

USAGE OF EXPRESSIONS IN SLOGANS FROM POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS: A CASE STUDY OF BULGARIAN LOCAL ELECTIONS IN 2023

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Abstract. Campaign posters and printer billboards are reviewed in this article with a focus on the slogan. The main argument is that the analysis and the function of an ad slogan can be applied to political campaign slogans. Certain similarities can be found in the purpose of the two, but also similar techniques are used to engage the audience: by using salient expressions or conversational implicatures voters are engaged in a language game that increases the chances of the slogan fulfilling its purpose. For this reason, the theory of implicatures and the Graded salience hypothesis are briefly reviewed. The message becomes easier to grasp and remember because it uses familiar expressions as it is shown in the evidentiary sample.

Keywords: cooperative principle; conversational implicature; flouting maxims; advertising language; campaign slogan; local elections

Introduction

Under the direct influence of consumer culture, people gradually satisfy their desires rather than their needs. Ad slogans depend on prototypical expressions or salient words to “sell” the product. Some slogans depend on a language pun that expresses a less salient meaning of an expression trusting the language user to process the more salient meaning as well and to make interplay between the two meanings of an expression with the goal to engage the voter in some sort of a language play. This idea can be investigated to compare how some prototypical and salient or less salient expressions have been applied in advertising slogans of political parties in an effort to state a message that should urge people to vote for them. In these cases, the product that needs to be “sold” is the idea that the party stands behind and supports. Moreover, some of the slogans use words that are aimed at exactly that consumption rationality that will “look” for simple fixes to everyday problems instead of long-term lasting solutions that need compromise and effort from the population.

Explanation of the function and processing of salient and prototypical expressions

This paper focuses on the fact that copywriters rely on the pragmatic interpretation of the message in the slogan based on voter's life experience and linguistic norms. Grice's theory of implicature can be used in such cases to explicate the intended meaning behind the usage of a certain expression in a slogan.

The meaning of a word is directly related to language practice within the community in a particular context according to the prototype theory. The term prototype as defined by Elinor Rosch designates a symbol, that is a salient part of a category since it is the first symbol, associated with this category. (Rosch 1978) Rosch later defines it as the category's most basic, central element. In a broader sense, "a prototype of a category can be an object or element of a class that is most often associated with that class." (Zhang 2017, p. 135)

The graded salience hypothesis (Giora 2003) suggests that language users tend to process more salient meanings of an expression quicker than a less salient meaning. The salience of a term is determined based on a certain context, frequency of use, how familiar is the speaker with the term in this particular usage, etc. Advertisers use this characteristic of a term – its salience – as a way to engage customers in a word pun which helps the customer to remember the slogan and by extension – the advertised product. Below is an example that Rachel Giora¹ gives for a situation in which the interpretation of an expression should prioritize the literal meaning due to a contextual cue, but the idiomatic meaning was still processed initially. "The other day, when I was shopping in the Mall, I saw a shoe shop named Body and Sole. Despite ample contextual evidence, supporting the shoe sense of sole (I was in a shopping mall, the window shop displayed shoes), I could not refrain from accessing 'soul' – the contextually inappropriate meaning of the homophone – alongside sole. Or consider the following anecdote. Brigitte Nerlich, living in cold England, frequently whining about the cold weather, said to her husband one cold evening that she got cold feet. She knew while saying it, that he would never in the world reply to her literal meaning and her literal intention to tell him that she had cold feet, but he would start a joke and comfort her and ask her what she was so worried about, which he naturally did (Nerlich & Clarke 2001)" (Giora 2003, p. 14).

The conclusion in these situations is that our mind does not access the relevant compatible information initially, but the most accessible information, although it might not be the appropriate interpretation of the speaker's intention. Such examples show that there are expressions that we encounter so frequently in their idiomatic meaning, that we start to process this meaning initially even in cases where a certain context (however strong) suggests another meaning should be processed.

The theory of implicatures that Paul Grice proposes, can be used as another tool to explain the function of advertising slogans. He distinguishes between what

is said, which is “closely related to the conventional meaning of a sentence he has uttered” (Grice 1991, p. 25), and the meaning the speaker wishes to convey – the implicated meaning. The theory of implicatures refers to cases where grasping the conventional meaning of the words or the sentence is not enough to understand the speaker’s meaning. Grice assumes that people follow what he calls the Cooperative Principle (Grice 1991, p. 26) and that their contribution to the conversation is “as informative as required”. So, in case there is a discrepancy between what is said and what is meant, the speaker is assumed to remain cooperative. In such cases, their statement is processed based on the context, and the implicature that arises is named *conversational* because it is not determined only by the meaning of the uttered sentence, but also based on the context and the speaker’s intention². “Conversational implicature differs from contextual implication (or nondemonstrative implication more generally) in being defined as a relation between a speaker (not a sentence) and a proposition and in arising typically from conversational maxims (Grice 1989: 26ff.; cf. Horn 2004)” (Horn 2014, p. 15)³.

Al Fajri expresses the thesis that ads should follow the Cooperative principle and the four maxims, because an ad is essentially a communication between a few (advertisers) and many (potential customers). The application of conversational implicature with the aim to achieve a communicative effect makes ads more persuasive (Al Fajri 2017, p. 1)

Scalar implicatures are widely recognized as a specific type of implicature, also called quantity implicatures, because what is implicated is processed based on what could have been said, but isn’t. In cases where the speaker utters a sentence that contains, for example, the expression *some*, they imply that the utterance refers to some members of a class, but not all (to their knowledge). In neo-Grecian frameworks (Horn 2004, Levinson 2000) based on the maxim of quantity (“Do not make your contribution more informative than required.”) some expressions are grouped in scales such as <some, many, most, all>. Based on this scale if the speaker asserts a weaker value, this would implicate that they do not know if the stronger value can be used. In a different context, the usage of a weaker term from the scale would raise two possible interpretations of the speaker’s meaning. Consider the example “You ate some cake”. The expression *some* could be interpreted as *some if not all* or *some, but not all*. (Horn 2014, p. 16) In such cases the statement would be processed in regard to the context⁴.

Quintilian (Institutio Oratoria 9.4.23 – 27) offered several naturalis ordo principles of his own, two of the most important being the Temporal Correspondence Principle and another consideration that goes back to Aristotle: priority goes to what is ‘better and more valued’, so that we say *men and women, day and night, rising and setting*, but not the reverse. [...] the hearer will recover an implicature that the first element outranks the second in positivity, importance, or salience, if indeed that implicature hasn’t already been conventionalized⁵. Classic examples

include *high or low, good or bad, he or she, husband and wife, gin and tonic, and meat and potatoes*. (Horn 2014, p. 30)⁶.

Jeffrey Schrank (1974) explains that in the language of advertising, such a phenomenon is observed that some adjectives used in their comparative form have a stronger claim than in their superlative form – ex. *better* and *best*. This view can be considered a counter example to the theory of scalar implicatures. If a scale is formed of the adjectives <good, better, best>, a sentence that contains the word *best* would be considered stronger than a sentence, containing the word *better*. However, advertising practice serves as an example that the comparative form of the adjective is considered more persuasive. The same can be said with regard to the usage of such adjectives in campaign slogans. Schrank calls this “the unfinished claim” – stating that a product is better does not explain in what aspect that is true – the comparison remains unfinished. I hypothesize that scalar implicatures work outside of context (in the sense of physical environment), but in a certain context (a certain physical environment, or an utterance that provides the context for a specific speech situation) a less salient, but more contextually appropriate expression is processed with a higher degree of importance. The case of the comparative form having a stronger claim than the superlative is a case in point for this theory. Moreover, in a scale, there are additional degrees where the speaker uses a comparative form to show a decrease or increase of value: *even better, a lot better, a lot less good*. In those cases (if the speaker uses, for example, *a lot better*) the context of the situation shows if the expression is used to mean “quite a lot better” or “just a little better”.

Grice presupposes that people are usually compliant in a conversation with the cooperative principle and the maxims that follow from it, so when a speaker is flouting a maxim, this action is considered deliberate. Flouting a maxim is a situation where maxims are not fulfilled in an obvious way with the purpose of making the addressee search for a different or an additional meaning beyond the expressed meaning (Thomas 1995, p. 65). Grundy (2000) points out that flouting maxim is a salient means of making a hearer draw an inference and therefore recover an implicature. Flouting a maxim is a good way to make a point. People violate maxims on purpose to create a certain linguistic effect. That same effect is used in many ad slogans. “The first rule of parity involves the Alice in Wonderlandish use of the words “better” and “best.” In parity claims, “better” means “best” and “best” means “equal to.” If all the brands are identical, they must all be equally good, the legal minds have decided. So “best” means that the product is as good as the other superior products in its category. When Bing Crosby declares Minute Maid Orange Juice “the best there is” he means it is as good as the other orange juices you can buy.” (Schrank 1974)

This is an example of how flouting a maxim is used in advertising. In this case, the maxim of quality appears to be followed – the speaker does not make a claim, they believe to be untrue. Yet, if “best” means “as good as any other”, this

is an instance of violating the maxim of Manner, because the message of the ad is ambiguous.

There are many advantages to using conversational implicatures in advertising. Some of the beneficial functions of implicatures are related to the economy of language (keeping the message short and sweet), which in turn makes the message easier to memorize and attract attention. Using implicatures has one other very important feature: “Advertisers can avoid the responsibility to defend the claim since the audience is also involved in inferencing the assumption so that it is partly the audience’s responsibility. Advertisers are not required to defend inferences drawn by the audience (Geis 1982) and can if required, deny that they intend to communicate those assumptions (Tanaka 1994).”⁷ (Al Fajri 2017, p. 13).

Usage and characteristics of a slogan

The main function of advertising is to inform – “as a means of communication between the advertiser and the target audience” (Skorupa & Duboviciene 2015, p. 109).

The phrase “Breakfast is the most important meal of the day” is very popular, although it is not a scientific fact, but an ad slogan. It was used to promote cornflake cereal and later became recognized as a rule that people tend to follow and believe that breakfast is important for a healthy metabolism. This is an example of the function of ad slogans. A well-picked slogan changes the world’s knowledge and understanding of language users and shapes their beliefs. This is also an instance of the hypothesis that this case study aims to confirm: by using the phrase *most important* the first meal of the day is given priority in a way that is not easily dismissed by the native speaker. ‘Important’ is an expression that already contains high value and significance in its definition, but combined with the term ‘most’ it is placed in a scale so that it would serve as a scalar implicature. Although the usage of the word *most* in advertising is accepted as *as good as* anything else, in combination with important it creates a context where the phrase can be analyzed as a scalar term.

The purpose of the slogan in the advertisement is to leave the key message in the mind of the audience. Its goal is to stick: “If you get nothing else from this ad, get this ...!” A perfect slogan should be memorable, it should include a key benefit that shows why you as a customer should choose this product over the others of the same sort and it should impart positive feelings about the product. Those are the general features an ad-slogan should have, but this is not a complete list. In short, they sum up what the product or the brand has to offer, they are designed to draw the attention of customers to a product and keep that brand in mind in their future purchases.

“As the advertising message is usually limited by space and time, it is very important to advertisers to use effective language to attract their target audiences

and make them react to the advertisement in a positive way, as “language has a powerful influence over people and their behavior” (Kannan, Tyagi 2013, p. 3). Ad slogans have to be easy to remember, catchy, engaging, they have to correspond to the intended audience’s understanding of the world and for this reason, and language is used very distinctively. Fang Liu (2012, p. 2619) categorizes slogans as “a kind of persuasive speech act” that aims to “influence a customer into buying a certain product”. „Advertisers routinely use words or utterances to mean considerably more than what is semantically conveyed”⁸. (Chinturu Adindu & Ogonnaya 2020, p. 1) This is the characteristic of a slogan that is used as a premise in this research. A slogan has to be short, so an entire message has to be communicated with just a few words. One very common and effective way to do this is to use an implicature. The purpose of a slogan proves very effective in political campaigns: “to reduce an advertising message strategy to a brief, repeatable, and memorable positioning” (Ding 2003) – this way the views and values of a political party/candidate can be grasped and processed with less effort by the potential voter.

The main function of an advertisement – to persuade a person to buy a certain product – can be seen as a clue as to why we can use the language in the advertising slogans to draw conclusions about the mindset of the public, i.e., the prototypical expressions used in some slogans will help to understand the way potential customers see the world to understand the add. In this article, the slogan is viewed as a part of a political campaign ad and its goal is to “sell” the idea that a certain political party (or a specific candidate) is the ‘right’ choice in an election. Prototypical and salient expressions in campaign posters are processed quicker, more efficiently, and are easier to remember. Also, “research shows that fluent processing elicits positive reactions” (Winkelman t. al. 2006, p. 799), which is another reason to use more salient and prototypical expressions in campaign slogans.

“Advertisers use language quite distinctively: there are advantages in making bizarre and controversial statements in unusual ways as well as communicating with people using simple, straightforward language. Copy-writers are well-known for playing with words and manipulating or distorting their everyday meanings. They break the rules of language for effect, use words out of context and even make up new ones.” (Vasiloaia & Bacovia 2018). In this article, I would adhere to Skorupa & Duboviciene’s definition of a slogan: “as a short catchy phrase related to a specific brand, which defines, presents, and helps customers remember the key concepts of a brand or advertising campaign itself” (Skorupa & Duboviciene 2015, p. 111) – as it combines all key characteristics of a slogan based on its function in advertising.

Methodology

This is descriptive qualitative research that discovers the violation of Grice’s maxims and the usage of salient and prototypical expressions in advertising slogans in political campaigns. The data of this study consists of examples of printed

billboards or online ads of mayoral candidates in the local elections in Bulgaria in 2023. Nine examples are reviewed. This study employs qualitative methods of sociology and theoretical methods of philosophical conceptual analysis. Words and phrases are analyzed based on Grice's theory of conversational implicature, their salience, and their linguistic characteristics as an advertising slogan.

There are some obvious limitations to this study. For one the number of examples is fairly small. Also, the research could be continued throughout future campaigns to determine succession. Another way this research could be broadened in future papers is to include public opinion about the persuasiveness of the slogans.

Examples

In this section I will review billboards and campaign posters with the goal to point out the usage of implicatures with advertising purposes and to explain which maxim is being flaunted.

The first example comes from a printed billboard in Blagoevgrad of the mayoral candidate of the political party "We Continue the Change – Democratic Bulgaria" [Продължаваме Промяната – Демократична България]. The slogan reads "Together for our city!" [Заедно за нашия град!]. This slogan violates the maxim of manner – the slogan is ambiguous because there is no clear claim as to what exactly the mayoral candidate and the candidates for Municipal Counselor are going to do for the city together. One other reading (probably the one that the copywriter intended to express) of this slogan would be that the candidate promises to work together with the citizens, opening a dialogue about city issues. If we take a closer look at the word "together" it can be interpreted in the context of a metaphor that Bulgarians often use: "Many hands make light work. – Сговорна дружина планина повдига". In this context, the usage of the word together implies that the candidate and the citizens can work together and easily improve the quality of life in the city.

Another example where the maxim of manner is flaunted is GERB-UDF's [ГЕРБ – СДС] slogans "We work for [name of a city]" – "Работим за [име на град]". The phrase is again ambiguous – it is not clear in what aspect is the candidate working for the city. "The present tense is the most commonly used in advertisements. The present tense grammatically is used to show the emotion of the topic and the writer's point of view." (Yuliahet al. 2021, p. 122).

The third example is again from a printed billboard, that presents one of Simitli's mayoral candidates, affiliated with The Union of Free Democrats [Съюз на свободните демократи]. The slogan's text is: "For a free Simitli" [За свободен СIMITЛИ]. This could be considered as a language play, because a part of the name of the party, that the candidate is associated with is in the slogan. But the message the slogan intends to communicate, is that by voting for this candidate, citizens support the end of corruption in their city and are backing a democratic administration.

In a similar manner can be interpreted the slogan of mayoral candidate of local coalition “We Continue the Change – Democratic Bulgaria and There Is Such People” [Продължаваме Промяната – Демократична България и Има Такъв Народ] in Pomorie. The slogan is “Future for Pomorie” [Бъдеще за Поморие]⁹. Such slogans violate the maxim of manner with their obscurity, because they do not give the voter exact information about what type of future is being promised/advertised. Also, as mentioned before, slogans have to be short, so they are easier to remember, but such examples are cases of a violation of the maxim of quantity.

The slogan of mayoral candidate of political party There Is Such People [Има Такъв Народ] in Kazanlak says: “Kazanlak – that is You, I am one of You!”¹⁰ [Казанлък – това сте Вие, Аз съм една от Вас!]. “The use of second person referent “you” tends to shorten the distance between the product or the producer and consumers, as if the producer or the ad is speaking to you face to face, making sincere promises, and honest recommendations. In so doing, the ad slogans stand a better chance to move the receiver or customers to action, because the receiver feels that he is being thought of and taken care of and he is the center point of the producers.” (Ding 2003) In this case, the quantity maxim appears to be flouted, because the slogan is uninformative. The message that the voter should be able to process, is that the mayoral candidate (being one of the people) will take care of the needs of those people: as a member of the community she is familiar with the issues in this community and also has a personal interest in fixing them.

The sixth type of slogan that should be discussed, is concerning usage of idiomatic meaning. “According to Grice (1967), there are several rhetorical devices that typically give rise to the flouting of the maxim of Quality, including pun, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, and irony. This kind of flouting is also commonly seen in print ads.” (Liu 2012: 2621) Such an example can be found in a printed poster from the campaign of one of Blagoevgrad’s mayoral candidates, endorsed by GERB [ГЕРБ]. The text of the slogan is: „Blagoevgrad of the people“ [Благоевград на хората]. The meaning behind this slogan is that the citizens should be the ones deciding their city’s future, not that they own the city. But in such context, the idiomatic meaning would be processed easier, because it is more salient than the literal meaning. The implied meaning can be therefore easily derived but the voter would be able to remember it as it is short and catchy. Similarly, the slogan of a mayoral candidate of Sofia, endorsed by BSP for Bulgaria [БСП за България], claims “Sofia for everyone” [София за всички]. The implied meaning is citizens of Sofia should have equal opportunities for development, and the administration has thought about everyone’s needs and they will be met in an effort to achieve high quality of life. “Figurative language also has a striking and memorable quality which suits it for slogans and headlines” (Leech 1972, p. 183).

There are a few examples in the posters of mayoral candidates in Bulgaria that are related to the violation of the maxim of manner in the sense that the word

“better” is used to express “the best”. Such expressions are ambiguous and the audience can draw many meanings from the implicature. One such example is the slogan of a mayoral candidate in Dobrich, endorsed by a local coalition Bulgaria of the citizens [България на гражданите]: “Stronger together for Dobrich” [Посилни заедно за Добрич]. The word *strong* can be matched with its synonyms *durable, secure, solid, determined*, so to use the superlative form would increase these associations in the voters. Another example can be drawn from a mayoral candidate in Sevlievo, endorsed by BSP [БСП] – “For a better life” [За по-добър живот]. Not only are such claims vague, but also have an emotional appeal. People are easily persuaded to choose a product (vote for a candidate) that promises them something more and better than what they currently have. In such cases, the slogan is chosen for its rhetorical effect.

Conclusion

Conversational implicatures are used in slogans of political campaign posters with the intention to create linguistic effect. El-Dali defends the position that “advertising must be looked at as a social discourse with rhetorical force.” (El-Dali, 2019, p. 118) Implicatures are processed based on language use, context of communication, and speaker’s motives. The copywriters are attempting to persuade the voter to choose a specific candidate by flaunting a maxim and gain the audience’s attention.

A slogan is a tool that is used to help the customer identify the brand quickly and easily. Slogans in political campaigns’ aim is to make an impression in the voter’s conscience, so that the corresponding political candidate/party is easily identifiable and therefore more familiar. The audience is engaged in a certain language game (through implicature) and on election day the slogan serves its purpose. Using implicatures in campaign slogans creates a rhetorical effect to attract the audience’s attention.

NOTES

1. Here she quotes the article of Nerlich, Brigitte & Clarke, David (2001). Ambiguities we live by: Towards a pragmatics of polysemy. *Journal of Pragmatics*, vol. 33, pp. 1 – 20. 10.1016/S0378-2166(99)00132-0.
2. Grice considers the speaker’s intention to be crucial for reliably deriving the meaning of any utterance uttered by that speaker. To derive the meaning attributed by the speaker, the listener takes into account the semantic meaning of the sentence used, as well as conventional rules of communication and the context of the speech situation.
3. The four maxims Horn refers to are introduced by Grice (Grice 1991, p. 27): Quality (the contribution to the conversation has to be true); Quantity (the contribution should be as informative as required); Relation (the

- contribution of the speaker should be relevant to the conversation) and Manner (ambiguity and obscurity should be avoided, the contribution should be orderly and brief).
4. The concept of context in this sense includes both the physical environment, in which the interlocutors are located, as well as any sociolinguistic conventions that are part of their language community; and any other background knowledge that the speaker and hearer are assumed to share and that contributes to processing the meaning that the speaker wants to convey.
 5. "In some cases, the conventional meaning of the words used will determine the implicature, in addition to helping to determine what is being said." (Grice 1989, p. 25) Grice calls these cases conventional implicatures.
 6. Horn quotes Cooper and Ross, and Quintilian in these examples: Cooper, W. and J. R. Ross. 1975. World order. In *Papers from the Parasession on Functionalism*, pp. 63 – 111. Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society.; Quintilian. *Institutio Oratoria*, Vol. 3, H.E. Butler, trans. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920.
 7. Here Al Fajri quotes Geis, M. L. (1982). The language of television advertising. New York: Academic Press and Tanaka, K. (1999). Advertising language: A pragmatic approach to advertisements in Britain and Japan: Psychology Press.
 8. It is through implicatures that meaning is expressed (directly dependent on the intention of the speaker to communicate something) that goes beyond the semantic meaning of the utterance.
 9. <https://www.24chasa.bg/bulgaria/article/15991369>
 10. <https://www.kazanlak.com/news-41926.html>

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