



Theoretical frameworks in the study of  
**press advertisements**

Polish, British and Chinese perspective

Adam Wojtaszek



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Wrocław University of Economics and Business  
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Wydanie I

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Although modesty and reticence are usually required under similar circumstances, I cannot help emphasising how enormous an achievement the completion of this book is for me. Only those who have already accomplished a similar task know exactly what I am talking about. It needs to be stressed in this context that in all my efforts I have been inspired and supported by many people, without whom this accomplishment would not be possible.

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## Abbreviations used in the text

CI	– Collectivism Index (a culture-related variable)
CSCPs	– Culture-Specific Conceptual Properties (aspects of word meaning)
DMM	– Dynamic Model of Meaning
EAM	– Exhaustive Access Model (of meaning processing)
EEG	– Electroencephalography (a neuroimaging technique)
fMRI	– functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (a neuroimaging technique)
FTA	– Face Threatening Act
GSH	– Graded Salience Hypothesis
MEG	– Magnetoencephalography (a neuroimaging technique)
MP	– Model Person (in Politeness Theory)
NFC	– Need For Cognition (a cognitive variable)
OALDE	– Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of English
OAV	– Ordered Access View (of meaning processing)
OIH	– Optimal Innovation Hypothesis
PET	– Positron Emission Tomography (a neuroimaging technique)
RAM	– Reordered Access Model (of meaning processing)
SAM	– Selective Access Model (of meaning processing)
SST	– Steady State Topography (a neuroimaging technique)
UAI	– Uncertainty Avoidance Index (a culture-related variable)
WSSPs	– Word-Specific Semantic Properties (aspects of word meaning)

## Preface

Science can be viewed as a peculiar transaction: in exchange for better understanding of the world we have to accept that whatever we describe is just an approximation and secondary rendition of the surrounding reality. Additionally, all those who attempt to focus their scientific attention on surrounding phenomena are aware of the fact that all acts of observation involve a certain amount of intrusion into the object of observation. The so-called observer effect has been postulated a long time ago and recognised by many scientific disciplines. A well-known example is the double-slit experiment in quantum physics in which a single photon is released to pass through a shield with two slits on its way to the screen. If there is no detector attached to the slits, the interference pattern is produced by the passing light, which is only possible when the signal behaves in a wave-like fashion, passing through both slits simultaneously. Placing the detectors at the slits results in the disappearance of the interference pattern, because the photon will physically interact with one of them on its way to the screen, exhibiting a particle-like behaviour. In such a situation, its continued path goes forward only from the slit where it was detected (Greene, 1999, pp. 97–109). This shows that the awareness of the observer effect has to be constantly at the back of our head, moderating the strength of our claims about whatever we study and describe.

The impossibility of truly objective (whatever it means) description of reality, echoing the philosophical disputes between believers of realism and those who profess idealism, does not question the sense of scientific inquiry, however. In a certain sense it is a factor contributing to even better quality of our descriptions and theories, as the acknowledgement of the secondary nature of our insights only reflects the true nature of relationships and interdependencies between the universe and the conscious observers who experience it. The quest for better and better theoretical accounts of the surrounding world is in itself a fascinating object of observation and reflection, often generating inspiration for novel conceptualisations and discoveries in the realm of phenomena which seem to be familiar and well described.

The initial inspiration for the present book came unexpectedly with one of articles which I found in one of the spring issues of *Journal of Pragmatics* in 2008. It was Istvan Kecskes's paper 'Duelling contexts: a dynamic model of meaning', which seemed to be just another interesting conceptualisation of the process of meaning encoding

and decoding. However, read in the context of my prior research and current interests, it turned out to be the necessary catalyst which initiated a chain reaction of inspirations and ideas, whose final product comes in the form of the present work.

For many years preceding the completion of this book I have been fascinated by and interested in the discourse of advertising. A large part of my research was devoted to this continuously evolving and changing, peculiar form of mass communication. Yet, there were certain aspects of the phenomenon which, although subconsciously perceived, escaped attempts at more systematic and reflective elaboration. Reading Kecskes's reflections on the nature of *context* and its role in different types of communication felt like putting on new glasses through which the blurred and indistinct script suddenly became decipherable. I have noticed the analytic potential of his conceptualisations and decided to apply it to the discourse of advertising.

About the same time I also came across the book by Rachel Giora *On our mind*, which provided yet another illuminating perspective and offered one more powerful descriptive tool. Her conceptualisation of *saliency* seemed to offer a very useful framework for analysing both the content of advertising messages, as well as the responses which they evoked in the viewers.

Additionally, I have decided to return to the largely unexplored area of applying the theorems of *face* and *politeness* to the analysis of advertising communication, which I touched upon in Wojtaszek (2007a), with a view to expand it in future. In connection with the two above-mentioned frameworks, it seemed to constitute a promising and solid basis for new analytic insights.

At the same time, the question of material for analysis had to be addressed. The choice of press advertisements reflected my recent interest in this particular advertising medium, following the earlier focus on radio commercials, represented by my previous book *Deciphering Radio Commercials – A Pragmatic Perspective* (2002a). In terms of the contrastive range I have decided to follow the advice of Professor Janusz Arabski to incorporate the Chinese perspective into the project, which not only reflected the current trends in the development of global economy and politics, but also offered a very intriguing comparative angle.

The potentially disputable issue is the selection of the advertising discourse as the object of focus. Many publications have accumulated over the past years, dissecting and analysing multifarious aspects of this peculiar form of communication, so yet another book on advertising might seem unnecessary. In spite of the above, however, the choice seems to be well grounded for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the discourse of advertising is a continuously evolving phenomenon, breeding new forms and tendencies on almost daily basis. Therefore, it is extremely unlikely that this object of study will ever be exhaustively described. There will always be something new to notice, inspect and account for. Additionally, given its complex nature, it invites insights from many different perspectives, rendering the investigation of advertising discourse a truly interdisciplinary venture.

Secondly, in spite of many efforts of deconstructing and exposing the persuasive and manipulative practices of the advertisers by crowds of critical commenta-

tors and theoreticians, the commercials still perform their roles around the whole world. And if certain tricks stop being effective, they are immediately replaced by new ones, creatively elaborated by never-weary advertisers. It is therefore fascinating how it is possible that in spite of changing times and fashions, in spite of the rising awareness of the consumers, even in spite of their frequently antagonistic attitude, the commercial messages are invariably successful in serving their main purpose. The above observation additionally points to how little we still know about the mechanisms of composition and interpretation of advertising discourse.

Finally, advertisements constitute a fascinating object of reflection not only for scientists investigating the phenomenon from different perspectives, but also for the general public, who treat them as a form of entertainment, a source of information and an interesting subject of conversations. That is why publications on the advertising discourse are usually very popular and inspire many young people in their choices of the topics for dissertations and theses, not only in strictly economic departments. The present book might prove useful, in this context, for many students of the discourse of advertising as a valuable source of information.

There are several aspects in which the present book is unique. First of all, it tests the analytic potential of theoretical concepts and constructs which have not yet been applied to the analysis of the advertising discourse, although such a possibility was envisaged by some of the authors (e.g. Giora, 2003). Secondly, it offers a comparative elaboration of advertising corpora from three different cultural backgrounds: Polish, British and Chinese; a combination which has not yet been, to the best of my knowledge, covered in literature. Finally, it is also heavily biased towards critical methodological reflection, exposing many aspects of making certain choices vis-à-vis the analytic perspective and material. It was possible thanks to the application of such a viewpoint to unmask and appreciate the contribution of the observer effect in the study of the advertising discourse. Especially in the context of application of the *Politeness* framework to the analysis of commercials the book has managed to demonstrate how big may be the impact of the way of viewing. The evaluation of the practicality, usefulness and common sense of such applications is left to the readers, who may disagree with the author in this respect.

The book unfolds in three stages. In the first chapter the contributions of particular types of selective focus applied in the study of advertisements are presented and critically evaluated. In particular, the impacts of choices pertaining to the object of the study, the preference for the approach (*bottom-up* versus *top-down*) and the alternatives implicit in opting for the content analysis or the investigation of responses were examined. The second chapter elaborates on an attempt to look at the advertising discourse from the perspective of *Politeness Theory*, as a peculiar form of communication between the advertiser and the recipients. Following an extensive discussion of the applicability of the framework and the necessary methodological modifications, a two-step study is presented in which Polish, British and Chinese participants were reflectively commenting on a selection of press advertisements from three corresponding corpora. The subsequent comparative in-

vestigation of their responses allowed for identification of language- and culture-related idiosyncrasies. The third chapter, which is the most extensive, is divided into two major parts. The first one draws upon Giora's (2003) *Graded Salience Hypothesis* in proposing the constructs of *static* and *dynamic salience* which are subsequently used in the analysis of the corpora, followed by the investigation of *Optimal Innovation Hypothesis* applied to selected advertisements. In the second part of the third chapter, Kecskes's (2008) model is applied to the description of advertisements from Polish, British and Chinese newspapers and magazines. In particular, the notion of *context* is decomposed into several distinct sub-categories, conveniently summarising and explicating the contributions offered by each of them. The visualisation of the context takes the form of the *Stratified Model*, whose levels perform specific roles in the model of the process of interpretation of advertising messages, outlined in the final parts of the chapter. In connection with Giora's concepts, the constructs of *endo-* and *exo-links* of varying degrees of salience are suggested as useful descriptive tools in the analysis of advertisements. Throughout the whole book many methodological comments are offered, pertaining to the consequences of applications of the models under consideration.

It is my hope that in spite of applying a relatively wide range of viewpoints and illustrating a multitude of aspects the book is not excessively eclectic in its approach and that the leading theme of critical methodological reflection is sufficiently explicit throughout its contents. In elaborating on the elements of intercultural comparison I do not make any claims to the exhaustiveness of the conclusions, which were formulated on the basis of comments of relatively small groups inspired by a relatively small selection of advertisements. Nevertheless, it is arguably not incidental that my observations seem to find strong support in a much more extensive (in terms of scope) publications, such as Bogdanowska-Jakubowska (2010). Finally, I hope that the methodological suggestions and analytic constructs introduced in this book will prove illuminating and useful for many scholars fascinated, like myself, by the discourse of advertising.

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Adam Wojtaszek

## **Modele teoretyczne w badaniach nad reklamą prasową w odniesieniu do reklam polskich, angielskich oraz chińskich**

### **Streszczenie**

Książka stanowi próbę poszerzenia metodologii badań nad reklamami prasowymi poprzez wypracowanie nowych modeli analizy tego szczególnego typu tekstów oraz wykazanie ich zasadności i przydatności w oparciu o obszerny korpus przykładów zaczerpnięty z prasy polskiej, brytyjskiej i chińskiej. Praca podzielona jest na trzy rozdziały, z których pierwszy stanowi wprowadzenie teoretyczne oraz przegląd badań nad dyskursem reklamowym, natomiast dwa następne najpierw omawiają i poszerzają wybrane modele teoretyczne, a w dalszej części demonstrują ich wykorzystanie w badaniach o charakterze analitycznym oraz empirycznym.

Rozdział pierwszy zawiera przegląd bogatej literatury przedmiotu, siłą rzeczy ograniczony do opracowań zorientowanych językoznawczo. Dwa główne podrozdziały wydzielone zostały ze względu na dwie istotne kwestie metodologiczne: po pierwsze, jaki aspekt dyskursu reklamowego został wybrany przez autorów opracowań jako główny motyw badawczy, i po drugie, czy badanie koncentrowało się na analizie samych reklam, czy też na ich przyjęciu i ocenie przez odbiorców. I tak w pierwszym ze wspomnianych podrozdziałów przewijają się motywy medium reklamowego, zastosowania zapożyczeń w reklamie, wykorzystania gry słownej i wieloznaczności, stereotypowego przedstawiania świata w reklamie, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem roli kobiet, oraz analizy podstawowych elementów składowych reklam, takich jak slogan, ilustracje wizualne i dźwiękowe, nazwy firm i produktów oraz informacje zamieszczone „drobnym drukiem”. Drugi podrozdział przedstawia najpierw omówienie ważnych aspektów decyzji metodologicznych istotnych dla badań wpisujących się w trend analizy zawartości, dotyczących kwestii takich jak rozmiar korpusu badawczego, zakres badania oraz indukcyjny bądź dedukcyjny jego charakter, a następnie skupia się na studiach reakcji odbiorców komunikatów reklamowych, porządkując je pod względem wyboru i opracowania przedstawianych respondentom próbek, typu badanej reakcji, oraz doboru i charakterystyki samych osób uczestniczących w badaniach.

Rozdział drugi stanowi próbę zastosowania teorii grzeczności, a ściślej rzecz biorąc modelu teoretycznego autorstwa Brown i Levinsona (1987), do analizy dyskursu reklamowego. Na wstępie przedstawione są główne założenia modelu, następnie jego krytyka

i modyfikacje powstałe na przestrzeni lat po ogłoszeniu teorii, potem następują uwagi metodologiczne pozwalające na przystosowanie modelu do opisu dyskursu reklamowego, i wreszcie w ostatniej części zamieszczony został opis badania przeprowadzonego na grupie respondentów z Polski, Wielkiej Brytanii i Chin. Jego celem było z jednej strony uchwycenie reakcji odbiorców na strategię uprzejmościowe stosowane przez reklamodawców, a z drugiej strony identyfikacja podstawowych różnic kulturowych występujących pomiędzy trzema wspomnianymi grupami narodowo-kulturowymi na poziomie kodowania relacji pomiędzy nadawcą i odbiorcą komunikatu reklamowego.

Trzeci rozdział odwołuje się do nowszych modeli dekodowania znaczenia w komunikacji językowej: Hipotezy Stopniowalnej Wyrazistości [*Graded Salience Hypothesis*] (Giora, 2003) oraz Dynamicznego Modelu Znaczenia [*Dynamic Model of Meaning*] (Kecskes, 2008). Obydwa główne podrozdziały mają podobną strukturę: najpierw przedstawiane są podstawowe założenia danego modelu, następnie wyodrębniane są i odpowiednio modyfikowane te elementy, które są najbardziej istotne z punktu widzenia badań nad dyskursem reklamowym, a w końcu wypracowane dzięki temu narzędzia analizy stosowane są w badaniach nad wybranymi aspektami komunikatów reklamowych oraz ich odbioru przez respondentów. We wszystkich badaniach wykorzystywany jest, całkowicie lub częściowo, ten sam korpus reklam prasowych pochodzących z polskich, brytyjskich i chińskich czasopism, liczący odpowiednio 300, 300 oraz 200 reklam. Wiele z nich zamieszczonych jest w książce jako materiał ilustracyjny, uzupełniając tabele, schematy i wykresy sporządzone przez autora. Dodatkowo zamieszczone zostały w pracy załączniki, zawierające transkrypty wykorzystywanych w badaniach reklam oraz formularze ankiet.

Adam Wojtaszek

## **Theoretische Modelle bei Untersuchungen von Pressewerbung am Beispiel polnischer, englischer und chinesischer Werbebotschaften**

### **Z u s a m m e n f a s s u n g**

In der vorliegenden Arbeit wird ein Versuch unternommen, neue Modelle für Analyse von Pressewerbung als besonderen Texttyp auszuarbeiten, und zwar auf der Grundlage aktuell vorhandener jedoch hier erweiterter Untersuchungsmodelle. Es sollen darüber hinaus Zweckmäßigkeit und praktischer Wert dieser Modelle bei Analyse von Werbetexten an umfangreichen Beispielen aus polnischer, britischer und chinesischer Presse gezeigt werden.

Die Arbeit besteht aus drei Teilen. Im ersten wird der aktuelle Forschungsstand im Bereich des Werbediskurses präsentiert. In zwei folgenden werden ausgewählte theoretische Modelle erörtert und erweitert, dabei wird gleichzeitig auf ihre praktischen Einsatzmöglichkeiten bei empirischen und analytischen Untersuchungen hingewiesen.

Im ersten Kapitel finden wir umfangreichen Überblick über aktuelle Werbeforschungen, die jedoch auf sprachwissenschaftliches Gebiet begrenzt werden. Zwei Hauptunterkapitel sind den wesentlichen methodologischen Aspekten gewidmet, d.h. erstens dem Problem, was für Bereich des Werbediskurses durch Autoren dieser Veröffentlichungen als Hauptmotiv der Untersuchung gewählt wird, und zweitens der Frage, ob diese Untersuchung allein auf Analyse der Werbung, oder vielleicht auf Analyse ihrer Wahrnehmung und Auswertung bei Empfängern konzentriert wird. Somit werden im ersten von den oben genannten Unterkapiteln folgende Aspekte erörtert: Motive des Werbemediums, Entlehnungen in der Werbung, Verwendung der Sprachspiele und ihre Mehrdeutigkeit, stereotype Welt Darstellung in der Werbung, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Frauenrolle, bzw. Analyse von Hauptbestandteilen der Werbung, wie z.B. Slogan, visuelle und akustische Illustrationen, Firmen- und Produktname, so wie beigefügte Informationen, die mit Kleindruck geschrieben werden. Im zweiten Unterkapitel werden erstens relevante Aspekte methodologischer Entschlüsse dargestellt, die einen wesentlichen Beitrag für Untersuchung der Trends bei Inhaltsanalyse leisten. Sie beziehen sich auf solche Problembereiche, wie Menge des Untersuchungsmaterials, Umfang des Forschungsgebiets, sowie sein induktiver bzw. deduktiver Charakter. Weiterhin wird in diesem Unterkapitel Analyse menschlicher Reaktionen beim Empfang von Werbebotschaften geschildert. Diese werden entsprechend geordnet, je nach Auswahl und Be-

arbeitung der für die Befragten vorbereiteten Probeprodukte, nach untersuchter Reaktionsart, sowie nach Auswahl und Auslese der Befragten selbst.

Im zweiten Kapitel wird versucht, die Höflichkeitstheorie anzuwenden, und genauer gesagt das theoretische Modell für Analyse vom Werbediskurs von Brown und Levinson (1987). Zunächst werden Grundsätze dieses Modells vorgestellt, dann folgt seine Kritik und Modifizierungen, die im Laufe der Jahre nach seiner Bekanntmachung entwickelt wurden. Weiterhin findet man methodologische Kommentare, die erlauben das Modell der Beschreibung vom Werbediskurs anzupassen. Im letzten Teil wird die Untersuchung geschildert, die an Befragten aus Polen, Großbritannien und China durchgeführt wird. Mit dieser Untersuchung wird beabsichtigt, Reaktion der Empfänger auf Höflichkeitsformeln zu prüfen, die Autoren der Werbebotschaften angewendet haben, sowie Identifizierung grundsätzlicher Kulturunterschiede, die zwischen den drei oben genannten Nations- und Kulturgruppen beim Kodieren von Relationen Sender und Empfänger der Werbebotschaften auftreten.

Das dritte Kapitel ist den neuesten Modellen vom Bedeutungsdekodieren in der Sprachkommunikation gewidmet, und zwar: der Hypothese für graduellen Ausdruck [*Graded Salience Hypothesis*] (Giora, 2003) und dem dynamischen Bedeutungsmodell [*Dynamic Model of Meaning*] (Kecskes, 2008). Beide Unterkapitel sind ähnlich aufgebaut: zunächst werden Grundsätze jeweiligen Modells geschildert, folglich werden entsprechend Faktoren unterschieden und modifiziert, die aus Perspektive der Forschung am Werbediskurs am wichtigsten sind. Auf dieser Grundlage werden Analysemittel ausgearbeitet, die bei Untersuchung von ausgewählten Aspekten der Werbebotschaften, sowie ihrem Empfang bei Befragten angewendet werden.

Bei allen durchgeführten Untersuchungen wird dasselbe Werbematerial entweder im ganzen oder nur zum Teilen eingesetzt, das polnischen, britischen und chinesischen Zeitschriften entnommen wird, und zwar insgesamt sind es entsprechend 300, 300 und 200 Werbebotschaften. Vieles davon wird in der vorliegenden Arbeit als Beispiele präsentiert, die als Ergänzung für Tabellen, Schemata und Diagramme des Autors gelten. Der Arbeit wird zusätzlich ein Anhang beigefügt, in dem Transkription der in Untersuchungen eingesetzter Werbebotschaften und Umfrageformulars zu finden sind.