   b. on a website for a cleaning service
       … als het gaat om schoonmaak in de reinste zin (3.4)
       (salient meaning) … if cleaning in the "purest sense" is wanted
       (meaning with contextual fit) … if the tidiest cleaning is wanted
   c. naughty commercial for underwear
       Je hebt iets … met Schiesser (2.7)
       (salient meaning) You've got something good … with Schiesser
       (salient meaning with contextual fit) You have a relationship … with Schiesser

Only the ambiguity of (6a) is in agreement with the linguistic and pragmatic criteria. In (6b), 'reinste zin' is a contamination of 'ware zin' ('true sense') and 'rein zijn' ('being pure'). This contamination creates the wordplay, and makes the slogan very forced. In (6c), it seems that the slogan is not relevant with respect to the commercial. In the one interpretation, the product is not relevant ('you've got something good' counts for all products); in the other, the commercial is not relevant (the relationship is between the actors in the scene, not between the actress and her underwear). In general, slogans with leading dots are not appreciated. The underestimation of (6a), relative to the expert criteria, has probably to do with the image of coach parties.

In (7) the three best slogans are presented, with translations for each interpretation, and the mean value between brackets (scale from 1 to 10)

(7) a. In a commercial for dairy products
       Nou, die kan het shaken! (8.2)
       (salient meaning) Boy, she's in trouble!
       (meaning with contextual fit) Boy, she can shake it!

b. In a commercial for lager
   Grolsch gaat al een eeuw door de beugel (7.8)
   (salient meaning) Grolsch has already passed
   muster for a century
   (meaning with contextual fit) Grolsch has already
   streamed through its special bottleneck for a century
c. Ad for a dredging company
   We move the earth to a better place (7.3)
   (salient meaning) We change society for the better
   (meaning with contextual fit) We dredge sludge and
   reuse it elsewhere

The three slogans in (7) all need additional comments. The slogan in (7a) can only be understood in the context of the commercial: In a series of commercials, cows play a personified role, and act like humans or trained dogs. In this commercial, a cow steals a motorcycle and sidecar, and rides away on a bumpy country road. The slogan is uttered by the (human) owner of both the motorcycle and the cow. There is wordplay in the use of the word 'shaken': it is an English loan, in the meaning of 'to shake'. In this literal meaning, reference is made to the bumpy road, but it also associates with the dairy product 'milkshake', which is sold under its English name in the Netherlands. The salient meaning stems from the Dutch translation 'schudden' ('to shake'), which has as an idiomatic meaning that punishment is due for the person referred to. There is only humor in this slogan within the whole of the commercial.

The slogan in (7b) is very much appreciated by the students from the university of Twente, but the reason is probably not the slogan itself: Grolsch is the local beer in Twente and is said to be better than Heineken. The slogan itself fails on two points: the salient meaning stems from the saying: 'dat kan niet door de beugel' ('that cannot pass muster'). Here, it is used positively, but its meaning can only be 'that almost didn't pass muster'. So, the beer has been barely drinkable for a century. The contextually appropriate meaning refers to the 'beugel' which is the wire around the bottleneck holding the stopper in place, which is not the same as the 'beugel' in the saying (that 'beugel' was used for measur-

ing the size of dogs in Amsterdam for dog tax purposes). This makes the ambiguity forced. So it is probably the brand name that makes the slogan attractive to this particular audience rather than the felicity of the phrase.

The slogan in (7c) was in English originally (the company is Dutch in origin, but operates worldwide). The salient meaning is what Dutch people make of the salient meaning of the slogan. Native speakers of English had reservations about accepting this interpretation as salient, but that does not bother native speakers of Dutch, of course. They recognize the use of *move* in its abstract meaning, and combine it with 'the earth' as referring to the world, whereas the concrete interpretation has to do with sludge. Although recognition of salient meaning in foreign languages is not easy, Dutch respondents seem to appreciate whatever they recognize in English slogans (Gerritsen et al., 1999).

The analysis of the students' judgments make it possible to identify biases in judging ambiguous slogans. The appreciation for (7a) shows that reminiscence of existing commercials must be avoided. The appreciation for (7b) shows that brand names (and product type) are more important factors than appreciation of rhetorical means. The appreciation of (7c) shows that English slogans may be appreciated more than Dutch slogans, regardless of the use of rhetorical means. To avoid biases in the results of the experiments, the experiment consisted of a split-run session, in which two slogans for the same (imaginary) brand are compared. In order to make a contrast with English slogans, some of the slogans were in English (but not ambiguous).

Method

The experiment was conducted as a pause-experiment within another experiment with several tasks (reported in Karreman & Steehouder, 2000). The experiment consisted of two tasks: first, participants indicated their appreciation for various slogans. Next, they were asked to check ambiguous slogans from part of the set of slogans they had previously judged.

Participants

Eighty-nine respondents took part in the experiment. They were all students at the University of Twente, in various courses of study: Communication Studies, Public Administration and Public Policy, Educational Science and Technology. The population consisted of 29 men (32.58%) and 60 women (67.42%), aged 18 to 25 years. The participants had responded to a call to participate in another experiment (Karreman & Steehouder, 2000), regarding telephone instructions. They did not know that a survey on slogans would be used as a pause-experiment.

Apparatus

Participants were asked to choose several times between two slogans, offered in pairs. A pair of slogans consisted of two different slogans about the same product with the same brand name (all but one imaginary). This way, biases based on product type and brand name could be eliminated. The slogans were either taken from billboards or advertisements, or made up by the researchers themselves. Rhetorical devices like contrast, lists of three, imperatives, and the use of English language were divided equally amongst the non-ambiguous slogans. In both ambiguous and nonambiguous slogan pairs, conventions of rhythm, rhyme, and alliteration were followed.

The preference for one slogan of the two had to be specified on four different scales: humor, beauty, arousing more confidence, and yielding more intention to buy. Agreement with a statement about slogans A and B was measured on a five-point scale. One example of a slogan pair with accompanying scalar statements has been translated and is presented in Figure 3. In the chosen pair, both slogans were not ambiguous (another rhetorical device was used).

16 pairs of slogans were constructed this way. Eleven pairs contained one ambiguous slogan next to a nonambiguous slogan; the other pairs contained only nonambiguous slogans. Afterwards, the researchers reanalyzed one pair as containing two ambiguous slogans. This pair was removed from the analysis. Two versions were made by taking the 16 pairs and swapping the A and B slogans.

In order to measure the recognition of ambiguity in slogans, a list of 16 single slogans was made by taking all the left-hand slogans from one version of the list of slogan pairs. Participants could mark the sentences they considered to be ambiguous. In the instruction it was explained what was meant with the term 'ambiguous', by giving an applicable definition and an example slogan.
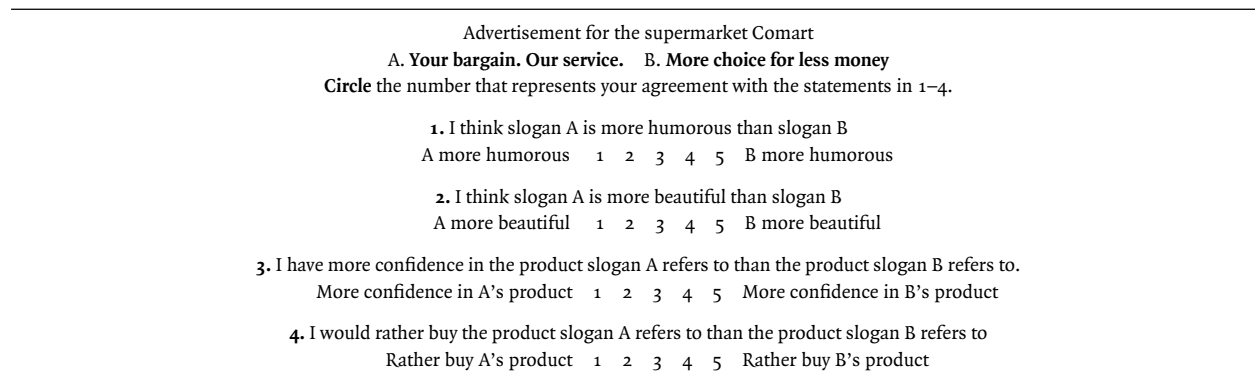

Advertisement for the supermarket Comart

A. **Your bargain. Our service.**   B. **More choice for less money**

Circle the number that represents your agreement with the statements in 1–4.

1. I think slogan A is more humorous than slogan B

A more humorous   1   2   3   4   5   B more humorous

2. I think slogan A is more beautiful than slogan B

A more beautiful   1   2   3   4   5   B more beautiful

3. I have more confidence in the product slogan A refers to than the product slogan B refers to.

More confidence in A's product   1   2   3   4   5   More confidence in B's product

4. I would rather buy the product slogan A refers to than the product slogan B refers to

Rather buy A's product   1   2   3   4   5   Rather buy B's product

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Figure 3   Example of one pair of slogans with four scalar statements of appreciation

Design

In this experiment, the ambiguity of slogans is the independent variable. By the choices made within pairs of slogans, the dependent variable 'appreciation' is measured. Four five-point scales were used to construct this dependent variable. Using Figure 3 as an example, scoring 1 on a scale of 5 means that the A slogan is preferred with respect to the relevant statement. All scores were converted into scores as if the slogan were on the B-side. This way, a single slogan may have 5 as the highest possible appreciation, and 1 as the lowest level of appreciation. Appreciation consists of the mean scores of the four separate scales: humorous, beautiful, confidence and inclination to buy. It is admissable to take these scales together (Cronbach's alpha=.79). The other dependent variable, recognition of ambiguity, is measured on a dichotomous scale.

Groups of slogans, especially the ambiguous and the nonambiguous, are compared below with respect to appreciation. Interactions between appreciation and recognition will be presented as well. In order to answer some research questions in more detail, the scales are also analyzed separately in a contrast analysis.

Procedure

In the break halfway during an experiment concerning instructional texts, participants were given a divergent task in order to forget the first part of the experiment, and make a fresh start with the second part. This task consisted of the present experiment. First, the participants received 16 pairs of slogans, one of them depicted in Figure 3, in a different (random) order for every participant. There were two versions: the slogans were the same, but within the pairs the order of the slogans was swapped in the other version. Hereby, sequence effects were excluded. Instructions were added on the front page of the set of forms, with an example to show how to fill in the form. Participants had ten minutes to work through the forms, which was enough time for everyone. For each slogan pair, participants made four choices between the two slogans: the funnier, the more beautiful, the one conveying more confidence, and the one giving them more inclination to buy the product. These choices were presented using five-point scales. Next, after returning that set of forms, participants received a list of 16 (single) slogans (the left hand slogans of the set of forms they had filled in). They were asked to check off those slogans they thought were ambiguous. The list was headed by an explanation of the notion "ambiguous" along with an example to illustrate the kind of choice they were supposed to make.

Results

There was no difference in the mean appreciation of the slogans between the 29 men and 60 women who participated in the experiment (independent samples; t=0.84; df=87; p=.40). Also in the (correct) recognition of the slogans as ambiguous, men (3.66 out of 15 slogans) did not perform significantly differently from women (3.22 out of 15 slogans; independent samples; t=1.41; df=85; p=.16).

The first research question was: are deliberately ambiguous slogans appreciated more than other slogans? The slogan pairs were rated, taking the ambiguous slogans as a reference point. For the pairs containing unambiguous slogans only, either the slogan in English was taken as reference point, or the reference point was chosen arbitrarily. The three slogans that were ranked highest in appreciation, as well as the three slogans that ranked lowest, are presented in the appendix.

The slogan pairs were divided in two groups: Five slogan pairs contained unambiguous slogans only, and 10 slogan pairs contained one ambiguous slogan. The unambiguous group scored a mean appreciation of 3.08; the 'ambiguous' group scored a mean appreciation of 3.31. This difference is significant (paired samples; t=3.97; df=88; p<.001). The first research question can thus be answered positively. Three comments should, however, accompany these results. A minor research question was whether there was a

difference between the judgments 'humorous' and 'beautiful'. Another minor question was whether or not slogans in English were appreciated. Finally, a remark should be made on the ranking of the slogan pairs.

In order to answer the two minor research questions, the dependent variable 'appreciation' was split up in the original scales it consisted of and the slogan pairs divided into three groups: one of pairs containing one ambiguous slogan (A), one of pairs containing a slogan in English (E), and one containing only Dutch and unambiguous slogans (U). The differences between these three groups are made visible in a multivariate variance analysis with the slogan types D, A, and U as repeated measure. A model was constructed in which 12 group means (three groups on four scales) could be compared. There was a difference between the means of the groups (F=3.62; df=(8.81); p<.001). By means of a modeled contrast analysis of the differences between group means and the null hypothesis that there was no difference between groups, significant differences are made visible. In Table 1, group means are represented, together with the results of the contrast analysis.

Slogan pairs containing an ambiguous slogan differ in three kinds of appreciation from the other two groups. They are not considered to be more beautiful. In general, respondents tend to rate every slogan higher on the humor scale than on the beauty scale. In the previous section, we expected deliberately ambiguous slogans to differ more from other slogans on the aspect of humor than on the aspect of beauty. This expectation is borne out. Also, it was expected that the particular scheme of using English might be appreciated more than other schemes, and perhaps more than

deliberate ambiguity. From Table 1, one may infer the tendency that differences between ambiguous and other slogans are larger than differences between ambiguous slogans and English slogans. English slogans are not appreciated more than ambiguous slogans, however. Given that there were only two English slogans, this latter result might come out differently in a replication of the experiment.

A last remark concerns the ranking of slogan pairs according to their mean appreciation. The top seven pairs of slogans stem from the A group, and the next four pairs are from the E or U group. However, within the four least appreciated slogan pairs, there were three pairs containing an ambiguous slogan. Whether they are meaningful exceptions will be subject of discussion.

The second research question concerns the relation between recognition and appreciation. The first question was: are slogans that are recognized as ambiguous more appreciated than other slogans? In order to answer this question, the appreciation scores for single slogans were converted for the slogans that were not taken as reference. Next, the appreciation scores were divided into two groups: appreciation scores of slogans that were recognized as ambiguous (recognized slogans), and of slogans that were not recognized as ambiguous (unrecognized slogans), regardless of the correctness of the judgments. The mean scores for recognized and unrecognized slogans were 3.37 and 3.17, respectively. This difference is significant (paired samples; t=3.00; df=85; p<.01). The first subquestion can be answered positively.

The second subquestion was: are deliberately ambiguous slogans that are recognized as ambiguous (recognized am-

Table 1   Mean, standard deviation and paired differences between groups of slogan pairs (conf.: confidence; beaut.: beautiful; Unamb.: unambiguous; diff.: difference between; n.s.: not significant); *: p<.05, **: p<.001

Scale	Ambiguous	Unamb.	English	diff. A–U	diff. A–E	diff. E–U
Humor	3.73 (0.52)	3.52 (0.52)	3.44 (0.96)	*	*	n.s.
beaut.	3.30 (0.52)	3.14 (0.77)	3.26 (0.97)	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
conf.	3.04 (0.43)	2.70 (0.67)	2.87 (0.79)	**	n.s.	n.s.
Buy	3.19 (0.43)	2.79 (0.77)	3.00 (0.78)	**	*	*

biguous slogans) appreciated more than deliberately ambiguous slogans that are not recognized as ambiguous (unrecognized ambiguous slogans)? The scores for appreciation for the ambiguous slogans were divided into scores for recognized and for unrecognized slogans. For this computation, 22 participants had to be removed (N=67): 9 participants did not recognize any ambiguous slogan while 13 participants recognized all ambiguous slogans. Recognized ambiguous slogans were appreciated with a mean score of 3.58 and unrecognized ambiguous slogans were appreciated with a mean score of 2.69. The difference between these scores is significant (paired samples; t=6.41; df=66; p<.001). The second subquestion can be answered positively.

The third subquestion was: are (incorrectly) recognized slogans more appreciated than (correctly) unrecognized slogans? The scores for appreciation for the unambiguous slogans were divided into scores for recognized and for unrecognized slogans. For this computation, 8 participants had to be removed: they correctly did not recognize any unambiguous slogans as ambiguous. Incorrectly recognized slogans were appreciated with a mean score of 3.12 and correctly unrecognized slogans were appreciated with a mean score of 2.78. The difference between these scores is significant (paired samples; t=3.35; df=80; p<.001). The third subquestion can be answered positively.

Conclusions

Deliberately ambiguous slogans are appreciated more highly than other slogans. Deliberate ambiguity with closed interpretation is considered more humorous than beautiful. Appreciation for slogans in English does not particularly differ from other slogans. There is a relation between recognition of ambiguity and appreciation of slogans.

1. Recognized slogans are appreciated more than unrecognized slogans
2. Recognized ambiguous slogans are appreciated more than unrecognized ambiguous slogans.

3. Unambiguous slogans recognized as ambiguous are appreciated more than unrecognized unambiguous slogans.

These conclusions are consistent with the conclusions on the appreciation of visual metaphors (Forceville, 1996; McQuarrie & Mick, 1999). However, groups of slogans differ in humorousness rather than in beauty. For all three groups of slogan pairs, the ratings on beauty were lower than those on humor.

Discussion

Four issues will be discussed: first, an interpretation of the results in a model of processing advertisements; second, the attention ambiguous slogans may attract; third, the reason why some ambiguous slogans are ranked very low; fourth, the property that is recognized in unambiguous slogans.

In Meyers-Levy & Malaviya (1999), the processing model predicts correctly that recognition of ambiguity is essential for the appreciation of deliberately ambiguous slogans. If the salient interpretation of a slogan is not successful in its context (i.e., when ambiguity is recognized), the model is reentered, with a more successful interpretation as result. We cannot assume that more attention will be paid in a second interpretation, because the participants' task of making a comparison already invokes high involvement; on the other hand, there is little information available to process systematically. However, we can assume that the participant will rethink his or her original interpretation. The appreciation increases as a result of the greater effort expended for the interpretation. When both interpretations are successful, the interpretation is 'closed'. This might influence appreciation as well, for the interpretation process is clearly finished. The examples of the visual metaphors used in McQuarrie & Mick (1999) are also closed: there is a (culturally bound) solution for the awkwardness in the picture. Many other metaphors, however, have an open end. It is a question for future research whether there is a difference in appreciation between open-ended and closed metaphors.

It is an important quality of advertisements to be able to attract attention in the presence of other advertisements. It is doubtful whether deliberately ambiguous slogans attract attention by dint of their ambiguity. The only effect they can bring about is an increase in attention when it has already been attracted. The billboards of the Mayor of London mostly provide a visual context in which the slogan does not fit. The visual effects in this context attract the attention, and it is only after the ambiguity (or awkwardness) in the slogan is recognized that attention to the slogan is increased. Several slogans were designed in the format of the slogan in example (4): there is no visual context other than a picture of Ken, but the slogan is printed in an extremely large font, within quotation marks.

One result of the research seems to be inconsistent: three of the four slogan pairs with the lowest ranking contain ambiguous slogans. This contradicts the idea that deliberate ambiguity increases appreciation. We can account for low appreciation in two ways: either recognition failed, or the second attempt at interpretation was not successful. We will discuss each possibility with one example (the third could be analyzed as failure of second attempt as well). One of the least appreciated slogans mentioned in the appendix — Een mooi boeket. Geschikt voor elk moment (salient: 'a nice bouquet. Appropriate on any occasion'; fit to context: 'a nice bouquet. Arranged for any occasion') — was recognized as ambiguous in only 25% of the cases. Here, the salient meaning was too strong to recognize the context as appropriate for another interpretation. Also, there was no clash with the context: the salient meaning of the slogan is not at all awkward within its context. When ambiguity is not recognized, the slogan is worse than others, because then it seems as if no rhetorical means have been used to make the slogan worthwhile. The other example in the appendix that comes out bad, is: 'werk geregeld bij Thema' (salient: 'job arranged with Thema'; fit to context (temporary employment agency): 'work on a regular basis with Thema'). Here, the ambiguity is often recognized (59%), but appreciation is low. The problem with this slogan is that the second interpretation is not entirely satisfying while the salient meaning is in line with the context. At a temporary employment agency it is possible to get a (temporary) job. This would be too obvious for a slogan, and therefore a contextual interpretation is called for. The problem is that the latter interpretation is not correct: although you may be contracted by the employment agency, it is not very likely that you will work on a regular basis. You might even consider an employment agency to be attractive as an employer because you can work there on an irregular basis. In other words, the contextual interpretation disturbs the selling point. If the interpretation after recognition of ambiguity fails, the extra effort for the second interpretation will 'backfire' on the appreciation.

The last point of consideration is the recognition of slogans as ambiguous that are in fact unambiguous. In order to explain what is recognized, we discuss the following slogan pair, for an airline company.

(8) a. HLB. Take it or leave it.
    b. HLB. Een vlucht vol voordeel ('HLB. A flight full of advantage')

Slogan (8)a was considered ambiguous by 40% and (8)b by 36% of the participants who judged these slogans. In (8)a, the slogan is inconsistent with the context, insofar as the salient meaning sounds quite aggressive towards the consumer. So, it is likely that people will try to search for a contextual interpretation. However, no successful interpretation seems to be possible: if you take HLB, you will leave, and if you leave it, you will not use HLB. There is wordplay in the word 'leave', but it makes no sense. It might be the case that the fact that the slogan was in English made it easier to choose for recognition of ambiguity: the cooperative principle makes it very hard to choose for 'interpretation impossible'. So, when the language is foreign, you assume ambiguity rather than recognize it. Also, the interpretation might be considered open-ended: associations on the basis of 'leave' can be made freely. So, what is recognized is a kind of polyvalency of interpretation. These open-ended interpretations are appreciated, but not as much as deliberately ambiguous slogans

(the appreciation for the pair was 3.02, so A and B were equally appreciated). The translation of the slogan in (8)b might have the same kind of open-ended associations as its Dutch original: you can think of different kinds of advantages. Financial advantages, but also advantages during the flight. In Dutch, 'vlucht' means 'escape' as well as 'flight', but this would not lead to a satisfactory interpretation. Also here, there is some polyvalent interpretation possible, as well as a senseless wordplay. There are no cases of unambiguous slogans that were incorrectly recognized as ambiguous that were very successful: This means that closed interpretation works best for deliberate ambiguity.

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Appendix I

The three most appreciated slogans
(context; recognition %)
(S: Salient; CF: contextual fit)

U staat op kwaliteit!
(Schweigmann carpets; 69%)
S: You demand quality!
CF: You're standing on quality!

Goede verwarming laat je niet koud
(energy supply company; 93%)
S: Good heating is your concern
CF: Good heating does not leave you cold

Op alle onderdelen beter
(Kwikfit spare parts; 91%)
S: Better in all respects
CF: Better on all spare parts

The three least appreciated slogans
(context; recognition)
(S: Salient; CF: contextual fit)

Geen kluns met De Klus (wordplay)
(do it yourself shop; 14%)
S/CF No fool going to The Chore

Een mooi boeket. Geschikt voor elk moment
(flower shop; 25%)
S: A nice bouquet. Appropriate on any occasion
CF: A nice bouquet. Arranged for any occasion

Werk geregeld bij Thema
(job centre; 59%)
S: Job arranged with Thema
CF: Work on a regular basis with Thema

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