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Synergistic Application  
of Metaphorical and Humorous Elements  
in Polish and English Advertising Discourse

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## Contents

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Bionote . . . . .	9
Acknowledgements . . . . .	11
Humour and Metaphor in Advertising—Embarking on a Journey . . . . .	13
Chapter 1	
Advertising as Communication—Theoretical Framework . . . . .	21
1.1 The Phenomenon of Advertising . . . . .	22
1.2 Definition, Purpose, and Operation of Advertising . . . . .	22
1.3 Print Advertising . . . . .	27
1.3.1 Newspapers . . . . .	27
1.3.2 Magazines . . . . .	31
1.3.3 Catalogues . . . . .	33
1.3.4 Leaflets . . . . .	34
1.3.5 Direct Mail . . . . .	34
1.4 Ads Today—On Multimodal Advertising Discourse . . . . .	35
1.4.1 The Verbal . . . . .	36
1.4.2 The Pictorial . . . . .	44
1.4.3 The Multimodal . . . . .	53
1.5 Summary . . . . .	59
Chapter 2	
Relevance Theory in Visual and Multimodal Advertising . . . . .	61
2.1 Basic Principles of Relevance Theory . . . . .	62
2.2 Relevance Theory and Visual/Multimodal Mass Communication . . . . .	67
2.3 Relevance Theory in Advertising—The Issue of Genre Attribution . . . . .	70
2.4 Summary . . . . .	74

Chapter 3	
Advertising and the Power of the Figurative . . . . .	77
3.1 A Few Words on Metaphor . . . . .	78
3.2 Considerations Related to Mental Spaces . . . . .	83
3.3 Deliberations on Conceptual Blending Theory . . . . .	88
3.4 Identifying Metaphoric Language . . . . .	94
3.5 Verbal, Visual, and Multimodal Metaphor in Advertising . . . . .	101
3.5.1 Verbal Metaphor in Advertising . . . . .	102
3.5.2 Visual Metaphor in Advertising . . . . .	105
3.5.3 Multimodal Metaphor in Advertising . . . . .	110
3.6 Relevance Theory and Figurative Language . . . . .	116
3.7 Summary . . . . .	124

Chapter 4	
Advertising and Language for Humorous Purposes . . . . .	127
4.1 Defining Humour . . . . .	129
4.2 Types of Humour . . . . .	134
4.2.1 Incongruity-Resolution Theory . . . . .	137
4.2.2 Superiority Theory and Disparaging Humour . . . . .	145
4.2.3 Relief Theory . . . . .	149
4.3 The Linguistic Approach to Humour . . . . .	152
4.3.1 Graded Salience Hypothesis . . . . .	152
4.3.2 Relevance-Theoretic Treatments of Humour . . . . .	156
4.3.3 The Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humour (SSTH) . . . . .	163
4.3.4 The General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) . . . . .	169
4.3.5 Some Polemic Points with Regard to the SSTH and GTVH . . . . .	175
4.3.6 The Visual and Multimodal Means for Producing Humour . . . . .	179
4.4 Considerations Related to Previous Research on Humour in Advertising . . . . .	184
4.5 The Linkage between the Humorous and the Metaphorical . . . . .	200
4.6 Summary . . . . .	211

Chapter 5	
Perspectives on the Study of Humorous Metaphorical Ads . . . . .	217
5.1 The Scope of Study and Data Collection . . . . .	217
5.2 Research Objectives . . . . .	219
5.3 Methodology . . . . .	220
5.4 Research Participants . . . . .	232
5.5 Presentation of Results . . . . .	234

5.6	The Qualitative Investigation . . . . .	236
5.6.1	The English Corpus—Brief Overview . . . . .	238
5.6.2	Sample in English . . . . .	240
5.6.3	Selected Case Studies—An Integrated Perspective . . . . .	250
5.6.4	The Polish Corpus—Brief Overview . . . . .	253
5.6.5	Sample in Polish . . . . .	256
5.6.6	Selected Case Studies—An Integrated Perspective . . . . .	263
5.7	Ad Ratings and Emotional Responses—Results . . . . .	265
5.7.1	Results for the Sample in English . . . . .	270
5.7.2	Results for the Sample in Polish . . . . .	284
5.8	Ad Comprehension—Results . . . . .	298
Chapter 6		
	Conclusions . . . . .	329
6.1	Conclusions Concerning Qualitative Investigation . . . . .	329
6.2	Conclusions on Ad Ratings and Emotional Responses . . . . .	333
6.3	Discussion on Ad Comprehension . . . . .	340
6.4	Closing Remarks . . . . .	344
6.5	Limitations and Avenues for Further Research . . . . .	347
Appendix 1 – Transcripts of the Advertising Material Used . . . . .		
		355
Appendix 2 – The Likert-type Scale and Visual Self-Report Used . . . . .		
		365
Appendix 3 – Questionnaire Form on Ad Comprehension . . . . .		
		369
Appendix 4 – The Corpus in English . . . . .		
		371
Appendix 5 – The Corpus in Polish . . . . .		
		385
Bibliography . . . . .		
		401
Index of Names . . . . .		
		437
Streszczenie . . . . .		
		447
Summary . . . . .		
		449

## Bionote

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Anna Stwora obtained a double PhD from the Institute of Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities of the University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland, and the Sapienza University of Rome, Italy. Her research interests revolve around multimodal discourse of advertising, especially in its metaphorical and humorous dimensions, as well as around broadly conceived humour studies. She is also interested in specialised registers, cognitivism, communication studies, and contrastive linguistics. In 2020, she took up a post as editorial assistant at *The European Journal of Humour Research* and became a member of the board of the Cracow Tertium Society for the Promotion of Language Studies. She has been involved in several projects, including seminars, workshops, and conferences devoted to humour and contrastive studies, as well as to business language and culture. Her recent publications include *Humor Research Project: Explorations in Humor Studies* (2020, co-edited with Marcin Kuczok and Mariola Świerkot) and *Exploring Business Language and Culture* (2020, co-edited with Urszula Michalik, Iwona Sznicer, and Paweł Zakrajewski).

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## Humour and Metaphor in Advertising— Embarking on a Journey

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Given the noticeable impact of humour and metaphor on contemporary ads, it comes as no surprise that both are frequently used in advertising discourse. However, it is still a relatively new concept to think of humorousness and metaphoricity as similar in terms of the cognitive experience provided; it turns out that both require a similar shift in cognition, for they “[...] involve a semantic contradiction [or] incompatibility that the recipient has to disambiguate, using his/her linguistic competence and encyclopaedic knowledge to find some analogy or other ‘common link’ to relate the involved planes of meaning” (Krikmann, 2009, pp. 14–15). The recipients are therefore made to look for additional implications and connotations, as well as to interpret, compare, and transfer meanings appurtenant to various domains, in the case of metaphors, and to different scenarios, in the case of humour. To my mind, combined in advertising, the two phenomena present a unique research challenge when it comes to understanding incongruities and the instances of conceptual blending.

To date, the subject of comparative studies on both figurativeness and humour in ads has received little attention, as the two were usually studied in isolation. In spite of extensive research on metaphorical language in advertising and on what may produce humour in ads (e.g., superiority humour, puns or irony), the issue of incongruity-resolution-based humour and metaphors in press advertising has received rather scant attention.

Hence, faced with such a gap, it seems useful to enquire into the joint operation of both the humorous and the metaphorical in contemporary advertising discourse, with special emphasis placed on their reception by the audience. This book is an attempt at joining three academic fields, namely, advertising discourse, metaphor, and humour research, with multimodality

as an overreaching thread. It will address questions related to cognition, communication, and humour, as instantiated in a selection of ads. The present volume is anchored in cognitive linguistics and communication studies, for one of its major objectives is to study the reflections of general conceptual mechanisms in language and the other to show how advertising messages communicate complex ideas of both metaphorical and humorous nature to the recipients. It should also be specified at this point that the book subscribes to the incongruity-resolution theory of humour which “defines humour as a cognitive-linguistic problem-solving task that elicits positive affect (Goel & Dolan, 2001; Raskin, 1985; Suls, 1972)” (Strick, Holland, Van Baaren, Van Knippenberg, & Dijksterhuis, 2013, pp. 7–8).

Research in cognitive linguistics has shown that there has been an increased interest in the role of metaphors and, in particular, of mental spaces and conceptual blending, in the production of humour (cf. Brône, Feyaerts, & Veale, 2015; Attardo, 2017). Citing Krikmann, “the theory of humour and the cognitivist theory of figurative speech have begun to notice and reach out towards each other” (Krikmann, 2009, p. 34), which, in turn, has led me to have a closer look at the synergistic application of metaphorical and humorous elements in both Polish and English multimodal press ads.

First of all, it should be clarified that multimodality relies on the simultaneous application of different modes of communication. It assumes “the interaction and combination of multiple modes within single artefacts” (Bateman, 2008, p. 1) or, in other words, it presumes the use of several distinct semiotic codes to convey a message, for instance, the textual and the visual mode in the case of press ads, with all the modes incorporated being treated as one meaningful entity (cf. Bateman, 2008). At the same time, multimodality assumes that each semiotic mode is responsible for the completion of specific tasks (Stöckl, 2015) (e.g., the anchoring function of the text (cf. Barthes, 1977) that helps the perceiver to avoid over- or misinterpretation).

Despite different functions they may perform, the modes involved create an inextricable network of interrelations that results in the creation of one semantic entity; this reciprocal contextualisation, as Maćkiewicz (2017) puts it, leads to the emergence of new meanings that were not contained in the aforementioned semiotic codes, which testifies to the synergistic communication effect of multimodality (Maćkiewicz, 2017, p. 40). Apart from the fact that such messages are simply more interesting due to the application of several modes that interact with each other, they are more

pleasurable to the eye than ads dominated by the textual mode alone, for example. What is more, multiple impressions generated by various forms create more chances to impress the perceiver and hence attract his attention.

The power of metaphors in advertising is of great importance as well because they are frequently more attractive and more cognitively engaging than any straightforward claims. Pérez-Sobrinó (2017) is of the opinion that, as a discourse genre, advertising is actually symbiotically tied to metaphor in that “metaphor suits the specificities of advertising because both consist in putting into correspondence two discrete domains: in the case of metaphor, the source and the target domain; in advertising, the product or service being advertised and the corresponding positive attributed values” (Pérez-Sobrinó, 2017, p. 50). Following this line of reasoning, it can be said that advertising as such constitutes fruitful a domain of study for metaphor scholars. Therefore, not only do metaphorical ads appeal to the audience thanks to their originality, that is, owing to a game of meanings played by the advertiser and the audience (cf. Bralczyk, 2000), but they also constitute a pool of novel figurative constructions to be studied. The usage of the figurative in advertising, in turn, aptly illustrates how the pre-existing knowledge structures in human minds in the form of cognitive schemas, frames, and scripts help people to identify relevant facts without the need “to sift through the blizzard of information” (Cialdini, 2007, p. 60) each and every time they want to communicate something or decode the message they receive.

When it comes to humour in advertising, it is employed to entertain the audience and, therefore, to dispose the prospects favourably towards the goods advertised. Thanks to the note of levity introduced, the message starts to stand out from the information clutter and creates a more relaxed cognitive environment for the perceiver, thus oftentimes conducing to increased liking for the ad, product or brand (Gulas & Weinberger, 2006). Apart from contributing to a pleasant cognitive environment, humour in advertising makes ads more appealing because, just like metaphors, humour usually provides the audience with involving content, that is, with a puzzle to solve. Nevertheless, resorting to humour is relatively risky a strategy in advertising, for whether a humorous ad succeeds or fails depends on many variables to be discussed in the ensuing chapters.

What follows from this short introduction is that both metaphoricality and humorousness are issues of significance when it comes to constructing memorable and influential ads, since they are said to facilitate ad appreciation and increase the prospects’ attention. Humorous metaphorical

ads may therefore pose a greater cognitive challenge to the audience, as they are characterised by considerable conceptual complexity resulting from the simultaneous application of the two phenomena. Based on the aforementioned contention that there are some marked similarities in perception of humour and metaphor, the following discussion will centre on the synergistic interaction of metaphorical and humorous elements in multimodal ads.

For this research, I first gathered two corpora that consisted of multimodal humorous metaphorical ads in English (100 press ads) and Polish (100 press ads); the selection for the two language corpora was made according to the following criteria: (i) the ads were multimodal in their nature, that is, they combined visual and verbal information alike; (ii) they contained a metaphor (verbal, visual or multimodal); and (iii) they made use of incongruity-resolution-based humour. The two language corpora were subsequently divided into several subgroups according to the “butt of the joke,” which made it possible to secure roughly equal representation of different humour targets identified in the selected ads in each language group studied (see Chapter 5 for a more detailed account of the methodology used). A proportional number of advertisements was then chosen from these sub-sets and, as a result, the final sample to be analysed and included in the questionnaires comprised 20 ads for each language group so as to prevent the task from becoming too tiring for research participants.

As stated above, the principal aim of the present research is to investigate the workings of conceptual integration and the incongruity-resolution mechanism on the basis of humorous metaphorical press ads in English and Polish. The specific objectives to attain are as follows:

1. To study the way in which metaphorical constructs may be used as vehicles for humorousness in advertising discourse. To achieve this goal, I will first provide an overview of the theoretical frameworks concerning the phenomenon of advertising and cognitive linguistics, as well as of the existing studies on metaphor in advertising. I will also explore topics connected to humour research in order to establish that there is some compatibility between the theory of conceptual integration and the incongruity-resolution model. Then, in the analytical chapter, I will perform a qualitative content analysis of selected English and Polish press advertisements (all the transcripts of the advertising material used can be found in Appendix 1);

2. To check ad liking (ad ratings) and affective attitudes (emotional responses) in an attempt to capture the emotional reactions of the informants to the ads sampled. This will be accomplished by having each research participant rate a set of humorous figurative ads. Ad ratings will be determined thanks to the use of a Likert-type scale, whereas emotional responses will be measured on the basis of visual self-reports that apply the Self-Assessment Manikin (SAM) assessment technique (cf. Lang, 1980; Morris & Waive, 1993) (detailed information on research participants is included in Chapter 5, while the survey used to study ad ratings and emotional responses is available in Appendix 2);
3. To investigate the ways in which research participants understand and interpret the mechanisms inducing metaphor and humour in ads. To this end, I will use open-ended questionnaires and collect the informants' feedback on the ads they previously rated (see Appendix 3). The questionnaires filled in by the informants will provide post-exposure results and thus help to check whether research participants are actually aware of the mechanisms at work in the course of ad comprehension and appreciation.

Finally, more broadly, the present volume is also to advance current knowledge of effective pragmatics of humour in figurative advertising messages and to build the base for future research into advertising phenomena within linguistic frameworks. That is why this book aims to take a comparative approach and hence discuss the similarities and differences between the two corpora, one in English and the other in Polish. The analysis will show whether it is possible to identify any observable trends in the interplay between the concepts found in both metaphorical and humorous constructions in selected multimodal ads.

As far as the structure of this book is concerned, Chapter 1 deals with the phenomenon of advertising, that is, with its definition, purpose, and operation. It discusses print advertising and, therefore, centres on the verbal, visual, and multimodal facets of advertising with a view to presenting different modalities by means of which the advertising stimulus can be conveyed to the audience.

After this introductory chapter, it seems imperative to explain how the said audience manages to develop a decoded multimodal message into a relevant one. To this end, Chapter 2 touches upon the most important pragmatic theory pioneered by Sperber and Wilson (1995) known as

Relevance Theory (henceforth RT) with a view to demonstrating how the expanded version of RT proposed by Forceville (2020) can accommodate various dimensions of mass-communication.

Then, the following chapter delves into the theoretical foundations of research on metaphor. Chapter 3 refers to the theory of mental spaces (Fauconnier, 1994, 1997, 1998) and then adumbrates the theory of conceptual integration (conceptual blending theory) formulated by Fauconnier and Turner (1998, 2002). The chapter explores the ways of identifying metaphors as such (cf. Pragglejaz Group, 2007; Steen, 2007), to which I refer in the subsequent operationalization of metaphor and cite existing research on the construction of verbal, visual, and multimodal metaphor in advertising.

Chapter 4 addresses the topic of humour and its numerous definitions. It cites relevant literature on the key theories of humour known as the incongruity-resolution, superiority, and relief theories (Hurley, Dennett, & Adams, 2017) and also stresses the role of the prototype theory (Rosch, 1973; Rosch & Mervis, 1975) in the shaping of humour and its strength. Following such researchers as Nerhardt (1976) and Giora (1991), I associate non-prototypicality with an increase in humour value. Furthermore, the chapter probes into the linguistic approach to humour, all forms of which are claimed to be descendants of the incongruity-resolution theory (Krikmann, 2006). The theories presented include the Script-based Semantic Theory of Humour (SSTH) (Raskin, 1985) and the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) (Attardo & Raskin, 1991). Some polemic points concerning the SSTH and GTVH, raised in large part by Brône and Feyaerts (2003, 2004) and Brône, Feyaerts, and Veale (2006), are included. Emphasis is also placed on the Graded Salience Hypothesis outlined by Giora (2003) since it emerges as a pertinent area of research in the context of this volume. Relevance-theoretic treatments of humour are presented too so as to further the understanding of how different approaches may be combined to explain humorous discourse.

Given the multimodal standpoint adopted for this book, Chapter 4 stresses the role of both the visual and the multimodal in the production of humour. Discussion on previous research on humour in advertising ensues and, finally, similarities in the conceptual operations involved in the creation and understanding of both humour and metaphor are emphasised. The observation that such common features exist is made on the basis of the works by Attardo (1994, 2006, 2015), Brône and Feyaerts (2003), Dynel (2009), Kyratzis (2003), and Müller (2015), all of whom see the theory

of conceptual integration by Fauconnier and Turner (1998, 2002) as a common denominator of metaphor and humour.

Chapter 5 clarifies the scope of the present study, shows the data collection procedure and research methodology, restates research objectives, and describes the group of research participants. Most importantly, it reports on the results of qualitative content analysis, which is supplemented with pertinent examples from the samples of humorous metaphorical ads in English and Polish. Furthermore, in line with the objectives of this research, a comparative study is conducted to present ad ratings and emotional responses for the ads from the English and Polish set. Last but not least, the chapter focuses on the reception and interpretation aspect, for it is also devoted to ad comprehension by research participants.

The final chapter presents conclusions on the workings of conceptual integration and of the incongruity-resolution mechanism, as instantiated in selected multimodal press ads in English and Polish. It is also devoted to the possible limitations of the study and to avenues for further research.

## Index of Names

---

- Abelson 86, 164, 428  
Abid 103, 428  
Adams 130, 131, 139–142, 144, 146,  
148, 149, 151, 162, 163, 165, 167,  
190, 193, 299, 328, 415  
Agres 25, 401  
Aharoni 125, 401  
Alden 185, 188, 401  
Alexander 134, 162, 200, 202, 401  
Alkabets-Zlozover 155, 413  
Allan 296, 401  
Allen 196, 401  
Alwin 267, 401  
Andersen 300, 401  
Anderson 23, 401  
Andren 24, 25, 401  
Antol 181, 405  
Araczevska 340, 401  
Arens 22, 27–29, 31, 32, 47, 404  
Aristotle 53, 136, 402  
Aschkenazi 155, 413  
Attardo 14, 18, 130–136, 138, 139,  
141, 142, 144, 146, 147, 152, 159,  
160, 162, 164–175, 177–179, 190,  
200–203, 206, 207, 211–213, 218,  
219, 226, 230, 233, 244, 257, 262,  
282, 295, 352, 402  
Baier 35, 429  
Bandyopadhyay 198, 199, 406  
Bansal 181, 405  
Baran 106, 111, 403  
Barsoux 150, 158, 184, 186, 197,  
198, 403  
Barthes 14, 50–52, 57, 58, 323, 403  
Basu 189, 197, 406  
Bateman 14, 21, 53, 54–56, 58, 110,  
182, 344, 403  
Bates 154, 403  
Batra 181, 405, 412, 421  
Beard 185, 403  
Beasley 22, 36, 45, 51, 101, 107, 403  
Bell, E. 227, 405  
Bell, N. 352, 403  
Bellantoni 47, 403  
Bergen 85, 177, 178, 185, 403  
Berger 23, 31, 105, 190, 403  
Berlyne 146, 149, 150, 403  
Bezemer 56, 403  
Billig 150, 403  
Binsted 177, 178, 403  
Black 109, 122, 123, 224, 404  
Blackford 149, 186, 230, 252, 404  
Blanc 188, 193, 194, 404  
Boerman 24, 29, 46, 188, 404  
Bornstein 190, 233, 404

Bosco 76, 404  
 Bovée 22, 27–29, 31, 32, 47, 404  
 Bowers 104, 151, 195, 404  
 Bralczyk 15, 22, 26, 30, 33, 36–41, 43, 47, 48, 77, 101, 195, 330, 353, 404  
 Brannon 26, 404  
 Brewer 184, 421  
 Brierley 37, 41, 42, 404  
 Brigaud 188, 193, 194, 404  
 Brock, A. 170, 404  
 Brock, T. C. 26, 404  
 Brône 14, 18, 88, 124, 163, 164, 171, 174–179, 181, 200–202, 205, 207, 210, 211, 213, 226, 227, 317, 404  
 Bruner 137, 305, 323, 343, 404  
 Bruthiaux 27, 29, 40, 405  
 Bryant 185, 190, 233, 349, 405  
 Bryman 227, 405  
 Buijzen 134–136, 146, 149, 150, 151, 180, 230, 261, 371, 385, 405  
 Burn 53, 58, 405  
 Burnett 28, 29, 39, 44–47, 50–52, 107, 434  
 Burrige 296, 401  
 Bury 149, 183, 186, 405  
 Busse 70, 405  
 Byrne 189, 423  
  
 Cacciari 416  
 Cacioppo 196, 197, 424  
 Cameron 99, 223, 405  
 Campbell, J. D. 162, 405  
 Campbell, L. 185, 434  
 Caples 23, 25, 43, 57, 405  
 Carlson 149, 404, 405  
 Carrell 166, 405  
 Carston 64, 65, 83, 201, 405  
 Chabanne 162, 402  
 Chakravarti 198, 418  
  
 Chambers 163, 405  
 Chandrasekaran 181, 405  
 Chang, I. Y. 189, 198, 199, 405  
 Chang, W. Y. 189, 198, 199, 405  
 Chang, Y. Y. 198, 199, 405  
 Charteris-Black 99, 223, 406  
 Chattopadhyay 189, 197, 406  
 Chen 207, 209–211, 215, 244, 271, 274, 275, 288, 339, 346, 357, 406  
 Cheung 35, 406  
 Chiaro 162, 406  
 Childers 33, 406  
 Chilton 124, 406  
 Chłopicki 167, 168, 170–172, 237, 252, 406  
 Christianson 162, 406  
 Chung 188, 189, 199, 406  
 Cialdini 15, 25, 26, 29, 127, 189, 234, 406  
 Cienki 85–87, 407  
 Cieślicka 350, 414  
 Cline 188, 189, 194, 195, 198, 407  
 Coleman 50, 407  
 Collins 164, 407  
 Colman 72, 407  
 Colston 62, 67, 68, 76, 83, 85, 86, 114, 116–118, 125, 165, 185, 213, 407  
 Cook 22, 27, 36, 37, 41, 43, 44, 47, 55, 58, 82, 103, 105, 162, 407  
 Cooper 143, 407  
 Coulson 88, 91, 106, 162, 165, 168, 201, 202, 207, 227, 351, 407  
 Crafton 162, 407  
 Craig 184, 430  
 Creswell 227, 407  
 Crisp 78, 408  
 Critchley 149, 351, 408  
 Crocker 188, 325, 435  
 Croft 87, 177, 408

Cruse 87, 177, 408  
 Curcò 159, 160, 408  
  
 Dane 162, 408  
 Danesi 22, 36, 45, 51, 77–80, 86, 94, 97, 101, 107, 222, 281, 403, 408  
 Davies, C. 148, 171, 172, 178, 237, 238, 408  
 Davies, J. 185, 190, 233, 349, 405  
 de Saussure 48, 408  
 DeCastellarnau 267, 408  
 Demerulias 162, 208  
 Dennett 18, 130, 131, 139–142, 144, 146, 148, 149, 151, 162, 163, 165, 167, 190, 193, 219, 299, 328, 408  
 Depalma 162, 434  
 DeRosia 105, 408  
 Derrick 191, 408  
 Dewitte 189, 190, 191, 238, 426  
 Di Maio 171, 200, 282, 402  
 Díaz-Pérez 41, 103, 409  
 Dijksterhuis 14, 430  
 Dillard 78, 104, 151, 195, 429  
 Dirven 41, 408  
 Djafarova 33, 41, 42, 254, 409  
 Doda-Wyszyńska 162, 409  
 Dolan 14, 220, 413  
 Dorfles 133, 138, 409  
 Douglas 167, 409  
 Dowker 350, 434  
 Drozd 131, 409  
 Dubitsky 25, 401, 434  
 Dubovičienė 102, 103, 429  
 Duffly 426  
 Dundex 162, 412  
 Durand 182, 409  
 Dyer 21, 24, 25, 27, 36, 40, 41, 45, 46, 48, 50, 57, 78, 94, 95, 103, 104, 107, 182, 227, 257, 331, 344, 409  
 Dynel 18, 41, 79, 80, 82, 95, 96, 115, 125, 128, 137, 138, 139, 140–146, 150, 152, 159, 162, 168, 180–182, 185, 193, 202, 203, 205, 208–211, 213, 214, 218, 225, 226, 409, 410  
 Eberhard 405  
 Edell 25, 401  
 Eisend 189, 194, 198, 410  
 Eisterhold 162, 402  
 El Refaie 182, 318, 410  
 Ellerbach 29, 410  
 Elsner 189, 421  
 Emanatian 351, 410  
 Ericsson 401  
 Ertel 207, 208, 281, 410  
 Esmae'li 105, 433  
 Eubanks 222, 410  
 Evans, D. 25, 410  
 Evans, V. 83, 84, 92, 93, 410  
 Eysenck 150, 410  
  
 Fabrigar 267, 418  
 Falkowski 26, 42, 410  
 Farber 293, 410  
 Fauconnier 18, 19, 78, 83, 84, 87–89, 91–94, 100, 124, 152, 163, 179, 181, 201, 203, 207, 213, 220, 226, 410  
 Fein 153–156, 411  
 Festinger 143, 411  
 Feyaerts 14, 18, 163, 171, 174–179, 181, 200–202, 210, 211, 213, 226, 227, 317, 402, 404, 423  
 Filip 405  
 Fodor 106, 145, 154, 411  
 Fónagy 162, 202, 203, 205, 214, 411  
 Fontaine 192, 411  
 Forabosco 141, 143, 144, 180, 203, 211, 212, 226, 411

Forceville 18, 52, 61–76, 105–107,  
 109, 111, 113–117, 119, 122, 123,  
 143, 157, 162, 180, 212, 214, 224,  
 302, 341, 351, 353, 411  
 Freud 136, 149, 150, 240, 411  
 Friedman 228, 411  
 Fromkin 26, 412  
 Frow 70, 71, 412  
 Fuentes Luque 127, 185, 186, 236,  
 412  
 Fuertes-Olivera 102, 103, 124, 212,  
 433  
 Fugate 193, 412  
 Furió 180, 255, 412  
  
 Gajewska 36, 41, 101, 127, 412  
 Garber 46, 47, 412  
 Gass 282, 348, 411, 413, 420  
 Gee 116, 412, 417  
 Geis 38, 412  
 Gelb 188, 189, 198, 412  
 Gentry 149, 404  
 Georges 162, 412  
 Gibbs 78, 85, 86, 88, 90, 94, 96, 97,  
 99, 100, 116, 119, 120, 162, 185,  
 411, 412, 413, 416, 417, 429, 430,  
 432  
 Gineste 83, 90, 109, 413  
 Ginter 94, 413  
 Giora 18, 128, 136–139, 142, 145, 152–  
 156, 162, 165, 166, 169, 176–178,  
 207–209, 211, 212, 215, 220, 225,  
 226, 237, 276, 281, 282, 288, 323,  
 336, 345, 346, 411, 413, 424, 435  
 Glucksberg 162, 417  
 Goddard 23, 30, 36, 42–44, 50, 56,  
 101, 103, 104, 162, 413  
 Goel 14, 220, 413  
 Grady 83, 91–93, 124, 201, 202,  
 207, 413  
 Granger 228, 413  
 Gray 421  
 Green 83, 84, 92, 93, 410  
 Grice 62, 159, 160, 166, 317, 409,  
 414  
 Grimm 162, 414  
 Grover 191, 192, 279, 430  
 Grunig 36, 39, 414  
 Guidi 162, 172, 414  
 Gulas 15, 127–129, 131, 184,  
 186–188, 193, 195, 198, 236, 325,  
 351, 414, 434  
  
 Haiman 162, 414  
 Hale 282, 343, 352, 414  
 Halliday 55, 414  
 Hamrick 177, 206, 414  
 Handford 116, 412, 417  
 Harrison 149, 404  
 Hasan 55, 414  
 Hashemian 209, 414  
 Haverkate 162, 414  
 Hay 134, 162, 402, 414  
 Heath 348, 414  
 Heintz 148, 427  
 Hempelmann 132–134, 170, 171,  
 184, 200, 282, 402, 414  
 Henderson 46, 414  
 Henly 67, 417  
 Heredia 350, 414  
 Herman 162, 414  
 Hetzron 162, 414  
 Heywood 78, 408  
 Hiippala 21, 53, 57, 58, 415  
 Hitchon 103, 104, 415  
 Hoeken 56, 111, 162, 433  
 Hoffmann, C. R. 58, 415  
 Hoffmann, H. 191, 231, 268, 415  
 Holland 14, 430  
 Holmes 217, 218, 415

Horn 54, 349, 415  
 Houghton 111, 425  
 Houston 33, 406  
 Hoyer 185, 188, 190, 401, 435  
 Hsieh 227, 228, 415  
 Huber 182, 428  
 Hurley 18, 130, 131, 139–142, 144,  
 146, 148, 149, 151, 162, 163, 165,  
 167, 190, 193, 219, 299, 328, 415  
 Hutcheon 162, 415  
 Hyatt 46, 47, 412  
  
 Indurkha 83, 90, 109, 413, 415  
 Iqbal 103, 428  
 Ivković 105, 415  
 Iwańska 195, 330, 415  
 Izett 162, 412  
  
 Jaffe 104, 415  
 Jäkel 82, 416  
 Janoschka 22, 35, 37, 42, 218, 416  
 Jaszczolt 100, 416  
 Jeong 52, 416  
 Jhally 32, 36, 419  
 Jiang 207, 209–211, 215, 271, 274,  
 275, 288, 339, 346, 406  
 Jodłowiec 158–160, 416  
 Johansen 79, 416  
 Johnson, M. 77, 78, 80–82, 86, 92,  
 96, 107, 124, 133, 245, 247, 351,  
 416  
 Johnson, R. 137, 416  
  
 Kalaga 340  
 Kalisz 344, 416  
 Karaškiewicz 34, 53, 416  
 Katrandjiev 103, 416  
 Katz 77, 80, 90, 412, 416, 417, 426  
 Keir 426  
 Kellaris 188, 189, 194, 195, 198, 407  
  
 Kelly, L. H. 103, 417  
 Kelly, P. J. 184, 417  
 Kennedy 193, 417  
 Kessler 415  
 Keysar 67, 417, 435  
 Kirkorian 23, 401  
 Kitayama 191, 417  
 Kline 32, 36, 419  
 Koch 151, 417  
 Koestler 137, 138, 147, 175, 200,  
 417  
 Koller 57, 103, 111, 114, 244, 318,  
 417  
 Korenberg 51, 418  
 Korsmeyer 305, 417  
 Kotler 35, 417  
 Kövecses 41, 77, 78, 80–82, 88, 89,  
 91, 93, 94, 96, 97, 100, 101, 103,  
 109, 111, 222, 281, 417, 426  
 Kress 21, 47–51, 53–58, 108, 111,  
 403, 417  
 Kreuz 162, 417, 418  
 Kriegel 107, 418  
 Krikmann 13, 14, 18, 81, 90,  
 137–139, 145–147, 149, 152, 159,  
 165, 167, 170, 171, 175, 177–179,  
 202–204, 246, 252, 264, 275, 277,  
 281, 295, 418  
 Krishnan 198, 418  
 Krosnick 267, 418  
 Kuczok 45, 405, 409, 418, 431  
 Kurokawa 191, 417  
 Kyratzis 18, 89, 167, 169, 200,  
 202–205, 210, 213, 226, 418  
  
 LaFave 146, 418  
 Lagerwerf 51, 105, 107, 418  
 Lakoff 77, 78, 80–82, 85, 87, 90, 92,  
 95, 100, 106, 124, 133, 247, 351,  
 418, 419

Lang 17, 192, 219, 231, 266, 366–368, 419  
 Langacker 177, 419  
 Larsen 79, 416, 421  
 Larson 107, 416  
 Lazarus 192, 419  
 Lazović 37–40, 42, 419  
 Lee, C. 185, 188, 401  
 Lee, Y. H. 188, 189, 419  
 Leech 27, 28, 33, 34, 36–39, 42, 419  
 Legman 146, 419  
 Leigh 42, 261, 419  
 Leiss 32, 36, 419  
 Lemke 54, 419  
 Lessard 180, 181, 419  
 Lewiński 26, 101, 419  
 Lewis 328, 419  
 Libura 94, 201, 202, 227, 419  
 Likert 17, 191, 219, 230, 231, 266, 298, 333, 365, 408, 420, 432, 445, 447  
 Lim 28, 39, 420  
 Limbrecht 415  
 Littlemore 111, 350, 420, 425  
 Liu 150, 420  
 Loftus 164, 407  
 Loi 28, 39, 420  
 Lowis 192, 420  
 Lucy 47, 420  
 Lusińska 330, 420  
  
 Maalej 105, 351, 420  
 Mac Cormac 41, 81, 95, 96, 108, 141, 203, 212, 420  
 Mackey 282, 348, 411, 413, 420  
 Maćkiewicz 14, 318, 319, 420  
 Madden 188, 195, 196, 401, 420  
 Maier 139, 415, 420  
 Maliszewski 95, 318, 420  
 Markiewicz 185, 193, 195, 420  
  
 Markus 191, 417  
 Martin, E. 26, 420  
 Martin, R. A. 146, 167, 186, 230, 252, 408, 420, 421  
 Mason 188, 189, 419  
 McGraw 136, 146, 147, 148, 421  
 McKendrick 184, 421  
 McLuhan 36, 421  
 McMahan 107, 421  
 McQuarrie 27, 31–33, 41, 49–53, 102, 104, 105, 109–111, 115, 125, 195, 229, 239, 371, 238, 421, 425  
 McQuitty 189, 432  
 Mehrabian 191, 268, 292, 421  
 Mehta 25, 133, 188, 421  
 Meijers 105, 107, 418  
 Melgar 189, 421  
 Mellish 145, 433  
 Mervis 18, 72, 153, 207, 221, 226, 427  
 Messaris 46, 51, 421  
 Michalik 129, 144, 146, 148, 149, 422, 431  
 Mick 51, 105, 115, 298, 299, 421, 422  
 Mínguez 108, 434  
 Minsky 165, 422  
 Mirzoeff 45, 241, 422  
 Mitchell, A. G. 180, 422  
 Mitchell, W. J. T. 53, 56, 422  
 Morgan 315, 342, 349, 422  
 Moriarty 28, 29, 39, 44–47, 50–52, 107, 434  
 Morreall 138, 141, 143–147, 149, 150, 166, 208, 211, 212, 225, 422  
 Morris 17, 191, 192, 219, 231, 266, 279, 298, 422, 423  
 Moyer-Gusé 188, 423  
 Mukherjee 190, 435

Mulder 139, 141, 142, 146, 149–151, 164, 167, 209, 225, 226, 252, 346, 423  
 Müller, C. 100, 423  
 Müller, R. 18, 202, 213, 423  
 Munch 33, 102, 235, 300, 314, 432  
 Murdoch 23, 423  
 Murray 53, 423  
 Musolff 86, 114, 115, 214, 350–352, 423  
 Myers 31, 36, 37, 40, 423  
  
 Nabi 188, 423  
 Neale 70, 423  
 Negro Alousque 110–113, 125, 423  
 Nerhardt 18, 136, 207, 208, 211, 215, 221, 225, 226, 237, 281, 346, 423  
 Nieuwoudt 192, 420  
 Nijholt 139, 141, 142, 146, 149–151, 164, 167, 209, 225, 226, 252, 346, 402, 413, 423  
 Nolan 84, 85, 87, 88, 423  
 Nordquist 78, 423, 424  
 Norrick 137, 185, 189, 424  
 Nthangeni 192, 422  
  
 O’Shaughnessy, J. 103, 196, 424  
 O’Shaughnessy, N. J. 103, 196, 424  
 Oakley 88, 162, 201, 202, 207, 407, 413  
 Ogilvy 193, 424  
 Ohlsson 401  
 Okopień-Sławińska 327, 424  
 Olson 190, 192, 424  
 Oring 144, 202, 205, 206, 212, 215, 281, 408, 424  
 Ortony 96, 104, 202, 404, 418, 424  
 Osborn 104, 151, 195, 404  
 Ott 236, 424  
  
 Palmer 162, 325, 424  
 Panofsky 48, 424  
 Parikh 405  
 Parker 53, 58, 405  
 Parsons 185, 188, 429, 434  
 Pearsall 28, 33, 34, 56, 424  
 Peirce 79, 300, 424, 429  
 Peleg 154, 155, 424  
 Pérez Hernández 111, 424  
 Pérez-Sobrino 15, 56, 111, 113, 114, 115, 116, 128, 277, 318, 425  
 Petty 196, 197, 424  
 Phillips 27, 31–33, 41, 49–53, 102, 104, 105, 108–111, 125, 195, 229, 239, 315, 342, 371, 385, 421, 425  
 Picard 191, 231, 235, 268, 425  
 Pickett 189, 412  
 Piddington 131, 425  
 Pinar Sanz 69, 140, 182, 410, 425  
 Pisarek 38, 425  
 Piskorska 116, 117, 125, 140, 149, 152, 159, 201, 202, 227, 409, 425, 426  
 Plumb 184, 421  
 Pluszczyk 129, 136, 146, 148, 149, 426  
 Poels 189, 190, 191, 238, 426  
 Poggi 162, 402  
 Pollio 200, 202–205, 214, 426  
 Postman 137, 305, 323, 343, 404  
 Praglejaz Group 18, 98, 222, 426  
 Provine 130, 426  
 Puhlik-Doris 421  
 Purvis 25, 133, 188, 421  
  
 Quillian 164, 426  
  
 Radden 41, 426  
 Radova 103, 416  
 Raphaelson 193, 424

Raskin 14, 18, 133, 138, 141, 142, 144, 146, 162, 164–173, 177, 178, 204, 208, 212, 214, 220, 226, 252, 402, 408, 426, 427  
 Rath 190, 427  
 Rayner 29, 414  
 Rees 39, 426  
 Reichert 315, 342, 349, 422  
 Richards 78, 80, 281, 426  
 Ritchie 141, 142, 144–147, 155, 162, 165, 168, 170, 202, 225, 227, 346, 426, 433  
 Roberts 162, 418  
 Rock 42, 427  
 Rockwell 162, 427  
 Roese 190, 192, 424  
 Rogers 188, 325, 435  
 Romero 90, 94, 122, 123, 427  
 Rosch 18, 72, 153, 207, 210, 221, 226, 237, 427  
 Rose 162, 427  
 Rosengren 227, 427  
 Rossolatos 56, 57, 111, 427  
 Rotello 426  
 Royce 48, 53, 55, 58, 427  
 Ruch 142, 148, 171, 178, 190, 427  
 Ruiz-Moneva 161, 427  
 Russel 191, 268, 292, 421  
 Rutter 149, 428  
  
 Samson 182, 428  
 Samuel Craig 430  
 Sautter 189, 432  
 Saylor Academy 228, 428  
 Scart 83, 90, 109, 413  
 Schöffner 124, 406  
 Schank 86, 164, 428  
 Scheck 415  
 Scherer 192, 411, 428  
 Schmidt-Hidding 131–133, 428  
 Schopenhauer 136, 164, 428  
 Schröder 27, 36, 103, 434  
 Schroeder 50, 51, 105, 428  
 Schweizer 236, 424  
 Scott 47, 51, 52, 105, 412, 421, 425, 428, 432, 434  
 Semino 85, 86, 93, 101, 114, 125, 165, 213, 428, 430  
 Shan Ahmad 103, 428  
 Shannon 227, 228, 415  
 Sharifian 351, 352, 428  
 Shelley 162, 428  
 Sheppard 180, 428  
 Shimp 298–300, 325, 428  
 Shultz 139, 428  
 Shurcliff 207, 208, 428  
 Sivik 46, 47, 429  
 Skorupa 102, 103, 429  
 Šmid 33, 431  
 Smit 24, 29, 46, 188, 404  
 Smith 188, 195, 422, 429  
 Solomon 184, 417  
 Solska 68, 152, 155, 159, 160, 162, 429  
 Sopory 78, 104, 151, 195, 429  
 Sørensen 300, 429  
 Soria 90, 94, 122, 123, 427  
 Speck 186, 195, 197, 229, 429  
 Spencer 150, 429  
 Sperber 17, 61–63, 65, 66, 69, 71, 74, 75, 103, 106, 117, 120, 123, 152, 157, 158, 160, 162, 212, 220, 227, 344, 409, 424, 429, 435  
 Spiller 35, 429  
 Spivey 163, 429  
 Spotts 185, 188, 429, 434  
 Steen 18, 78, 95, 98, 99, 222–224, 408, 413, 430  
 Stern 130, 430  
 Sternberg 80, 96, 115, 203, 432

Sternthal 184, 430  
 Stewart 191, 192, 279, 426, 430  
 Stöckl 14, 70, 430  
 Stone 162, 430  
 Strausbaugh 192, 422  
 Strey 73, 74, 434  
 Strick 14, 143, 185, 189, 194,  
 196–198, 220, 348, 430  
 Stwora 26, 33, 39, 40, 45, 46, 48,  
 53, 54, 74, 82, 87, 89, 101, 102,  
 105, 127, 132, 137, 147, 150, 164,  
 167–169, 173, 182–184, 188–192,  
 194, 199, 221, 222, 231, 245, 251,  
 266, 268, 296, 326, 330, 337, 349,  
 351, 353, 366–368, 405, 409, 418,  
 430, 431  
 Styles 46, 431  
 Suls 14, 136, 138–142, 144, 167, 190,  
 212, 220, 225, 226, 236, 346, 432  
 Sutherland 41, 431  
 Świątek 41, 94, 103, 432  
 Świerkot 45, 405, 409, 418, 431  
 Sylvester 41, 431  
 Sznicer 129, 144, 146, 148, 149, 422,  
 431  
  
 Tafoya 162, 432  
 Talikoti 267, 432  
 Tanaka 27, 36, 41, 42, 53, 74,  
 101–103, 159, 162, 194, 432  
 Tanenhaus 405  
 Tannen 86, 432  
 Tännsjö 401  
 Taute 189, 432  
 Tavassoli 47, 432  
 Tendahl 96, 116, 119, 120, 413, 432  
 Toncar 33, 102, 235, 300, 314, 432  
 Tourangeau 80, 96, 115, 203, 432  
 Traue 415  
 Trier 132, 432  
  
 Tsakona 169, 173, 181, 183, 221,  
 241, 316, 325, 328, 344, 432  
 Tuan 103, 432  
 Turner 18, 19, 78, 83, 84, 88–95,  
 124, 181, 201, 207, 213, 226, 407,  
 411, 416, 417, 419, 432  
 Tyebjee 325, 433  
  
 Unger 198, 433  
 Urios-Aparisi 111, 214, 264, 411,  
 417, 433, 435, 436  
 Urquidi 96, 433  
  
 Vahid 105, 433  
 Valkenburg 134–136, 146, 149–151,  
 180, 230, 261, 371, 385, 405  
 van Baaren 14, 430  
 Van Enschoot 56, 111, 162, 433  
 van Hooijdonk 51, 418  
 van Knippenberg 14, 430  
 van Leeuwen 25, 47–51, 53, 56, 108,  
 111, 417, 433  
 van Meurs 24, 29, 46, 188, 404  
 Van Mulken 56, 111, 162, 433  
 Veale 14, 18, 166, 174, 175, 178,  
 179, 213, 402, 404, 423, 433  
 Velasco-Sacristán 102, 103, 124,  
 212, 433  
 Velinov 103, 416  
 Venour 145, 433  
 Ventola 58, 433  
 Vestergaard 27, 36, 103, 434  
 Viana 167, 332, 434  
 Vijayakumar 405  
 Villafañe 108, 434  
 Vuorela 351, 434  
  
 Waine 17, 192, 219, 231, 266, 298,  
 423  
 Walker 25, 434

Walter 415  
Wang 350, 434  
Warner 136, 146–148, 421  
Weaver 90, 434  
Weinberger 15, 127–129, 131,  
184–188, 193, 195, 198, 229, 236,  
325, 351, 414, 420, 429, 434  
Weiner 162, 434  
Weir 421  
Wells 28, 29, 39, 44–47, 50–52, 107,  
434  
Wharton 73, 74, 434  
Wheelwright 203, 434  
White 191, 408  
Wieczorek 63, 66, 152, 156–160,  
434  
Widerski 103, 434  
Wildavsky 190, 403  
Williams, G. 162, 434  
Williams, J. 153, 434  
Williamson 35, 36, 46, 105, 107, 434  
Wilson 17, 61–63, 65, 66, 69, 71,  
74, 75, 83, 103, 106, 116, 117,  
119–124, 154, 157, 158, 160, 162,  
201, 212, 227, 344, 429, 435  
Wojtaszek 22, 30, 31, 36, 40, 43, 47,  
50, 56, 59, 75, 101, 111, 128, 141,  
155, 176, 195, 232, 262, 352, 422,  
435  
Woltman Elpers 190, 435  
Woolman 47, 403  
Wu, B. T. W. 188, 325, 435  
Wu, S. 67, 435  
Xu 73, 74, 435  
Yeari 153, 156, 411  
Yu 105, 111, 435  
Yule 43, 87, 180, 214, 317, 351,  
435  
Yus 64, 67, 73, 86, 105–109, 115,  
116, 129, 131, 140, 142, 143–145,  
150, 152, 156–162, 167, 180, 188,  
189, 193–195, 198–200, 225, 309,  
332, 342, 352, 427, 436  
Zajonc 154, 190, 233, 349, 436  
Zemełka 188, 189, 191, 192, 194,  
199, 231, 266, 268, 431  
Zhang 188, 196, 197, 436  
Zhao 188, 189, 199, 406  
Zhou 73, 74, 435  
Zillmann 146, 436  
Zinkhan 188, 189, 196, 197, 198,  
412, 436  
Zitnick 405  
Żyśko 86, 436

## Streszczenie

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Celem monografii jest analiza zjawiska współwystępowania metafory i humoru w multimodalnej reklamie prasowej—w języku polskim i angielskim. Punktem wyjścia refleksji na temat współdziałania elementów metaforycznych i humorystycznych w dyskursie reklamowym jest zwrócenie uwagi na podobieństwa konceptualne w sposobach konstruowania i rozumienia zarówno humoru, jak i metafory, które autorka wiąże z teorią integracji pojęciowej.

Rozdział pierwszy koncentruje się wokół pojęcia reklamy, w szczególności zaś reklamy prasowej, a więc elementów występujących w dyskursie reklamy na poziomie tekstowym i wizualnym, by następnie ukazać, jak warstwa językowa i parajęzykowa współgrają i uzupełniają się w tworzeniu przekazu multimodalnego. Rozdział drugi przedstawia ogólny zarys teorii relewancji celem ukazania, w jaki sposób proponowana przez Forceville'a (2020) modyfikacja tejże teorii może być wykorzystana do opisu różnych aspektów komunikacji masowej. Rozdział trzeci odwołuje się do teorii przestrzeni mentalnych oraz integracji pojęciowej. Rozdział czwarty poświęcono badaniom nad humorem, uwzględniając przegląd kluczowych teorii humoru, spośród których teoria niespójności i rozwiązywania niespójności stanowi główną oś dyskusji. Omówiono także znaczenie teorii prototypów w kształtowaniu się humoru i jego sile. Rozdział zawiera również przegląd wcześniejszych badań nad humorem w reklamie oraz prezentuje zestaw cech wspólnych dla humoru i metafory.

Analityczny rozdział piąty ma na celu ukazanie działania metafory i humoru współwystępujących w multimodalnej reklamie prasowej. Podstawą poczynionych obserwacji jest korpus stu reklam prasowych w języku angielskim oraz stu w języku polskim. W celu zbadania, w jaki sposób konstrukcje metaforyczne mogą być wykorzystywane jako nośniki humoru, wybrano po dwadzieścia przykładów z każdej grupy językowej. Ich szczegółowa analiza pozwala przyjrzeć się zjawisku synergicznego działania metafory i humoru. Kolejna część rozdziału bada odczucia respondentów dotyczące atrakcyjności wybranych reklam za pomocą kwestionariuszy opartych na skali Likerta. Ponadto bada stopień ich zabawności na podstawie intuicyjnej skali obrazkowej, pozwalając ustalić walor humorystyczny i siłę perswazyjną reklamy, jak również poziom stymulacji odbiorcy. Dodatkowa ankieta, zawierająca pytania otwarte, pomaga zrozumieć, jak uczestnicy badania rozumieją mechanizmy humoru i metafory w reklamie. W części końcowej przedstawiono wyniki obu ankiet, przywołując w dyskusji odpowiednie przykłady ilustrujące omawiane zagadnienia. Rozdział szósty stanowi podsumowanie pracy i prezentuje konkluzje dotyczące analizy treści oraz wyników ankiet. Uzyskane rezultaty dają

wgląd we współdziałanie humoru i metafory w prasowej reklamie multimodalnej, a także pozwalają na zidentyfikowanie podobieństw i różnic między przykładami z każdej grupy językowej.

Monografię zamyka krótka prezentacja możliwych ograniczeń przeprowadzonego badania, która wskazuje dalsze kierunki badań w zakresie multimodalnej reklamy prasowej łączącej metaforę i humor.

## Summary

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The book aims at investigating the synergistic application of metaphorical and humorous elements in Polish and English multimodal press ads. The starting point for the discussion on the co-occurrence of metaphorical and humorous elements in advertising discourse is the presence of conceptual similarities as regards both construction and understanding of humour and metaphor, seen through the lens of the theory of conceptual integration.

The first chapter focuses on the notion of advertising, especially on press ads, and, consequently, centres on the verbal and visual facets with a view to presenting how different modalities complement each other to produce multimodal messages. Chapter 2 provides an overview of Relevance Theory in order to demonstrate how its expanded version, as outlined by Forceville (2020), can accommodate various dimensions of mass-communication. In the third chapter, references are made to the theory of mental spaces and the theory of conceptual integration (conceptual blending theory). The following chapter is devoted to humour studies—it outlines the most renowned theories of humour, with the incongruity-resolution theory being the main axis of discussion. Chapter 4 also addresses the role of the prototype theory in shaping humour and its strength. Discussion on previous research into humour in advertising ensues and, finally, the similarities in the conceptual operations involved in the creation and understanding of both humour and metaphor are emphasised.

The subsequent analytical chapter aims at presenting and analysing the synergistic operation of metaphor and humour in multimodal press ads. For the purpose of the study, a corpus of one hundred press ads in English and one hundred ads in Polish was gathered. Twenty examples were selected from each language group and a qualitative content analysis was performed, which made it possible to examine the joint workings of metaphor and humour in press ads. The following part of the chapter focuses on checking ad liking and affective attitudes of the informants, accomplished by having each research participant rate a set of humorous figurative ads on a Likert-type scale. Also, the perceived funniness levels of the ads sampled were examined, which, based on an intuitive visual self-report, allowed to determine the appreciation of humour value and the persuasive power of ads, along with the levels of stimulation of the perceiver. An additional open-ended questionnaire on ad comprehension was implemented to check how the informants understood the mechanisms inducing humour and metaphor in ads. In Chapter 5, the results of both surveys are shown, referring to a wealth of pertinent examples. The final chapter presents conclusions on the qualitative content analysis, ad ratings,

emotional responses, and ad comprehension. The results provide valuable insights into the workings of metaphor and humour applied synergistically in multimodal press ads; they also allow for the identification of both similarities and differences between the two language samples.

The volume closes with a short presentation of the possible limitations of the study, suggesting avenues for further research in the field of multimodal press advertising which combines metaphor and humour in tandem.

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The book *Synergistic Application* aims at investigating the co-presence of metaphorical and humorous elements in Polish and English multimodal press ads. Conceptual similarities as regards both the construction and understanding of humour and metaphor, seen through the lens of the theory of conceptual integration, are a starting point for discussion. The analysis of advertising material makes it possible to investigate the joint workings of the phenomena in question. Furthermore, research participants' feelings on perceived attractiveness and funniness levels of the ads sampled are examined. The results help to check how the informants understand the mechanisms that induce humour and metaphor in ads, which, in turn, allows for the identification of both similarities and differences between the two language samples.

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