

Appreciation and interpretation of visual metaphors in advertising across three European countries

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The alternative typologies of visual metaphors proposed by Forceville (1996, 2005) and Phillips and McQuarrie (2004) show some striking similarities with regard to disposition of the visual elements, that is, the source and target domains. The first part of this chapter summarizes the results of two experiments that tested the validity of these classifications with Spanish, French, and Dutch participants and proposes an overall image of the appreciation of the three visual metaphor types. The second part focuses on the interpretations of the metaphors by the Spanish, French, and Dutch participants in the second experiment, to verify whether culture influences the interpretation of the common ground in visual metaphor. We detected subtle cultural differences in focus and interpretative diversity.

Keywords: advertisements, culture, Dutch, French, Spanish, types of visual metaphor

1. Introduction

Studies that adhere to the “copy theory of pictures” (see Scott 1994) claim that visual communication is the answer to global advertising. There is thus no need for translation, since the same message can be used everywhere to convey the same idea: a picture paints a thousand words. However, little is known about the cultural connotations that visual imagery evoke. Especially in the case of visual metaphor, it is very possible that some cultural groups process metaphors differently from others.

In this chapter, we investigate cultural differences between Spanish, French, and Dutch consumers with regard to the appreciation and interpretation of visual metaphors in advertising. Recently, two typologies of visual metaphors have been proposed by Forceville (1996, 2005) and Phillips and McQuarrie (2004), which show some striking similarities with regard to the disposition of the visual elements – that is the source

and target domains. This chapter sums up the results of two experiments that tested the validity of these classifications with Spanish, French, and Dutch participants. It then focuses on the interpretations of the metaphors by the Spanish, French, and Dutch participants in the second experiment, in order to verify whether culture influences the interpretation of the common ground in visual metaphor.

2. Visual metaphors

In his call for a rhetoric of the image, Barthes already stressed the fact that the readings of an image may vary across cultures (1964: 48). Albers-Miller and Gelb (1996) studied cultural appeals in advertisements from eleven countries. Their content analysis showed a clear culture-reflecting quality of advertising for at least ten hypothesized correlations between appeals in advertisements and the cultural values that were dominant in particular countries. They concluded that cross-cultural research is needed to investigate cultural differences in interpreting the same advertisement, and to investigate whether these differences relate to different effectiveness of the advertisement (1996: 69). Kövecses (2005) also questioned the universality of metaphors. He noted that the cultural context may override the universal mapping in metaphors. Spanish, French, and Dutch cultures differ with regard to the manner in which information is processed: Spanish and French cultures are known to be high context cultures, where communication relies on the specific situational context to be properly interpreted, whereas Dutch culture can be characterized as a low context culture, in that communication involves intensively elaborate expressions and requires clear, explicit verbal articulation (Hall and Hall 1990). Callow and Schiffman (2002) have shown that consumers from high-context communication systems are more apt than those from low-context communication systems to derive implicit meaning from visual images in print advertisements. Consequently, one might expect to come across similar differences in the preferences for visual metaphors. A culture that is more familiar with relying on the contextual implications and indirect signals in communication, like the French and Spanish, may be more open to and capable of interpreting metaphors than a culture that is more used to direct, straightforward communication.

Scott (1994) has shown convincingly that pictures, like language, can be used persuasively and hence must be processed cognitively rather than absorbed peripherally or automatically (see Scott and Vargas 2007). Pictures can be argumentative, and a pictorial argument can be laid out in recursive emblematic visual templates, not unlike the verbal figures of style. The disposition of the visual elements – in the case of metaphors, the source domain and the target domain – can be considered the “syntax” of the visual, and can be analysed in a way similar to verbal metaphor. Forceville (1996, 2005) has shown that the structure of visual metaphors has similar properties to that of verbal metaphors. A picture in which both the source and target domain are visually presented separately, where one element is juxtaposed to another, can be

considered the equivalent of a simile. Pictures where the target and source domain are combined into a single “gestalt” and the two elements are fused together can be considered visual metaphors (“hybrids” in the terminology of Forceville 2005). One would expect then that the way similes and metaphors differ in the verbal domain – with regard to processing and retention (Bowdle and Gentner 2005, Gentner and Wolff 1997, Gentner et al. 1987) – is similar to the way visual similes and metaphors are treated in the visual domain. It would imply that with very conventional visual metaphors, like the light bulb as a brilliant idea, viewers assess the categorical meaning of ‘idea’ first, as the most salient interpretation of a bulb, and the meaning of a source of light only after reinterpretation. Forceville isolates yet another structure type in visual metaphors: contextual metaphors. This type of metaphor occurs when there is only one term pictorially represented (either the target or the source) and the other term is visually absent and has to be inferred. The absent domain is evoked by the visual context. This kind of visual metaphor is also described by Groupe Mu (1992), who call this type of metaphor “in absentia disjunct” (see Van Mulken 2003, Maes and Schilperoord 2008). In all, Forceville identifies three different structures of visual metaphors: similes, hybrids, and contextual metaphors. This typology resembles, to a certain extent, the classification proposed by Phillips and McQuarrie (2004), who also identify three different types with regard to the visual structure of the figurative image. Although their taxonomy encompasses nine different metaphor types, the axis that describes the visual structure of these templates shows striking similarities with Forceville’s proposal, in spite of a different terminology. On the structure axis that indicates visual complexity, Phillips and McQuarrie distinguish juxtapositions, fusions, and replacements, and the definitions of these three types of visual structure are – as can be inferred from the names – more or less similar to the ones suggested by Forceville (1996).

In our view, the enormous number of possible visualizations of metaphor – even when we only consider the syntax of the visual elements – can hardly be reduced to three. We do not think Forceville or Phillips and McQuarrie claimed that the number of possibilities is restricted to just three types; rather that the three patterns can be considered canonical to represent fundamental characteristics of the disposition of the visual elements that incorporate the target or the source of the metaphor. However, in our opinion, the structural pattern that visualizes the target with regard to the source should be considered a continuum with, at one end, the target and source as two distinctively different visual elements, and, at the other end, one element (either the source or the target), which has been completely absorbed by the other. The descriptions of contextual metaphor or replacement, both in Forceville (2005) and in Phillips and McQuarrie (2004) are not always able to establish clear distinctions between fusions and replacements or between hybrids and contextual metaphors. This again corroborates our stand that it is best to view the visual structure axis as a continuum rather than as a list of discrete categories. In our view, the most complex type of visual structure is the one where either the target or the source is completely removed from the picture and has to be inferred from context, as is illustrated in the continuum in

Continuum of visual complexity



Figure 1. From left to right: simile (juxtaposition), hybrid metaphor (fusion), contextual metaphor (replacement), (We thank Peter Nusselder for allowing us to use his image manipulations)

Figure 1. The first picture on this continuum shows both the target (shampoo) and the source (vacuum cleaner) in juxtaposition (or simile). If we move to the right, we see a hybrid metaphor, where the shampoo has fused with the vacuum cleaner. In the third picture, we see that the shampoo has disappeared and has been replaced by the vacuum cleaner; the metaphorical relation vacuum cleaner-shampoo can only be inferred from the advertising context (for instance, the slogan or the product brand).

Both Forceville's (1996) and Phillips and McQuarrie's (2004) typologies are inspired by Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986), which claims that receivers will always assume that a message provides an optimal balance between cognitive effects and the effort required by the processing. Receivers are inclined to expend as little effort as possible in order to understand the message and at the same time they will try to gain as much effect as possible from the message by processing it. In other words, receivers expect that the more processing costs a message requires, the more effect they will gain. They are presumably willing to expend more cognitive effort, provided that they gain more effect, in the sense of more information, but also in the sense of more pleasure (see Tanaka 1992, Forceville 1996, 2005, Van Mulken, Van Enschoot and Hoeken 2005, and Van Mulken et al. 2010). Because contextual metaphors (or replacements) rely more heavily on the context (since an absent element has to be supplied by the consumer him/herself), more cognitive effort has to be expended than with the other two types of metaphor structure. The extra cognitive elaboration that they require will simply be rewarded with the extra relevance, i.e. extra cognitive effects in the form of humour or aesthetic pleasure. Provided that the effort invested is considered worthwhile, that is, provided that the message is understood, contextual metaphors will on average be better liked than hybrids or similes (see Tanaka 1992: 5).

3. Research questions

Because more cognitive effort has to be expended, the amount of interpretive diversity that contextual metaphors evoke will be greater than with other types of metaphor. Contextual metaphors should therefore evoke more and more diverse interpretations than hybrids or similes. Similarly, hybrids should be richer in interpretations (i.e. evoke more diverse interpretations) than similes (see also Utsumi 2007). Our first research question is therefore: is there a correlation between the complexity of the visual structure and the amount of elaboration a metaphor evokes?

Since research in intercultural communication assumes that in everyday life the French and the Spanish are familiar with indirect and contextualized speech (Hall and Hall 1990, Callow and Schiffman 2002), we also hypothesize that French and Spanish participants have a higher appreciation of more complex metaphors than Dutch participants. In order to investigate this cultural factor, we examined how French, Dutch, and Spanish participants respond to the three types of visual metaphors. Our second research question is therefore: do participants with different cultural backgrounds differ with respect to appreciation and interpretation of visual metaphors? We will first deal with appreciation, and will focus on interpretive diversity in the second part of this study. Our analyses are based on two experiments that investigated the appreciation of the three metaphor types, and on a content analysis of the qualitative data gathered in the second experiment.

4. Appreciation

4.1 Experiment 1

In our first experiment we tested the structure axis of the Phillips and McQuarrie (2004) typology. We verified whether the most complex metaphorical structure – replacement, comparable to contextual metaphor in the Forceville typology – was liked best in comparison to fusion (cf. hybrid) and juxtaposition (cf. simile). 202 participants from the Netherlands, 83 from France, and 89 from Spain took part in an on-line experiment. All participants in the three countries viewed exactly the same 24 advertisements – six juxtapositions, six fusions, six replacements, and six advertisements that contained no metaphor and served as a base line. Within each category the same product types were represented: cars, food, and drinks, and care products. Copy was removed from the original, authentic advertisements, and the brand name was mentioned above each advertisement.

A questionnaire was developed to measure respondents' appreciation of the advertisements. Two bilingual colleagues specializing in cross-cultural research checked and approved the translation of the Dutch questionnaire into French and Spanish. Apart from appreciation, experienced complexity and comprehension were also investigated

(Le Pair and Van Mulken 2008). Appreciation was operationalized as follows: participants were invited to evaluate each advertisement in terms of being “well-chosen”, “appealing”, and of evoking a “positive judgement”, on a 7-point Likert scale. After having verified that Mauchly’s test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been met, we used repeated measures analyses of variance, t-tests and univariate analyses.

The results showed that appreciation varied according to the type of metaphor that was present in the advertisements. “No metaphor” was appreciated least by our respondents ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 0.96$) and “fusion” was appreciated most ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 0.92$). Juxtaposition and replacement were less appreciated than fusion but better than “no metaphor” ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 0.89$ and $M = 4.19$, $SD = 0.94$ respectively). Juxtaposition did not differ significantly from replacement.

We found an interaction effect for Nationality and Type of metaphor ($F(6,738) = 6.51$, $p < .001$, Wilks’Lambda = .90, $\eta^2 = .05$). This interaction effect was caused by differences in appreciation between the three nationalities of the four categories of advertisements. T-tests showed that the most substantial differences occurred at the level of No Metaphor, and that only the differences at this level were responsible for the interaction effect: when this category was excluded, the interaction effect disappeared. In other words, the different appreciation of the three types of metaphor followed the same pattern in the three countries.

What remained was a strong main effect of Type of metaphor ($F(3,369) = 116.09$, $p < .001$, Wilks’Lambda = .51, $\eta^2 = .49$). Pairwise comparisons of mean appreciation of the different types of metaphor per nationality showed that the respondents from all three countries appreciated advertisements with visual metaphors more than advertisements without visual metaphors. The findings also show that the respondents from the three countries, contrary to what was predicted by the Phillips and McQuarrie (2004) framework, appreciated replacement (contextual metaphors) significantly less than fusion (hybrid metaphors). The other main effect that we found was of Nationality on appreciation of the three types of metaphors. T-tests showed that the Spanish respondents appreciated juxtaposition and fusion metaphors more than the French respondents, while the Dutch respondents appreciated all three visual metaphors less than both the French and the Spanish respondents.

4.2 Experiment 2

In order to test the Forceville typology, we carried out the second experiment. For this experiment we selected authentic advertisements with metaphors that could indisputably be considered to represent this typology. We decided to keep product category as a constant, and restricted to metaphors in automobile advertisements exclusively.

In our second experiment, in order to try to stabilize the effect of product involvement (Rossiter et al. 1991), we chose to examine only automobile advertisements – a typical high involvement product. Care was taken that in the metaphorical stimuli the comparison pertained to the entire car, and not just to an aspect of the car or to

characteristics of the user. Again, all copy was removed from the original advertisement, and the brand name was mentioned above each advertisement. Each type of metaphor was represented in five automobile advertisements, and five advertisements were advertised to represent a category with no metaphor.

Again, a questionnaire was developed to measure respondents' appreciation of the advertisements. 68 respondents from France and 69 from Spain took part in the online experiment. Of the 185 respondents from the Netherlands that completed the questionnaire, 75 were arbitrarily selected in order to keep the populations of the participants comparable. All participants in the three countries viewed exactly the same automobile advertisements that were divided into four groups: those that did not contain a metaphor, those that contained a simile, those with a hybrid metaphor, and those with a contextual metaphor. Appreciation was operationalized with the help of three semantic differentials: "original" versus "banal", "boring" versus "novel", and "predictable" versus "authentic" (internal consistency was always superior to .7). Two bilingual colleagues specializing in cross-cultural research checked and approved the translation of the Dutch questionnaire into French and Spanish. The data were analysed using analyses for repeated measures, t-tests and univariate analyses.

We found a small interaction effect for nationality and type of metaphor ($F(6,408) = 4.6$, $p < .001$, Wilks' Lambda = .88, $\eta^2 = .06$). This interaction effect was caused by differences in appreciation between the three nationalities of the four categories of advertisements. The French participants disliked "no metaphor" significantly more than the Spanish (but not than the Dutch) participants, and they also preferred hybrid metaphors significantly more than both the Dutch and the Spaniards. We can interpret the interaction effect as follows: with regard to hybrid metaphors, the French were more pronounced in their appreciation, whereas with regard to Contextual metaphors, the Spanish were (relatively) more pronounced in their dislike.

Again, there was a strong main effect of type of metaphor ($F(3,204) = 553.25$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .89$). Pairwise comparisons (LSD) in the participant analysis showed that the different types of metaphor all differed significantly from each other: "no metaphor" was least appreciated ($M = 1.88$, $SD = 0.77$), followed by contextual metaphors ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 0.95$), closely followed by similes ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 0.96$), while hybrid metaphors were appreciated most ($M = 5.21$, $SD = 0.91$).

Since both typologies share a common basis in the distinction of the three metaphor types, and since the outcomes of our appreciation studies present a similar pattern, we decided to collapse the two databases, and to compute the appreciation results for both our experiments. This implies that we can now generalize over stimuli: for each metaphor type we have 11 instantiations (5 from experiment 1 and 6 from experiment 2). Table 1 shows the results of this combination of data, and Figure 2 illustrates our findings. We used Forceville's terminology to characterize the types of metaphor.

Table 1. Mean evaluations and standard deviations on appreciation as a function of type of metaphor and nationality

	Appreciation ^a							
	Total (<i>n</i> = 535)		Dutch (<i>n</i> = 276)		French (<i>n</i> = 126)		Spanish (<i>n</i> = 130)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
No Metaphor	2.85 ^a	1.14	3.06 ^a	1.08	2.35 ^a	1.08	2.87 ^a	1.18
Simile	4.38 ^b	0.93	4.18 ^b	0.87	4.59 ^b	0.90	4.61 ^b	1.00
Hybrid M.	4.78 ^c	0.96	4.57 ^c	0.90	5.01 ^c	0.99	4.98 ^c	0.95
Contextual M.	4.31 ^b	0.95	4.17 ^b	0.90	4.51 ^b	0.93	4.40 ^b	1.02

^a 1 = very negative appreciation, 7 = very positive appreciation

Note: A difference in superscript indicates that the difference is significant in subject analysis.

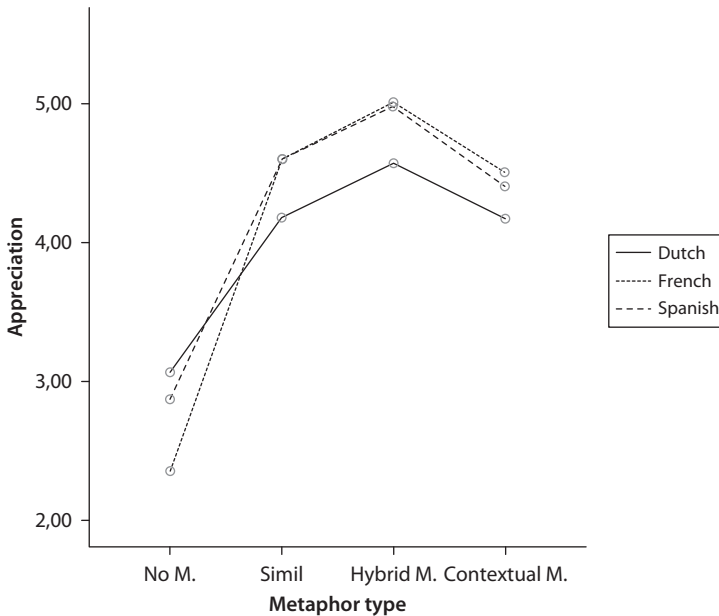


Figure 2. Mean appreciation (1 = very high appreciation, 7 = very low appreciation) * nationality, as a function of metaphor type

Again, we found a small interaction effect of nationality and metaphor type ($F(6,1054) = 9.96, p < .001, \text{Wilks' Lambda} = .90, \eta^2 = .05$) and a strong main effect of metaphor type ($F(3,527) = 286.67, p < .001, \text{Wilks' Lambda} = .38, \eta^2 = .62$). If we remove “no metaphor” from the dataset and focus on the three metaphor types only, the interaction effect disappears. T-tests revealed significant differences between the cultures: the

French and Spanish participants show a general higher preference for all types of metaphor compared to the Dutch participants.

Summarizing the results of Studies 1 and 2, we see that the results of the two experiments that tested competitive typologies of metaphor structure show a similar pattern: it is always the medium complex metaphor type, hybrid or fusion that is liked best. We conclude that the use of relatively complex visual metaphors is appreciated to a certain extent: if cognitive elaboration requires too much effort (such as in contextual metaphors or replacements), appreciation decreases. Complexity, within limits, is pleasurable arousing, and will also be related to greater advertisement liking. However, too much complexity reduces comprehension of the advertisement, and therefore the outcome of advertisement liking associated with more complex visual figures is likely to be subject to moderating factors.

It appears that in both our experiments, the Spanish, French, and Dutch respondents did not differ with regard to the effect of metaphor type, but the Spanish and the French participants appreciated all three metaphor types significantly more than the Dutch. This is in line with the observations of Hall and Hall (1990), Callow and Schiffman (2002), and De Mooij (2004). It might be the case that for the Dutch consumers, being members of a low context culture, the lack of explicit information causes more difficulties in processing the (lack of) information when interpreting a complex visual message. Spanish and French consumers might be more used to processing implicit complex messages.

5. Interpretive diversity

Interpretive diversity can be defined as the range of different interpretations a metaphor evokes. For instance, the comparison of the shampoo and the vacuum cleaner, such as the one used in Figure 1, invites the interpreter to map notions like “cleanliness”, “ease”, “every day job”, and “swiftness” to the shampoo (and s/he might also try to map notions like “soft smell”, “good for hair”, and “liquid” onto the vacuum cleaner). Although these common grounds are linked together, and can be seen as a network of associations that all contribute to the richness of the metaphor, they can also be identified as different aspects of the comparison. In this section, we will look at the quantity and variety of common grounds mentioned by the different groups of participants. Further, we will zoom in on some of the networks of common grounds, in order to pinpoint cultural differences in interpretive diversity.

In the second experiment, the one that tested the Forceville typology, the questionnaire contained the question: “When you first saw the advertisement, did you see a comparison?” If participants answered “yes” to this question, the screen prompted an open question that started with the words: “In this advertisement, the car is compared to ...”.

As expected, most participants did not see a comparison in the advertisements that, indeed, did not contain a metaphor. Table 2 shows in percentages the proportion of participants that did see a comparison and verbalized it in the open question. We also see that, *grosso modo*, our participants recognized more often a metaphor in hybrids than in the two other types of metaphor. The Dutch and French participants show a similar pattern; the Spanish, in contrast, seem to make no difference between the three metaphor types. Whereas the Dutch and French seem to find it easier to recognize a metaphor in hybrids than in similes and contextual metaphors, the Spaniards make no difference between the three types of metaphor with regard to the recognition. This difference is however not significant ($p > .05$).

Table 2. Percentages of participants that recognized a comparison in the advertisement (% indicates that the respondents answered to the open question)

		Nationality		
		Dutch	French	Spanish
Metaphor type	No Metaphor	6	5	6
	Simile	49	42	47
	Hybrid	67	56	49
	Contextual	44	38	40

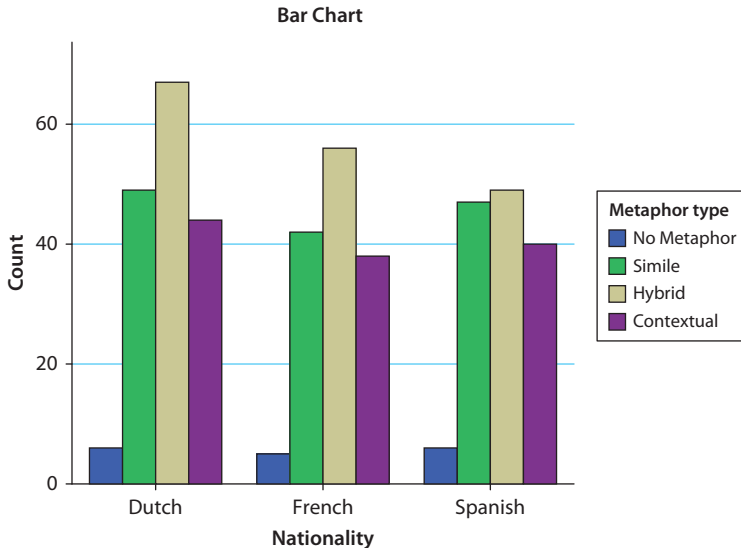


Figure 3. Recognition of the metaphor per nationality

In order to compare the number of different interpretations, two judges scored the individual answers to the open question. This permitted us to analyse the references to the common ground of the metaphors with regard to interpretive diversity. All verbalizations were analysed and qualified with regard to the common ground in the comparison. For instance, in a hybrid metaphor where a car is fused with a shoe, 13 French participants answered: “*une chaussure*”. They chose to mention only the source of the comparison, and this is of course due to the leading format of the open question. However, a large number of participants provided longer responses. Another French participant answered: “*Une belle paire de chaussures confortables*”, which permitted us to score “beauty” and “comfort” as two different bases for comparison. In fact, most participants opted for longer answers. Often, a respondent evoked more than one common ground, as in the example of this French participant.

In order to quantify interpretive diversity, we scored each answer with a reference to a common ground by labelling it with the noun that best covered the given qualification. This allowed us to verify whether the three countries differed in interpretive diversity. Interpretive diversity is a rather complex concept. Utsumi (2008) argues that if a metaphor allows for more diverse interpretations, it should be processed more easily. The problem is, however, that it is difficult to define what exactly qualifies as a “different” interpretation. For instance, in the case of the contextual metaphor of a car that is replaced by a star fighter, some French respondents noted “*la vitesse de l’avion*” whereas others wrote “*rapidité*”, and some Spanish respondents mentioned “*velocidad*” while others said “*rapidez*”. Since “*vitesse*” and “*rapidité*” are quasi-synonyms in French (and so are the Spanish equivalents), these two answers have been scored as one and the same interpretation: “speed”. However, one of the French respondents had written “*la vitesse du son*”, referring to a specific quality of fighter jets, and apparently he or she thought that it is the speed of sound that should be mapped to the car. Such a modification of the qualifier ‘speed’ has been coded as a different interpretation, namely “speed of sound”. Table 3 and Figure 4 show the totals of all different interpretations per group of respondents and per metaphor type.

Table 3. Total number of different references to common ground per type of metaphor and nationality

		Nationality			Total
		Dutch	French	Spanish	
Type of Metaphor	Simile	52	62	61	175
	Hybrid	89	86	42	217
	Contextual metaphor	66	65	67	198
Total		207	213	170	590

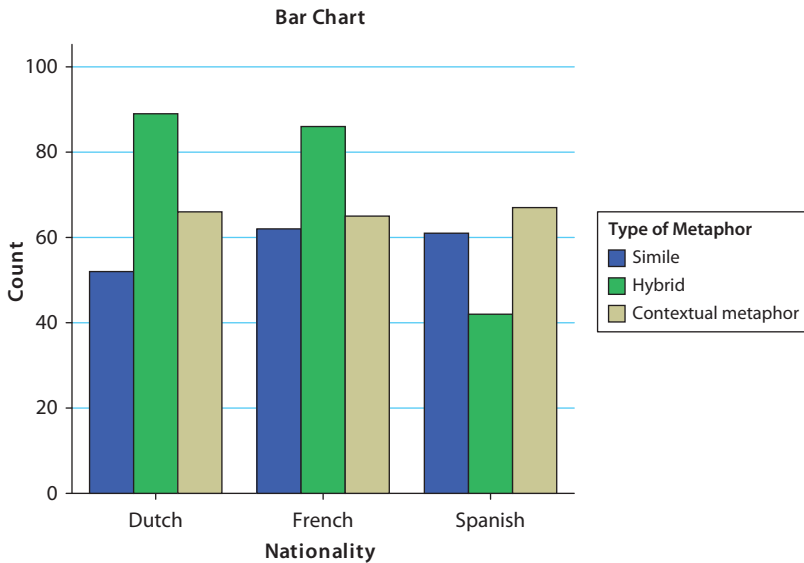


Figure 4. Total number of different references to common ground per type of metaphor and nationality

We see then that contextual metaphors did not evoke more different common grounds than the other two types of metaphor. Although this type of metaphor relies most heavily on context, and thereby presupposes more cognitive elaboration, and therefore may evoke more diverse interpretations, this is not the case if we generalize over all our stimuli with contextual metaphor. However, the advertisement that elicited the largest quantity of different common grounds contained a contextual metaphor. The advertisement that compared the car to a puma (a contextual metaphor, Figure 5A) scored across the three nationalities far more diverse interpretations (on average 19 different common grounds) than other metaphors. On average, a metaphor scored 12.5 different common grounds. The advertisement that compared the car to a tug (a simile) scored the least number of common grounds (on average 4.66 common grounds per nationality).

We see that the Spanish participants differed significantly from the Dutch and the French. They verbalized significantly less different bases of comparison, compared with the Dutch and French ($\chi(4) = 15.83, p = .003$). Whereas the Dutch and French participant groups both mentioned more different common grounds in the case of fusions, the Spaniards mentioned less. It may seem then that our Spanish participants found, in general, less common ground in the case of comparisons to cars. Of course, it is quite possible that the choice of the source domain makes the cultural difference: cultures and subcultures may differ in what source domains are used to characterize single target domains, such as beer, financial services, shampoos, or computers (see Kövecses 2005, Forceville 2000, Trim this volume). If this is true, then it is also

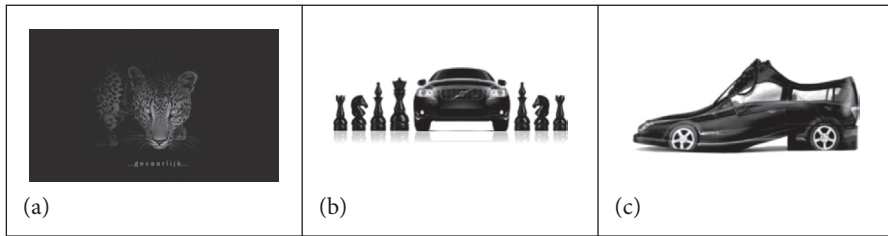


Figure 5. Contextual metaphor (A), Simile (B), and Hybrid (C)

conceivable that source domains differ in the type of associations they evoke. As we have seen above, the different associations that metaphors evoke and that serve as bases for common grounds, are generally linked together, and can be represented in a network. For instance, one of our stimuli compared the car to the king in a chess set (Figure 5B).

When interpreting this metaphor, Dutch participants referred mainly to common grounds such as ‘importance’ (*belangrijkste van het spel*), ‘competition’ (*competitief*), ‘strategy’ (*strategie*), ‘intelligence’ (*intelligentie*), ‘power’ (*macht, de heerser*), and ‘cleverness’ (*slim, slimheid*), qualifiers that could be grouped into one hierarchical node of common grounds “POWER PLAY”. The French respondents also acknowledged this POWER PLAY feature of the chess play, by mentioning ‘importance’ (*importance*), ‘intelligence’ (*intelligence*), ‘dominance’ (*maîtrise*), ‘power’ (*pouvoir, puissance, plus fort que les autres pièces*), ‘performance’ (*prestance*), and ‘strategy’ (*stratégie*), but they also added ‘luxury’ (*luxe*), ‘class’ (*classe*), ‘grace’ (*grâce*), ‘grandeur’ (*grandeur*), ‘prestige’ (*prestige*), ‘royalty’ (*royauté*), and ‘supremacy’ (*suprématie*), thereby accentuating a different hierarchical node of common grounds, MAJESTY. Apparently, the French common associations with chess give rise to a broader, and perhaps a richer field. The Spanish respondents also referred to the “POWER PLAY” characteristics of the king of chess (‘power’, ‘the best’, ‘superior’), but like the French, and unlike the Dutch, we recognized in the Spanish reactions several common grounds that are closely linked to MAJESTY, expressed in verbalizations like ‘grandeur’ (*grandeza*), ‘elegance’ (*elegancia*), ‘distinction’ (*distinción*), and ‘majesty’ (*majestuosidad*).

Something similar happened in the case of the advertisement where the car is compared to a shoe (Figure 5C). The French participants find 18 different common grounds that shoes share with cars, whereas the Dutch mention no less than 26 common grounds, and the Spaniards only seven. The common grounds can be grouped into three hierarchical network nodes: UTILITY, CLASS, and COMFORT. It appears that all three nationalities mention common grounds that can be grouped into one of these three hierarchical network nodes, but the French are more specific in their qualifiers than the Spaniards, whereas the Dutch are even more specific than the French. Table 4 shows the various common grounds with shoes. For the Dutch participants, the shoe metaphor is a more diverse and richer comparison than for the French, who, in turn, view this metaphor as more diverse and richer than the Spaniards.

Table 4. Networks of common grounds, grouped per hierarchical node, for CAR = SHOE*

Hierarchical nodes of common grounds	Class	Comfort	Utility
	Allure F	Compact F	Business F N S
	Chic F N	Comfort F N S	Go ahead F N S
	Class F N	Convenience N	Commodity N S
	Beauty F N	Form F N	Usability N S
	Elegance F N S	Protection F	
	Dressed F	Quality F N S	
	Luxurious F N S	Confection N	
	Perfection F	Expensiveness N	
	Distinguished N	High Power N	
	Exclusivity N	<i>Souplesse</i> /Flexibility N S	
	Classic N	Sportivity N S	
	Modern N	Power N	
		Adaptable S	
		Velocity S	

* 'F' stands for mentioned by the French-speaking participants, 'N' stands for the Dutch-speaking participants and 'S' stands for the Spanish-speaking participants.

We see then that cultures can differ not only in the type of common ground networks that metaphors evoke, but also in the degree of detail with which a hierarchical node of common grounds is filled in.

6. Conclusion and discussion

With respect to our first research question, whether there is a correlation between the complexity of the metaphor and interpretive diversity, we conclude that the most complex type of metaphor (contextual metaphors) does not evoke more diverse interpretations than hybrids, a less complex metaphor. In contrast, it appears that there is a correlation between appreciation and interpretive diversity. We found that the best-liked metaphor type also evokes the highest interpretive diversity. Apparently, if a reader sees a metaphor s/he likes, s/he is also inclined to elaborate more upon the target and source of this metaphor.

With regard to the role of culture, our hypothesis that Dutch respondents would show less liking of metaphors than French or Spanish participants is confirmed. Indeed, the Dutch groups liked all three types of metaphor less than the French and Spaniards. This might be attributed to the fact that the French and Spanish cultures are known for their high contextualization. They may be more familiar with the use of

indirect, figurative speech than Dutch respondents, and therefore express a higher appreciation.

We also hypothesized that the Dutch would show a preference for less complex, elaboration demanding metaphors, such as similes. This hypothesis has to be refuted. Although Dutch culture is a low context culture, where communication usually relies less on context than in other cultures, this does not automatically mean that the Dutch respondents dislike figurative speech, such as metaphors, in persuasive communication. The preference pattern for all our three nationality groups was similar: they all liked hybrid metaphors, or fusions, best. This is the type of visual metaphor that combines the target and the source domain in one single “gestalt”, into a new, unconventional entity, which invites readers to elaborate on the common ground that unites the target and the source. This type of visual metaphor is preferred to the theoretically more complex contextual metaphors or replacements. It is also preferred to the less complex simile or juxtaposition. Apparently, on the continuum of visual structure of the pictorial elements – a dimension that can be considered to make part of visual syntax – consumers, whether Spaniards, French, or Dutch, prefer a type of metaphor that facilitates processing by suggesting that two elements are physically fused together in one pictorial element, but in such a way that both the original components are still identifiable. Overall, the preferences for the different types of metaphors show a similar pattern regardless of culture.

In our experiments, we used in all 44 authentic advertisements, from which advertisement copy had been removed. Of these advertisements, 36 contained metaphors that could be classified as typical of a metaphor category established by either Forceville (1996, 2005) or Phillips and McQuarrie (2004). Since both frameworks show similarities with regard to the distinction of metaphor structure types, we collapsed our data files, and in this new data file, each metaphor type was represented by 11 instantiations. Although the general preference for hybrids is quite salient, further research into the effect of visual metaphor structure can be improved by creating metaphors that compare the same targets to the same sources for each metaphor type (such as illustrated in Figure 1). We propose, in future research, to keep things as equal as possible, and to investigate the effects of similes, hybrids, and contextual metaphors by making sure that the execution of the structure of the metaphor varies, but that the target and source are alike across all metaphor types. In order to give interpretive diversity the largest chance to occur, pretests should be executed in all participating countries, in order to investigate what possible mappings participants make with ordinary products.

In this study, we have used both a quantitative and qualitative method to investigate interpretive diversity. In future research, data collection could be improved by using thinking-aloud methods or protocols, which might give more insights into the different mappings participants make when processing visual metaphors.

It is often thought that a picture can paint a thousand words. In the discussion on globalization in the field of communication, and certainly in the field of advertising, De Mooij (2004) stresses that it is of the utmost importance to localize campaigns, and

adapt them to the value systems that are typical of a certain culture. In this contribution, we have shown that the use of visual figurative communication in advertising, especially metaphors, is highly appreciated by Spanish, French, and Dutch respondents. We have also seen that the choice of the complexity of the visual structure is not hindered by cultural biases: both high context and low context cultures show the same pattern of preferences. We have also seen that, with regard to interpretive diversity, cultures – although relatively similar – tend to diverge. The same metaphor evokes slightly different networks of associations in each culture. Cultures differ in the richness that certain individual metaphors evoke.

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