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Sound of a slogan: appealing to audiences in the global market

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Abstract

Linguistic iconicity is the phenomenon that has become the focus of research in such spheres as philology, psychology, and neurology; it is one of the tools most frequently used to communicate the marketing or inspirational message, as its universal appeal allows reaching wider audiences and causing a predictable desired response of the recipients. The paper deals with the analysis of slogans composed according to three-element pattern in contrastive perspective to establish universal, relatively universal and language-specific manifestations of linguistic iconicity with an aim to consider the challenges in localization of these messages across the working languages (English, Russian, and Latvian).

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1. Introduction

Globalization of world economies, integration of markets and internationalization of communities call for necessity to transfer information transnationally, to address wider audiences in a mode that is universally comprehensible and appealing. Iconicity, which is defined as the motivated connection or similarity between the *sign* (the signifier) and *meaning* (the signified), is a set of universal tools that is increasingly applied to transcend national and cultural borders in communication. All forms of iconicity, including pictorial, graphic and linguistic, are employed to ensure the message is favorably perceived and interpreted by speakers of different languages and members of different communities.

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Linguistic iconicity (i.e. sound imitation and sound symbolism) is the phenomenon that has become the focus of research in such spheres as philology, psychology, and neurology. Nowadays, the results of research conducted on the issue of iconic characteristics of certain sounds and sound clusters (phonoesthemes) are extensively employed not only by copywriters and brand managers, but also by PR and communication specialists. Names of the companies and products, slogans and mottos, marketing and mission statements, which are aimed at inducing a desired reaction of the recipients, are composed employing the iconic resources of the language in general and the principles of phonosemantics in particular.

The effect caused by conscious application of certain sounds and sound clusters in communicating certain images or ideas is largely attributed to the phenomenon of synesthesia, or the '*oneness of senses*'. It is the perception phenomenon occurring when an impression caused by a certain stimulus and specific of a certain organ of perception is accompanied by other additional impression or image, often characteristic of other modality. Contemporary multi-modal operative texts aim at inducing definite synesthetic reactions, in which activation of concepts evokes perception-like experiences.

The paper deals with the analysis of advertising and motivational slogans in contrastive perspective with an aim to consider the opportunities and limitations in localization of marketing and inspirational messages across the working languages (English, Russian, and Latvian). The slogans included in the sample are composed following the three-element pattern aimed at creation of *staccato* effect. Taking into consideration that these slogans are created employing at least one instance of iconicity, i.e. rhythmical arrangement of the utterance, which can be accompanied by other forms of iconic meaning representation, they appear a perfect medium in order to establish universal, relatively universal and language-specific manifestations of linguistic iconicity.

2. Linguistic iconicity and synesthesia

Iconicity or stable non-arbitrary connection between the signifier and the signified is a mechanism of representation that can be implemented within and across all semiotic systems. Linguistic iconicity, or the property of a word conditioned by the presence of the essential, recurrent and relatively stable non-arbitrary relation between the phonemes of an underived word and the property of an object-denotatum (motif) taken as the basis of nomination (Voronin, 1982), is treated as a perception phenomenon that is primarily rooted in cognitive and neurological function of the human mind. Linguistic iconicity is used as an umbrella term to refer to such phenomena as sound imitation (onomatopoeia) and various forms of sound symbolism (articulatory and acoustic sound symbolism, phonaesthesia). Hinton et al. (2006) analyze the phenomenon of linguistic iconicity in terms of imitative, corporeal, synthetic, and conventional sound symbolism. In general, the distinction is made between imitation proper, when the properties of the denotatum are represented mimetically, and symbolic representation of certain meaning, when certain sounds or suprasegmental units are chosen to represent kinetic, tactile or visual properties of objects (e.g. size, shape, color, type of movement) (Crystal, 1994; Trask, 1999).

Sound imitation is a universal phenomenon that displays high degree of consistency in sound/meaning representation patterns across the languages (Voronin, 1982). At the same time, the phenomenon of sound symbolism, although being essentially iconic, may be more or less language and culture specific. The process of ascribing meaning to certain phonoesthemes would be governed by convention, conceptual structure of each particular language, and individual aspects of cognitive processing of information determined by subjective perception of the world. Coding of meaning in the process of conceptualization of sound symbolic lexis is associated with the phenomenon of synesthesia, which appears to be one of the most important components of psychophysical foundation of sound symbolism (Voronin, 1982; Cytowic, 2002). Within cognitive-semiotic systems, various conceptual and linguistic tools may be used to code one and the same emotive content inducing certain synesthetic reactions.

Synesthesia is the perception phenomenon occurring when an impression caused by a certain stimulus and specific of certain mode of perception is accompanied by additional impression or image, often characteristic of other modality. It appears when one stimulus causes several sensations at a time, while one sensation is adequate and the other(s) is inadequate. Within psycholinguistic approach, the phenomenon of synesthesia is associated with the mechanism of reconsidering the meaning of words identifying what properties of the concept allow using the name of one object to denote another (Zaichenko and Kartavenko, 2011). Thus, essentially, the mechanism of

synesthesia is akin to metaphor – there is a transfer of a quality of one sensation onto another. In this respect, Dixon et al. suggest that it is necessary to refer to the phenomenon of ideasthesia, which occurs when activation of concepts (inducers) evokes perception-like experiences (concurrents) (Dixon et al., 2006). In contrast to synesthesia proper, which in essence is the conflation of senses, ideasthesia is manifested on the plane of interaction between the semantic inducer and sense-like or emotive concurrent.

Cytowic (2002) with the reference to Marks points out that cross-modal metaphors in language derive partly from some of the same sensory processes that underlie synesthesia, which, in its turn, can be seen as a complex form of nonverbal metaphorical thinking. Synesthetic or intersense metaphors act as a conceptual linguistic mechanism of construing and verbalizing emotive experiences.

Synesthesia, or suggestion by certain sense receptions of characters belonging to another sense, (...), should be made more conscious by a linguistic metaphorical system that refers to nonspatial experiences by terms for spatial ones, though undoubtedly it arises from a deeper source. Probably in the first instance metaphor arises from synesthesia and not the reverse; yet metaphor need not become firmly rooted in linguistic pattern. (Whorf, 2012, p. 199)

Synesthesia is a tool with the help of which senses and feelings are fixed verbally, and understanding of the mechanism of synesthesia not only allows to effectively influence the way information is processed by a human, but also to manage the development of cognitive abilities of an individual (Zaichenko and Kartavenko, 2011). Therefore, conscious triggering of synesthetic reactions may lead to the activation of the desired sensations and emotions to be experienced by recipients as well as ensure communication of the intended meaning. In case of interlingual communication, it is important to account for the fact that synthetic metaphors, just like any other type of metaphors are “culturally and linguistically shaped, but with some neurological underpinning” (Day, 2012, p. 1).

Rhythm is another iconic phenomenon that can be manifested both linguistically and extra-linguistically. Levy (1966) as well as Leech and Short (1981) maintain that rhythm performs iconic function in language and intentional rhythmical arrangement of the utterance may not only bring order to the utterance but also reinforce the perception of certain meaning and trigger certain emotions. According to Levy (1966), rhythmical irregularities (for example, appearing as a result of the junction of two stresses or greater emphasis put on one of them) condition acoustic or semantic breach between two adjacent words. Regular rhythm (or rhythmic parallelism), on the contrary, facilitates the adherence of linguistic units into one whole (verse or half-verse) and thus reinforces interrelation of contextually determined elements. Semantic emphasis appears to be a natural result of phonetic stress, and this category also comprises ‘kinetic meanings’ of rhythm, which actually are nothing else but similarly structured successions of sounds emphasizing kinetic meanings appearing in the text, i.e. according to the principle of iconic sign. Hinton et al. (2006) also consider rhythm an instance of sound imitative symbolism, a universal phenomenon of iconic nature.

Pršir and Simon (2013, p. 167) distinguish three types of rhythmic iconicity, “iconicity on a local (word or phrase) and on a global (utterance or sequence of utterances) level, and contextualization provoked by contrast between sequences. Iconic meaning is strongly related to imitation (or mirroring) while contextualization helps draw inferences by creating contrasts.” The appellative force of rhythm is widely employed in marketing, public speaking and motivational discourse. In its iconic capacity, rhythm reinforces the message, makes it recognizable and memorable, it brings order into utterance thus making it more harmonious. A more or less distinct rhythm is present in the majority of successful slogans.

Expressive resources of the language based on the principles of linguistic iconicity can be employed to perform a variety of functions, including communicative, appellative, expressive and phatic, and that makes them a perfect tool to be used in persuasive or manipulative communications, specifically in the composition of operative texts.

3. Linguistic iconicity in operative texts

Operative texts, or the texts that primarily perform appellative function and are aimed at inducing definite behavioral responses (Reiss, 1989), extensively employ expressive means of the language in order to manipulate recipient opinion and induce the responses intended by the sender of the message. In case of marketing or

inspirational slogans, the information value may be reduced to a minimum, because form may be considered to be more important than content.

Linguistic iconicity is one of the tools most frequently used to communicate the marketing or inspirational messages. Its universal appeal allows reaching wider audiences and causing a predictable desired response of the recipients. Such manifestations of linguistic iconicity as onomatopoeia and rhythm, as well as combinations of phonetic and phonosemantic stylistic devices that aim at inducing certain concurrent synesthetic reactions, such as alliteration and assonance, are extensively used in composition of slogans and brand names (Batey, 2008). Iconic and synesthetic phenomena are consciously employed to influence the recipient's behavior, "The fact that phonemes, in certain situations, appear to be linked to specific meanings and even emotions is significant with regard to brand meaning (...) Individual letters and phonemes in a brand name contain meaning that can influence attribute perceptions and trigger perceptual reactions to the brand name." (Batey, 2008, p. 61)

In case marketing or inspirational messages have to be translated, or localized, to appeal to different linguistic communities, the aspects of iconic representation of meaning should be considered in contrastive perspective taking into account culture-bound assumptions. The challenges associated with the interlingual transfer of manifestations of linguistic iconicity are conditioned by the differences in conceptualization and verbalization of emotive content, which is governed by the conceptual structure of a particular language. Coding of information is subject to conventions, which can be national, local, family, some may be formal and institutionalized, some may pertain to culture and thus may be manipulated, cf. (Oswald, 2012, p. 78).

Communication of the message through a purposeful arrangement of sounds and submorphemic clusters as well as rhythmical organization of the text can be ensured not only by linguistic but also extra-linguistic means. Graphical arrangement of words on the page may possess mimetic power and may be considered the instance of graphic synesthesia (Kies, 1990).

The text in example (1) extracted from the banner at the official site of Jamie Oliver [A] displays characteristic features of operative texts that aim to cause certain behavioral responses; it serves both advertising and inspirational purposes.

- (1) Small changes
 Scrumptious recipes
 Smashing tips
 For a healthier happier you

The message is communicated employing various means that can conditionally be considered iconic. The text is organized in a column to make the effect of alliteration of the initial letters of the noun phrases more pronounced. The juxtaposition of the units *healthier* and *happier* is close succession aims to establish certain associative relationship between the cognates. The message is also rhythmically arranged, although rhythm is relatively covert. Thus, it may be maintained that the texts feature the manifestations of both linguistic and graphic iconicity that are used as the medium ensuring successful communication of the message.

4. Linguistic iconicity in advertising and inspirational slogans

In the recent years, more and more goods and services are marketed internationally, and numerous databases of brand names and slogans are compiled to avoid infringement on the intellectual property rights. Textual data were retrieved from two data bases, www.adslogans.co.uk and textart.ru, listing slogans in English and Russian, and since there is no comprehensive data base of slogans in the Latvian language, the slogans analyzed have been handpicked from authentic texts.

All slogans in the sample are composed following a three-element pattern. The effect known as *staccato* [B] is achieved through a combination of three items rhythmically arranged, thus rhythm is used as the primary vehicle in communicating iconic meaning. The impact of rhythm is often emphasized by the application of rhyme, alliteration and assonance, which help convey meaning, mood and emotions iconically.

The most powerful iconic effect is achieved if the slogan is composed of three monosyllables initiating in the same sound, i.e. the *staccato* effect is promoted by initial alliteration [C]. Thus, iconicity is manifested at several

levels, namely, rhythmical arrangement of the utterance brings order to the phrase, alliteration acts as a synthetic metaphor projecting an image that there is an inherent ideational interrelation between the three concepts referred in a phrase, and if the initial phonoesthemes are linguistically iconic, the appellative effect is further reinforced.

The three-element model is widely employed in all three working languages, although in English it is used more frequently and at times more effectively. In Latvian and Russian, there is a tendency to use longer words. In English the elements in the slogan tend to be monosyllabic, whereas in the other working languages it is not a frequent occurrence; the slogans would be mainly composed of bi- or trisyllabic words. For instance, example 2.5 features a 2-2-3 syllable pattern – *Яр-кий. Ред-кий. До-маш-ний*, whereas example 2.7 – a 2-1-2 syllable pattern – *Zi-nāt. Spēt. Ra-dīt*. English slogans often have a more pronounced rhythmical pattern and are more frequently composed using other expressive means, e.g. assonance (example 2.1), alliteration (example 2.2), parallel constructions (example 2.3).

- (2) 2.1. Flop, Drop & Shop (Cruise holiday from Royal Caribbean International)
- 2.2. Dream. Dare. Do. (Girl Guides)
- 2.3. Buy it. Sell it. Love it. (eBay)
- 2.4. Верный. Надежный. Друг. (UAZ Patriot) (Faithful. Reliable. Friend)
- 2.5. Яркий. Редкий. Домашний. (Toshiba TV-set) (Bright. Rare. Homely)
- 2.6. Zināt. Spēt. Radīt. (Riga Technical University)
- 2.7. Dievs. Daba. Darbs (three exhibitions, a concert organized by the University of Latvia, a concert organized by Kekava Municipality, etc.)

Popular and frequently reiterated slogans may acquire additional independent meaning. In the course of time, they might become catch phrases or set expressions that enter the general language stock. Motto (2.7) *Dievs. Daba. Darbs* (God. Nature. Work) can make a good example to the point. It was originally used as a title of the first book (1926) of an autobiographical trilogy by the Latvian writer Anna Brigadiere, and nowadays is considered to represent the quintessence of the Latvian national identity. The phrase is frequently used as a title of exhibitions and concerts. It is argued that the three concepts in question historically constitute the core values of the Latvian culture (Latkovskis, 2013).

From the point of view of linguistic iconicity, the phrase is an instance of successful application of iconic resources of the language. It consists of three words, two of which are monosyllabic, that start with the same sound, and sound [d] being a plosive in the initial position followed by a vowel projects the iconic effect of brevity and power. The cognates in a phrase are seen to represent a certain unity, to be inherently connected on the conceptual level. The sensations or concurrences triggered by the motto are also conditioned by the social and cultural context, the traditions of using, quoting and interpreting the phrase. Thus, on the intertextual level it is a complex allusion to the previous texts that can be decoded only by the users sharing certain background knowledge. Considering it in contrastive perspective, it is translatable with considerable limitations and only on the level of denotation; the iconic effect as well as cultural implications are fully lost in translation.

Challenges in localizing or translating advertising and motivational slogans are normally associated with the fact that the form of operative or vocative texts is not less important than their meaning. The following example illustrates the case when the content was compromised in favor of the effect of the form. The motto of Riga Technical University is (2.6) *Zināt. Spēt. Radīt* (to know, to be capable, to create). In Latvian, the appeal of the slogan is conditioned by staccato effect; however, if translated into English literally, this effect is going to be lost. Thus, the official English language version of the motto was composed to retain the *staccato* pattern – *To know. To explore. To invent*. This version was given priority over a more content-wise accurate variant *Be clever. Be capable. Be creative*, even though this version also employs alliteration metaphorically relating the core qualities to be developed in the course of studies. The iconic power of rhythm is explicit in the former variant and latent in the latter. That makes the official variant more suitable to use through all modes of communication, written and oral, to use it as a jingle or a chant. It may be argued that the motivational power of the official English version is much greater. Thus, in case of interlingual transfer, it is necessary to reach certain tradeoff between content accuracy, formal characteristics, and the appellative force of the message.

Considering the slogans in contrastive perspective it can be observed that the persuasive and aesthetic effect communicated by the application of iconic linguistic means can be reproduced in translation only with certain

limitations, and the translator should carefully assess the extent of potential loss on either the plane of content or the plane of expression.

5. Conclusion

The potential of various forms of linguistic iconicity as means to communicate messages across languages and cultures has been appreciated in numerous studies; however, to date the interest has been mainly focused on universal appealing power of graphic and pictorial iconicity. Comprehensive study of the mechanisms of iconic representation of semantic and emotive content can contribute to the understanding of the processes underlying conceptualization of sensations and emotive experiences, especially in the interlingual setting.

Having analyzed the application of iconic resources of the language in three working languages it can be concluded that in English these resources are employed more extensively, and the effect of their application is more explicit and traceable. Further analysis of the methods guiding how rhythm, onomatopoeia, alliteration, and assonance and synesthetic metaphors can be employed in composing operative texts both intralingually and interlingually can facilitate the development of efficient and universally appealing marketing and inspirational campaigns reaching the audiences on the global scale.

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