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ABSTRACT

Relevance theory, the premise that a hearer will make the effort to process a communication if he or she feels it will alter or enrich his/her cognitive environment, can be useful for increasing the effectiveness of advertising communication. It is particularly helpful for analyzing and improving the effectiveness of the creative devices often used in advertising language to add interest and additional meaning to the text. While essentially a theory of pragmatics, relevance theory gives a complete account of the recovery of meaning of an utterance. Advertising text commonly contains variations on accepted standards of grammaticality and specific contextual implications. Analysis of the text using relevance theory can expose the text/context interaction and illustrate the role of linguistic style as a tool for conveying more than is actually verbalized. Areas that can be targeted by such analysis include disambiguation and referential assignment, readers' anticipatory hypotheses, examination of phonetic effects, repetition, text length, media-specific contextual implications, intertext devices, illocutionary force, and cancellation of implicature. A 97-item bibliography is included. (MSE)

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Relevance Theory and the language of advertising*

by

Barbara Byrne

1 Introduction

Advertising is an exercise in communication economics, in which the communicator endeavours to utilize scarce resources in the best and most effective combination to bring the desired return. As Leech (1966, p.26) points out: "The advertiser has to buy his way to the public's attention: budgeting economy of means against results".

One of the more problematic of the imponderable factors involved can be the linguistic-pragmatic effectiveness of the advertising text. This will depend on the interaction between the text, the reader/hearer's context (cognitive environment), and the effort he is prepared to make to interpret the message and its implications. Text refers here to the language used in the advertisement, whether the medium is print, radio or television. The term utterance is taken to refer to other uses of language outside the advertising text.

In addition to the timeless meaning prior to disambiguation, as described by Grice (1957) and discussed in section 2.2 below, most communications also incorporate a pragmatic or contextual element which completes or enriches the information conveyed. In creative language a higher degree of responsibility for the interpretation of an utterance is left to the hearer. For this reason, a linguistic-pragmatic study would seem to be a helpful basis for analysing the effectiveness of the creative devices used in advertising

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language to add interest and additional meaning to the text.

Levinson (1983, p.387) argues that pragmatics "has potential application to all fields with a stake in how utterances are understood" including the "[...] study of communication difficulties that arise when communicators are not in face-to-face interaction". As Kempson (1988, p.151) points out: "One of the chief problems for any pragmatic theory to explain [...] is how it is that the information derived from an utterance of a sentence is far richer than the information which a given sentence will present as its linguistically specifiable meaning."

Dyer (1982) cited in O'Donohoe (1986, p.47) states: "[...] the meaning of an advertisement is not something there, statistically inside an ad. waiting to be revealed by a 'correct' interpretation". Referring to the gap between semantic and pragmatic meaning of texts in television advertising, Geis (1982, p.139) suggests an "alternative theory of sentence meaning in which the relative primacy of semantics and pragmatics is reversed".

Opinions vary as to the exact point at which the distinction between semantics and pragmatics is drawn. As will be discussed in section 2, Relevance Theory accounts for the recovery of both the explicature of an utterance and its implicatures, the semantic and pragmantic elements, what is said and what is implied. None of these three sets of terms correspond exactly to each other. As Carston (1988, p.160) points out: "There is simply not a neat correlation between a semantics/pragmatics distinction and an explicating/implicating distinction". Wilson and Sperber (1981, p.156) state: "The semantics/pragmatics distinction cannot be reduced to a distinction between saying and implicating".

Relevance Theory, although essentially a theory of pragmatics, gives a complete account of the recovery of the meaning of an utterance. While the semantics/pragmatics dichotomy has a role to play, defining the exact point at which the distinction is made is not perhaps as significant to explaining the communication process as was the case with previous theories. It is worth mentioning here that the semantics/pragmatics distinction has been compared to the distinction between meaning and use or between competence and performance (as described by Chomsky 1965). This is discussed, for instance, in Leech (1981), Levinson (1983), Kempson (1975), and Blakemore (1987). Chomsky describes a grammar of a language as a description of the ideal speaker-hearer's intrinsic competence (the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language) and performance (the actual use of language in concrete

situations). In ordinary conversation, as Aitchison (1983, p.164) points out: "A speaker's performance is likely to be a random sample bespattered with errors and does not necessarily provide a very good guide to his competence, the internalized set of rules which underlie them."

In advertising, because of the importance of creativity of style, it is quite common, as Leech (1966, p.27) states, to find variations on normally accepted standards of grammaticality. These range from deliberate errors in orthography, which are used to attract attention, to elliptical devices and unusual premodifiers (*ibid.*, p.136) such as "different tasting" and "the all-round-the-garden fertiliser". Advertising might be an area which fits what Bruner (1975, p.3) says in relation to child language acquisition: "utterer's meaning cannot be judged in terms of truth or falsity conditions or by well-formedness in the light of grammatical rules, but rather in terms of its effectiveness in achieving the speaker's intention".

Pragmatics is concerned with contextual and occasion factors in the interpretation of an utterance. The term "semantic meaning" is taken here to refer to the proposition that could be recovered from the use of a sentence in isolation, minus the contribution of context and occasion. In other words, it can be taken to be the underspecified conventional meaning of an utterance. It is often observed that some uses of language, for example scientific texts, approach this "context-freedom" more closely than others. Of course, even the utterance of a scientific term can have pragmatic implications as, for example, an utterance such as

(1) Fahrenheit 451

(1) could on occasion be used to refer to the science-fiction novel by Ray Bradbury, with all the contextual implications of a world without books.

Similarly, somebody handed a glass of clear liquid and expecting an unusual drink might remark, on discovering it is water,

(2) It's H_2O

to communicate her disappointment that it is only water and to imply that she was expecting something more exotic. This is the effect of calling it by a less everyday name.

Wilson and Sperber (1986b, p.67) define pragmatic processes as those that are "used to bridge the gap between the semantic representations of the sentences and the interpretation of utterances in context". As Blakemore

(1987, p.18) indicates: "Pragmatic interpretation does not just involve the recovery of propositional content: the hearer is also expected to access the impact of the proposition on his existing representation of the world"

Reduced communicative value of advertising can result from the hearer's failure to access the intended implications of the message either because these are not sufficiently immediate, or because he feels it is not worth making the effort to access them, or because the hearer accesses unintended unfavourable implications. Vestergaard and Schröder (1985, p.3) remind us that display advertisements in newspapers are placed in prominent places amongst the editorial material "in order to attract the attention of readers whose main interest in the publication is not this or that particular advertisement".

Leech (1966, p.5) emphasises that "The average person's attitude to advertising is bored tolerance"; while Day (1984, p.5) states that: "Advertising is part of the wallpaper of our lives and has been these many years". The recent upsurge of consumer awareness and consumer legislation have contributed towards making the audience more critical and more analytic towards advertising when they do take note of it. O'Donohoe (1986, p.43) found that spontaneous responses of women interviewed to test their reaction to advertisements in Irish women's magazines showed that they were "advertising literate". Packard (1981, p.218) stresses "the very great rise, within two decades, in the average level of education of people under thirty-five. Any flimflaming must be done somewhat more subtly".

On the other hand, failure on the part of the audience to study an advertisement in detail can result in the desired message being conveyed without its being actually stated or logically implied in the text; in other words, by the hearer's being "manipulated" into thinking a definite statement has been made. Geis (1982, p.56) draws attention to the fact that in states of "idle listening" while watching television, the consumer may fail to observe how weak a claim is, assessing only the most relevant information as defined by Grice (1975, p.56) in his formulation of the Maxim of Relevance. Geis (1982, p.57) notes that: "Implicatures arising out of the Maxim of Relevance are perceptually more salient than implicatures arising out of the Maxim of Strength".

Gardner (1975) cited in Harris (1977, p.603) presents as a category of deception any way in which the advertisement "interacts with the accumulated attitudes and beliefs of the consumer in such a manner as to leave a deceptive

belief or attitude about the product or service being advertised, without making either explicit or implicit deceptive claims".

Relevance Theory, as developed by Sperber and Wilson (1986), emphasises the interaction between cognitive psychology, mental deductive functions and grammatical processes, and between the effort the hearer invests and the yield of information attained. This study argues that Relevance Theory is therefore an ideal tool for analysing the effectiveness of communication through the creative linguistic style of advertising, which is geared to a large target audience, often widely scattered.

Wilson and Sperber (1987, p.9) suggest that the

> standards governing inferential communication have their source in some basic facts about human cognition. Humans pay attention to some phenomena rather than others; they represent these phenomena to themselves in one way rather than another. What is it that determines these choices? Our suggestion is that humans tend to pay attention to the most relevant phenomena and to process them in a context that maximises their relevance. Relevance and the maximisation of relevance is the key to human cognition.

Relevance in the ordinary sense is essential for any product that is advertised. As Day (1984) points out:

> If the product is not perceived as being sufficiently relevant to enough people, the product dies [...]. The product must be seen to be "relevant" to the way people live, which means the communication must start from a common point of reference.

Sperber and Wilson (1986, p.119) argue that:

> scientific psychology needs a concept which is close enough to the ordinary language notion of relevance, in other words that there is an important property — a property of mental processes — which the ordinary notion of relevance roughly approximates and which it is therefore appropriate to call relevance too, using the term now in a technical sense.

As Kempson (1988, p.160) points out,

> The attraction of Relevance Theory is twofold. First it articulates a

detailed explanation of processes involved in utterance interpretation with predictions which are precise enough to bring pragmatics back into the field of serious inquiry. Secondly, the entire account of pragmatics is embedded within an overall theory of cognition.

A particular advantage of Relevance Theory when it comes to describing advertising communication is the stress it places on the contribution of hearer-related factors, which do not receive the same emphasis in the traditional code model or in semiotics. No amount of work or skill on the part of the communicator will make the communication effective if the hearer is not prepared to make the effort to access the intended information. The opportunity cost to the hearer of processing a communication is a few moments of time. While the average hearer in the canonical conversational situation (as described by Clark and Carlson 1982) will make a minimum effort to process utterances no matter how boring, rather than appear impolite, the advertiser has no certainty of a captive audience even if the physical presence of the audience can be guaranteed, and so has to weigh the implications of using a more interesting style to convey the message, even if this involves more processing.

Giving too much information, on the other hand, and including in the utterance items which the hearer could readily access from contextual implications (as defined in Relevance Theory and described in detail in section 2) can make the communication sound boring and patronising.

Van Peer (1986, p.5) indicates the three modes into which language is divided by Havranek (as described by Garvin 1964). These are (a) scientific, (b) everyday and (c) poetic. All of these modes can be used in particular types of advertising, although there is a tendency to rely on a more poetic linguistic style than is the case with everyday language. Sperber and Wilson maintain that style arises in the pursuit of Relevance and that the degree of responsibility the hearer has to take for the interpretation of an utterance varies according to the poeticness of the style used. They state (1986, p.224): "One way in which styles may differ is their greater or lesser reliance on implicature and in the way they exploit the backgrounding and foregrounding of information in their explicatures".

Although advertising is written language or what Leech describes as "written-to-be-spoken" (scripted) language, copywriters tend to try to reproduce the spontaneous everyday language of the target audience,

interspersed with poetic devices. As indicated in Leech (1966, p.74) advertising can have a collective source, several people often being involved in the creation of the text and, in the case of radio and television advertising, the performer not being the originator of the text. The audience can amount to thousands or, in the case of pan-national media, to millions. Referring to the language of television advertising, Geis (1982, p.139) states: "Whether or not there is a special advertising register that is used to address viewers is difficult to say. In my view, the answer to this question is a qualified 'no'."

Douglas (1984, p.6) argues that: "Advertising is not an art, a craft or anything in its own right. It is the application of certain artistic techniques of various kinds of linguistic or filmic grammar to the solution of a defined problem". If advertising could be described as a science, it is obviously an inexact science and, as with any social science, it abounds in problematic imponderables. Sperber and Wilson recognise the inexact nature of communication analysis and, in the development of Relevance Theory, take a non-modular approach to pragmatics. They emphasise that the interpretation of an utterance resembles scientific theorising and is based on hypothesis formation and hypothesis confirmation. They stress (Wilson and Sperber 1986b, p.71) that "there are always alternative ways of interpreting a given piece of evidence, even when all the correct procedures for interpretation are applied and therefore there is always an element of risk".

This study argues that keeping Relevance Theory in mind when analysing advertising reduces the risk. Relevance Theory is described in more detail in section 2 and an analysis of its application to advertising is given in sections 3 and 4. To illustrate the points raised, use is made of an unstructured selection of advertisements from radio and print media between July 1987 and September 1988. Only language is discussed in this study. Other creative factors such as design, filmic grammar, sound effects and analysis of the effect of the advertisement on selling the product are not covered. As Leech (1966, p.5) emphasises, "The standards of success and failure in advertising, as elsewhere, are pragmatic, and depend mostly on the individual circumstances of each advertisement - its purpose, its timing, the marketing situation, etc."

2 Relevance Theory

2.1 Introduction

The Relevance Theory of pragmatics proposed by Sperber and Wilson (1986) incorporates an inferential model of communication, developed from ideas put forward by Grice (1957, 1969 and 1975). Grice pointed out that contrary to the claims of logicians, most sentences in the English language fall far short of stipulating a concept or encoding a proposition, and consequently of stating in minute detail what the speaker wishes to convey. The vocabulary used by the speaker can be incomplete but at the same time sufficient to put the hearer on the right track, so that he can recover from the context the implied and intended content. In other words, the semantics of an utterance may leave sizeable gaps but, because of the interaction of pragmatic factors, these gaps do not hinder the conveyance of the message.

Sperber and Wilson (1982a, p.62) state:

> The main aim of pragmatic theory is to explain how successful communication is possible and in particular how utterances are understood [...]. The difficulty lies in explaining not how some arbitrary position is discovered and some random inferences drawn, but how the intended content and intended implications are recovered, that is, how comprehension is achieved.

When an inferential theory of communication is examined, it can be difficult to devise a definite rule to facilitate the distinction between the explicature of a sentence, which is taken to be the proposition expressed, and the implicature or the proposition(s) implicated. The term implicature was introduced into the philosophy of language by Grice in his William James Lectures in 1967. As Lyons (1977, p.592) points out: "Grice's notion of implicature is intended to cover at least some of the difference between the broader, everyday notion of implication and the narrower, philosophical notion of entailment". Levinson (1983 p. 372) stresses that "the theory of implicature has helped immeasurably to tease apart the semantic and pragmatic content of words and sentences".

On the analogy of "implicature", Sperber and Wilson (1986, p.182) define an explicitly communicated assumption as an explicature. What is said in Grice's terms, as Grice (1975, p.44) defines it — "In the sense in which I am using the word 'say', I intend what someone has said to be closely

related to the conventional meaning of the words (the sentence) he has uttered" —, is taken to be the proposition explicitly expressed by the utterance of a linguistic expression.

Sperber and Wilson (1986, p.182) state that because the recovery of any assumption requires an element of inference, they are not in agreement with the traditional view that the explicit content of an utterance is a set of decoded assumptions. They stress that: "An explicature is a combination of linguistically encoded and contextually inferred conceptual features. The smaller the relative contribution of the contextual features, the more explicit the explicature will be, and inversely." As Carston (1988, p.167) points out, the explicature of an utterance may "be more or less explicit since it is a combination of linguistically encoded and contextually inferred features. There is always a linguistic contribution but this contribution varies from near total determination of the explicature to a very small role."

Relevance Theory is based on the premise that the hearer will make the effort to process a communication if he deems it to be relevant, that is, to alter or enrich his cognitive environment. In the most straightforward cases of verbal communication, the speaker guarantees that the proposition he intends to express, when processed in a context he expects the hearer to have accessible, will yield enough contextual effects to be worth the hearer's attention. This is the central thesis of Relevance Theory — that the Principle of Relevance by itself suffices to explain the communication act. Every act of communication conveys a presumption of its own relevance. Sperber and Wilson call this the Principle of Relevance, the key role in human communication processes and comprehension. Other things being equal, the greater the effects of a particular item of information in the hearer's current context, the greater the relevance. Other things being equal, the smaller the processing cost, the greater the relevance.

Sperber and Wilson (1982a, p.74) illustrate this by analogy with industry, where achieving optimal productivity obviously involves maximising output relevant to the input of capital and labour. They point out that

> degrees of relevance depend on a ratio of input to output, where output is number of contextual implications and input is amount of processing needed to derive these contextual implications; by "amount of processing" we mean some function of time and degree of attention expended.

2.2 Grice's theories of meaning and conversational implicature

Grice's theories of meaning and conversational implicature could be said to form the basis of a standard theory of inferential communication. As Wilson and Sperber (1981, p.155) point out, although several people have put forward suggestions for modifying Grice's proposals, "it seems no exaggeration to say that most recent theories of utterance interpretation are a direct result of Grice's William James lectures". Levinson (1983, pp.100f.) draws attention to the fact that, although Grice's theory of meaning(nn) is not generally treated as having any connection with his theory of implicature,

> in fact there is a connection of an important kind. If [...] Grice's theory of meaning(nn) is construed as a theory of communication, it has the interesting consequence that it gives an account of how communication might be achieved in the absence of any conventional means for expressing the intended message.

Grice (1957, 1969) made the distinction between natural and nonnatural meaning (meaningnn) and between the timeless meaning, applied timeless meaning, occasion meaning of an utterance and utterer's occasion meaning. The natural meaning occurs in cases where a statement that x means that p actually entails p, such as in the case of symptoms of an illness, which cannot be altered by the occasion of the utterance. An example given of natural meaning in Grice (1957, p.377) is the statement that

(3) Those spots mean measles.

The nonnatural meaning takes account of conventions and established practice in contexts such as, to quote another example from Grice:

(4) Those three rings of the bell mean that the bus is full.

In this case the statement that x means that p does not actually entail p. Here it would be possible that the bus might not be full in spite of the three rings of the bell and the speaker might go on to say:

(5) But it isn't in fact full — the conductor has made a mistake.

Meaning in Grice's terms is obviously taken to include the meaning of non-linguistic acts and occurrences. As Wright (1975, p.366) points out, "Grice is clearly using utterance in reference to any act or entity, linguistic or non-linguistic, that may be used by an agent (the speaker) as a means for

communication".

Grice (1969, pp.147f.) develops the concept of timeless meaning and utterer's occasion meaning, which can apply to both complete and incomplete utterances. He takes the following sentence as an example:

(6) If I shall then be helping the grass to grow, I shall have no time for reading.

Grice posits that while, for example, the phrase

(7) if I am pushing up the daisies

could be taken to have as one of its actual timeless meanings prior to disambiguation,

(8) if I am dead

should not be taken to have the timeless meaning of

(9) If I am then dead, I shall not know what is going on in the world.

In Grice's terminology, the words "I shall be helping the grass to grow" neither mean nor mean here "I shall be dead". Grice points out, however, that a particular utterer on a particular occasion by uttering (6) might have meant (9). In that case (9) would come within the specification of utterer's occasion meaning. The important point about utterer's occasion meaning is that it incorporates the message which the utterer intends to convey to the hearer. As Grice (1969, p.150) states:

> Starting with the assumption that the notion of an utterer's occasion meaning can be explicated, in a certain way, in terms of an utterer's intentions, I argue in support of the thesis that timeless meaning and applied timeless meaning can be explicated in terms of the notion of utterer's occasion-meaning (together with other notions), and so ultimately in terms of the notion of intention.

As Levinson (1983, p.101) points out, Grice's theory provides a good account of "how much more can be communicated, in his rather strict sense of nonnaturally meant, than what is actually said". The hearer may, of course, interpret the message in a different way than the speaker intended, but this would not come within the concept of intention. As Levinson (*ibid.*)

goes on to state:

> obviously we can, given an utterance, often derive a number of inferences from it, but not all those inferences may have been communicative in Grice's sense, i.e. intended to be recognised as having been intended. The kind of inferences that are called implicatures are always of this special intended kind and the theory of implicature sketches one way in which such inferences, of a non-conventional sort, can be conveyed while meeting the criterion of communicated messages sketched in Grice's theory of meaningnn.

As will be discussed in 2.3, the Sperber and Wilson theory develops the concept of implicature further to allow for the gap between speaker's intention and hearer's interpretation. Relevance Theory allows for the crucial factor of a variation between the intended implicature and the actually conveyed message. It thus allows for the discussion of a crucial problem which can increase when utterer and hearer are separated by time or space.

Following from his theory of inferential communication, Grice formulated a theory of implicature and the co-operative principle of conversation, which he presented in his William James lectures in 1967. Levinson (1983, p.101) draws attention to the fact that implicature is "essentially a theory about how people use language". Grice posits that conversation can proceed successfully because people tend to observe certain maxims and adhere to the co-operative principle of conversation. He states (1975, p.45) that "Our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks and would not be rational if they did".

People make the effort to co-operate in ensuring that the conversation proceeds satisfactorily, recognising to some extent "a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction". Obviously, the amount of actual direction will depend on whether it is a casual conversation or a formal discussion of a pre-arranged topic or any one of the possibilities between these two extremes. Arising out of these considerations, Grice formulates a general principle, the Co-operative Principle, which participants in a conversation might be expected to observe. Grice (1975, p.45) defines the Co-operative Principle of Conversation as follows: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which

you are engaged".

Assuming that such a general principle exists, Grice maintains that, in addition to the linguistically specifiable meaning of an utterance in conversation, there are also a number of generally understood and accepted maxims which enrich or strengthen or clarify the meaning of a particular utterance in conversation. For instance the statement that

(10) Mary has three children

also carries (arising from the maxim of quantity) the implication that Mary has only three children. In fact (10) would still be true even if Mary had ten children but, if she had ten children, the speaker would have to say, in order to observe the maxim of quantity

(11) Mary has ten children.

As Levinson (1983, p.106) points out, the effect of the maxim of quantity is to add to most utterances a pragmatic inference to the effect that the statement presented is the strongest that can be made in the situation.

Grice defines four maxims:

Maxim of Quantity
1 Make your contribution as informative as is required.
2 Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Maxim of Quality
1 Do not say what you believe to be false.
2 Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Maxim of Relation
1 Be relevant

Maxim of Manner
1 Avoid obscurity of expression
2 Avoid ambiguity
3 Be brief
4 Be orderly

Because of the assumption that these maxims are adhered to, participants in a conversation can access non-conventional or conversational implicatures. As in the case of meaningnn, Grice gives examples in which these maxims

can apply to non-linguistic behaviour and are applicable to all kinds of co-operative behaviour. But in the case of linguistic utterances, they generate inferences beyond the semantic content of the utterance. As Levinson (1983, p.102) emphasises, it is not the case that people adhere absolutely to these guidelines:

> Rather, in most ordinary kinds of talk these principles are orientated to, such that when talk does not proceed according to their specifications, hearers assume that, contrary to appearances, the principles are nevertheless being adhered to at some deeper level.

As Wilson and Sperber (1981, p.164) state: "Grice defines a conversational implicature as a proposition which the hearer must take the speaker to believe, in order to preserve his assumptions that the co-operative principle and maxims have been obeyed."

Speakers can either observe (a term introduced by Levinson (1983, p.104) or flout the maxims. A situation where a speaker is obviously and deliberately flouting the maxims can also convey a great deal of information in conversation.

The Maxim of Relevance refers to giving the most appropriate information required in a particular situation. To take an example from Grice (1975, p.51):

(12) A: I am out of petrol.
B: There's a garage round the corner.

In order to act in accordance with the maxim "be relevant", B must think that the garage is or at least may be open and would have petrol. In this way she implicates that the information given in her statement is the solution to the problem.

Returning to the question of interpretation of conversational maxims in advertising, Geis found, as noted above, that the Maxim of Relevance was greater than the Maxim of Quantity, which he (1982, p.62) reformulated as the Maxim of Strength:

1 Say no less than is necessary.
2 Do not make your contribution stronger than required.

Geis gives some examples, taking both fictitious products and some actual advertisements. A fictitious example given (*ibid.*, p.12) is

(13) Wartsoff contains vivaline and vivaline removes warts instantly.

This statement, if not examined carefully, could be taken to assert

(14) Wartsoff removes warts instantly.

A much weaker claim is in fact made. There is no claim contained in (14) that a sufficient quantity of vivaline is contained in Wartsoff to remove warts instantly. The claim is therefore much weaker than the implied relevant interpretation might be. Another example given by Geis (*ibid.*, p.72) is taken from a commercial transmitted on NBC on 1 August 1981:

(15) With Comtrex you may almost forget you have a cold.

As Geis states, if the speaker is observing the maxim of strength here, the claim is extremely weak, hardly worth making. This claim is actually consistent with its denial:

(16) With Comtrex you may forget you have a cold and then again, you may not.

In fact, the advertisement could have been successful because the maxim of relevance was observed. The hearer would want to be able to forget he had a cold and could have interpreted the advertisement positively although the claim was extremely weak. As Geis points out, hearers may take the meaning most relevant to the situation and not notice that the maxim of strength is not observed. Obviously, as Geis indicates, in a more everyday situation, a person will not say

(17) I may come to your party

if she means

(18) I will come to your party.

As the maxims actually play a role in disambiguation, the second Maxim of Manner, "avoid ambiguity", would not seem to apply. The third Maxim of Manner, "be brief", does not seem to apply either; for, as Sperber and Wilson indicate, a statement using words in more frequent everyday use would seem to be more relevant and require less effort to interpret than a statement using fewer words but words in less frequent use. Wilson and Sperber (1987, p.21) give an example of this:

(19) a. I have no siblings.

b. I have no brothers or sisters.

Grice maintains that a message can also be conveyed in a communication by obviously and deliberately flouting the Maxims. He gives as an example (1975, p.52) of deliberate flouting of the Maxim of Quantity writing a testimonial for a pupil who is a candidate for a philosophy job and stating only that "his command of English is excellent and his attendance at tutorials has been regular". The writer of the testimonial obviously knows that more information is required and is obviously in a position to give it. By not stating the facts required, he must therefore be implying that there is information which he is reluctant to write down. An example given by Grice of flouting the Maxim of Relevance is the case where somebody makes a very tactless remark and a speaker wishing to convey the urgent need to change the subject says for instance:

(20) Lovely weather for March, isn't it?

Grice claims that stylistic effects such as metaphor and irony break the first Maxim of Quality, "Do not say what you believe to be false". In cases where the obvious interpretation would not seem to apply, the hearer will look for an alternative interpretation and will in this way access the intended interpretation. Wilson and Sperber (1981, p.160) maintain that "the conversational implicatures of the utterance thus have to be seen as cancelling what is actually said. This analysis seems to us to involve an unjustified extension of the notion of a conversational implicature".

Grice posits that implicatures have essential properties which can be predicted and help in identifying an implicature. They must, for instance, be calculable. In other words, as Levinson (1983, p.117) points out, it should be possible to construct an argument showing how from the literal meaning of the sense of the utterance on the one hand, and the Co-operative Principle and the Maxims on the other, it follows that the hearer would make the inference in question to preserve the assumption of co-operation. Grice stresses also that implicatures must be defeasible or cancellable. As Levinson (1983, p.114) explains, "an inference is defeasible if it is possible to cancel it by adding some additional premises to the original ones".

The following example is taken from Levinson (1983, p.115)

(21) John has three cows.

The straightforward implicature (from the Maxim of Quantity) would be

(22) John has only three cows.

This could be cancelled immediately by introducing an if clause as in (21)

(23) John has three cows, if not more.

As Wilson and Sperber (1981, p.155) point out,

> The value of Grice's work lies not so much from the detail of his analyses as from the general claim that underlies them. Grice has shown that given an adequate set of pragmatic principles — to which his conversational maxims are a first approximation — a wide range of what at first sight seem to be arbitrary semantic facts can be seen as consequences of quite general pragmatic constraints.

They develop Grice's concept of the distinction between what is said and what is implicated and maintain the distinction to be rather between the proposition the speaker is taken to have expressed — partly explicitly and partly implicitly — and the deductions of various types which can be drawn from it. As they state (*ibid.*, p.159), "the conversational maxims, and in particular the Maxim of Relevance, have a role to play in both aspects of interpretation".

Based on Grice's theory, Sperber and Wilson develop the Principle of Relevance, which they argue replaces Grices's maxims (with the exception of the submaxims of manner "be brief" and "avoid ambiguity", which are eliminable). Information is relevant to a hearer if it interacts with his existing assumptions about the world. They stress (*ibid.*, p.169):

> In general the relevance of an utterance is established relative to a set of beliefs and assumptions — that is, a set of propositions; relevance is a relation between the proposition expressed by an utterance, on the one hand, and the set of propositions in the hearer's accessible memory on the other.

The role of the hearer's assumptions in accessing information is discussed in more detail in sections 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7.

Sampson (1982) favours a more utilitarian approach to co-operation in conversation. Although the end result of the exercise is the same, the reasoning behind it differs. He quotes from Adam Smith's *The Wealth of*

Nations: "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest [...]" (p. 204). But in a free society where people strive to further their own economic interests, the interaction of supply and demand can lead to everybody's economic wants being satisfied and, as Sampson points out:

> it is in the nature of a free society to evolve cultural institutions which function so as to co-ordinate individuals' activities in such a way that they unknowingly promote each other's aims in the process of knowingly promoting their own aims.

There will, of course, be special cases where the participants co-operate to achieve a common goal, but in very many cases, the relationship will be more like that between a shopkeeper and customer. Sampson (*ibid.*, p.205) cites Kasher (1977), who suggests that Grice's principle ought to be replaced by a principle that he calls the "principle of rational co-ordination", which runs: "Given a desired basic purpose, the ideal speaker chooses that linguistic action which, he believes, most effectively and at least cost attains that purpose."

As Sperber and Wilson (1986, pp.161f.) emphasise, Grice assumes that communication involves a greater degree of co-operation than is assumed in the case of Relevance Theory. If, for instance, in a talk exchange or a seminar, there is a mutually manifest purpose or direction, "knowledge of such a common purpose, when it exists, is one contextual factor among others and it is only as such that it can play a role in comprehension".

2.3 Models of communication

Communication is successful only when (a) it attracts the attention of the target audience, (b) it indicates that the speaker/writer wishes to convey a message of interest to the hearer(s), (c) the audience recognises the speaker/writer's informative intention and finds it worthwhile to make the effort to understand what the speaker/writer intends to tell them, and (d) the message received by the hearer(s) is as close as possible to what the speaker/writer has in mind.

The code model of communication, popular from the time of Aristotle to modern semiotics, would seem to allow only for the recovery of the semantic meaning of a sentence. It is based on a theory of encoding, transmission through a channel, and decoding. A serious defect, as pointed

out by Richards (1985, p.262), is that it assumes that the speaker and hearer share not only a common language but a common context. If the Code Model were an accurate representation of the actual process of verbal communication, the thoughts the speaker intended to convey would be reproduced exactly in the hearer. This may be true, for example, in the case of scientific and technical jargon, where utterances have pre-coded meanings and only semantic interpretation is necessary. But as Wilson and Sperber (1987, p.7) point out:

> the most cursory examination of ordinary conversation reveals that in the case of implicit import, figurative interpretation and stylistic effects, such reproduction (in the hearer of the thoughts the speaker intended to convey) is rarely intended or achieved.

They disagree with the many linguists who have assumed without question that speakers of English know a pragmatic code, analogous to a grammar, which enables them to recover the intended interpretation of utterances in English. They emphasise (*ibid.*, p. 22) that the "linguistic meaning of an uttered sentence falls short of encoding what the speaker means. It merely helps the audience infer what she means".

A major cause of failure of communication, referred to by Richards (1985), is a mismatch between speaker's/author's text and hearer's/reader's context. For instance, a hearer's/reader's context may not include information about what is happening in the world of rock music. In the week before Michael Jackson was due to give a concert in Cork, a question people tended to ask everybody they met was:

(24) Are you going to Cork for the weekend?

Anybody aware of the forthcoming concert would be able to access from the question plus existing information in his cognitive environment:

(25) a. Michael Jackson is giving a concert this weekend
b. The concert is in Cork

and would be able therefore to access the information that

(26) The question being asked is, am I going to the Michael Jackson concert which will be held in Cork this weekend.

Anybody not familiar with this music scene would have trouble working out

the point behind the question and might answer.

(27) No, why ?

and wonder

(28) a. Why is she asking am I going to Cork?

b. Does she just mean am I going away for the weekend?

c. Does she think I have some particular connection with Cork?

and might conclude, for instance,

(29) She must think I have some connection with Cork which I have not got. She must be mistaken in the information she has about me.

Another case where rock music literacy or current information from news media in his cognitive environment would be an essential requirement for the hearer to access the intended referent is the advertisement for Ariston electrical appliances published in *The Irish Times* on 8 July 1988. The bold type reads:

(30) **The Boss rocks on**
and on and on
and on ...

For readers familiar with the fact that Bruce Springsteen was due to give a series of concerts, disambiguation would present no problem. The first sentence in the small print in the text would confirm this hypothesis:

(31) When it comes to rock, there's only one Boss.

Any reader whose context completely excludes rock music would have difficulty in accessing the message through contextual implications and the effort he was prepared to make might determine whether he would eventually work out the intended message.

While Grice's theory of implicature tended to concentrate on implicatures that are actually intended by the speaker, Sperber and Wilson point out (1986, p.57) that something can be communicated by the speaker without being strictly speaking "meant". Realising this is, they maintain, "a first essential step—a step away from the traditional approach to communication

and most modern approaches".

Sperber and Wilson posit that the communicator's informative intention is to modify the cognitive environment of the hearer. The actual cognitive effects of a modification of the cognitive environment are only partly predictable. This is an important consideration in advertising communication and will be discussed further in section 3.

The encoded information in an utterance is in fact the non-inferable information. The information linguistically stated may be the exception in a situation. For instance

(32) Mary is late

may imply that everybody else who should be present is present. So in fact there are instances where the information given linguistically can be communicating the exception by means of a code.

Several studies have shown that what is implicated in an utterance can be just as important or more important than what is actually said. For example, Harris (1977) found that most people who listened to advertisements which used hedge words such as "may" to make implicit claims, such as, for instance:

(33) Zap pills may help relieve pain

actually interpreted the statements as assertions. The researchers in this case wrote advertisements of the type frequently heard on radio or television for twenty fictional products. Each commercial had two versions, one asserting a critical claim, the other implying it. These were then arranged in random order to be played to three separate groups, one version only of each commercial being included in each set. For each advertisement, two test statements, a paraphrase or restatement of the information asserted or implied and a control item of either false or clearly indeterminate truth value, were also prepared. After they had listened to the commercials, subjects were asked to rate these statements as true, false or of indeterminate truth value. The groups were divided according to (a) instructions given and (b) recall opportunities. In the case of one group (the delayed group) the twenty commercials were played through without any pause and the subjects then answered the questions, only a list of product names being given as an aid to memory. The other two groups (concurrent and immediate) answered the question sheets immediately after listening to each individual

commercial, but the immediate group were also given the written script to read at the same time as listening to the commercial. Half of each group were given instructions warning them about the pitfalls of interpreting implied claims as assertions. The findings showed that a high proportion of the implied claims were interpreted as true in all cases and over half of the people who received the special instructions regarding implied claims did in fact interpret them as assertions. Harris (1977, p.607) reports that "the general finding of several other studies was supported, in that subjects process and remember pragmatic implications very much like direct assertions".

The crucial factor that determines both the effectiveness of the communication and the actual message that the hearer will access on any particular occasion is relevance.

2.4 Relevance

Sperber and Wilson put forward the single concept of Relevance, which includes and replaces all the considerations concerning meaning, implicature and conversational co-operation. The single concept of Relevance posits that the hearer will make the effort to process a communication if he deems it to be relevant in a particular situation, in other words to alter or enrich his cognitive environment. In order to be relevant new information [P] when contextualised in [C] the existing information in the hearer's context, must produce some effect on the hearer's cognitive environment. Sperber and Wilson posit that contextual effects produced by the interaction of new and existing information are of three types, contextual implications (which will be discussed in 2.8), strengthening of existing assumptions and contradiction of existing assumptions (which will be discussed in 2.5). Smith and Wilson (1979, p.177) point out that "the assumption that a remark was intended as relevant will dramatically reduce its possiblilites of interpretation in context".

Assuming optimal relevance, the hearer will take the first interpretation consistent with the Theory of Relevance, the interpretation which consequently requires the least processing. Wilson and Sperber (1987, p.16) propose the following comparative definition of Relevance:

(34) a. Other things being equal, the greater the contextual effects, the greater the relevance.

b. Other things being equal, the smaller the processing effort, the greater the relevance.

For instance, in the following statement

(35) The cover was a disaster

by taking the first interpretation that is relevant to him in accordance with the occasion and surroundings the hearer will be able to disambiguate the referent for 'cover'. Among the ways the utterance could be interpreted are:

(36) a. The design and/or printing of the book/magazine cover was very unsatisfactory.

b. An item of soft furnishing obtained was very unsatisfactory.

c. The staff available was insufficient or lacked the expertise to deal with the situation on that occasion.

d. The undercover operation was discovered.

e. The surveillance required was not given.

The way the hearer interprets (35) will obviously depend on the environment and his own encyclopaedic knowledge. Whichever of the above interpretations is relevant to the hearer, he will probably be able to access several additional contextual interpretations from this particular utterance. In order to try to assess what might be the contextual effects on the hearer, it is necessary to consider his cognitive environment, in other words, the set of assumptions that are manifest to him. The hearer's background assumptions are a crucial factor in relevance-theoretic interpretation of an utterance.

The interaction of psychological processes with the actual grammar of the utterance is the vital process that determines how the hearer will interpret the message the speaker intends to convey. No communication can start from zero and it is therefore applied to existing material in the hearer's context.

Wilson and Sperber (1986a, p.252) emphasise that:

> In every case the method of processing is the same. The hearer supplies specific contextual assumptions and derives specific contextual implications. What varies is not the specificity of the assumptions and conclusions derived, or the formality of the reasoning processes involved, but simply the amount of foreknowledge the speaker must be assumed

to have had of the way the utterance would be processed and with it the degree of responsibility he must take for the particular conclusions derived.

A very important element of Relevance Theory is the emphasis placed on the hearer's assumptions, the hearer's context, and the effect of the communication on the hearer's context, and it is to a consideration of these that we now turn.

2.5 Assumptions

Assumptions are defined by Sperber and Wilson (1986, p.2) as "thoughts treated by the individual as representations of the actual world". Blakemore (1987) equates the set of an individual's assumptions with his belief set. What is important in the case of the hearer's set of assumptions or belief set is that it represents the hearer's view of the world. The hearer will process new information in accordance with his view of the world, not according to the way the world actually is (if this were possible to define).

Everything the hearer has experienced during his life up to the instant of a particular communication will influence the way he interprets and reacts to a particular utterance. All past information absorbed is accessible from a memory store in the brain and is treated by the mind as a true description of the actual world, a fact.

Based on theories developed by Fodor (1983), Sperber and Wilson see the mind as a variety of specialised systems, each with its own method of representation and computation. There are two types of systems (a) input systems, which process information perceived and (b) central systems, which combine information derived from the various input systems and from memory and perform inferential tasks.

Assumptions are composed of smaller constituents called concepts, each concept containing the relevant logical, encyclopaedic and lexical information. A concept is assumed to be stored at an address in memory, from which the data can be retrieved. Concepts may be (a) incomplete, such as *rich*, *late*, *good*. Additional linguistic information would have to be added to these terms in order to clarify the timeless semantic meaning of an utterance. For instance, the utterance

(37) Mary was late

leaves open the question of "late in relation to what". Similarly the concept of "rich" is subject to individual interpretation according to circumstances and goals. Alternatively, concepts may be (b) complete and defined, such as *painless*, *daughter*, or (c) complete and undefined, such as *pain*, *colour*. While the concept of being absolutely free of pain would generally be universally understood, the idea of actual pain is open to individual interpretation, according to cognitive environment.

The lexical entry contains information about the word or phrase which expresses the concept; the encyclopaedic entry information about the extension of the concept (e.g. that *pets* would include *dogs* and *cats*); the logical entry for a concept is made up of a set of deductive rules which apply to logical forms of which that concept is a constituent.

Assumptions will not, of course, all be of equal value in an individual's belief set. The strength of an assumption depends, among other things, on its source. Assumptions retrieved from memory tend to be strong, having been stored as the result of previous convincing evidence. Similarly, assumptions sourced from first-hand experience, such as perception of particular events, will have a higher degree of certainty than those acquired from statements or assertions by somebody else, where the reliability of the information will depend on the hearer's confidence in the informer. The strength of assumptions arrived at by deduction depends on the strength of the premises from which they are derived.

Each newly acquired factual assumption is combined with a stock of existing assumptions to undergo inference processes, the aim of which is to modify and improve the individual's overall representation of the world. The relevance of an assumption is analysed by Sperber and Wilson in terms of the modification that it brings to the context in which it is processed, so it must be possible in principle to distinguish between the content of an assumption and its context. Their distinction between encyclopaedic and logical entries reflects this.

Any new piece of information processed can (a) strengthen existing assumptions and (b) contradict existing assumptions. In cases where new information contradicts existing assumptions, the strength of each implication will determine the final outcome. The strength of any implication cannot exceed the strength of its component parts; the strength of the implication as a whole cannot be stronger than its weakest link.

Being individuals, no two people can have exactly the same set of asssumptions about the world in their cognitive environments. The question of whether they can have access to the same set of assumptions about the topic being discussed represents one of the crucial problems with the Code Model of communication.

2.6 Mutual Knowledge

The concept of mutual knowledge was first introduced as part of the philosophical analysis of speaker-meaning, utterance-meaning, convention, and other meaning-related concepts by Lewis (1969) and Schiffer (1972), cited in Sperber and Wilson (1982a).

If mutual knowledge is to play a role in the comprehension of utterances, there must be some straightforward method by which a speaker and hearer who both know a given proposition can discover they mutually know it. Mutual knowledge is knowledge that is not only shared by the speaker and hearer, but known to be shared and known to be known to be shared.

A speaker S and an addressee A mutually know a proposition P if and only if:

1. S knows that P
2. A knows that P
3. S knows 2
4. A knows 1
5. S knows 4
6. A knows 3

and so on *ad infinitum*.

As Blakemore (1987) points out, since a hearer has only a finite time available for interpreting an utterance, he cannot perform the infinite number of checks for establishing genuine mutual knowledge.

Clark and Marshall (1981), cited in Sperber and Wilson (1982a), claim that there are three possible sources of mutual knowledge: physical co-presence, linguistic co-presence, and community membership. Linguistic co-presence would involve, for instance, two people being present when a certain announcement was made, so that, Clarke and Marshall claim, they had mutual knowledge of the announcement. Community membership is

taken to apply, for instance, to people who have seen a particular advertisement. Sperber and Wilson are critical of Clark and Marshall's implicit assumption that all evidence for mutual knowledge is ultimately physical. It has been shown for instance that the accounts of physical events such as traffic accidents given by individuals, when these occurred in their immediate environment, can differ considerably. Sperber and Wilson maintain (1982a, p.65):

> Clearly one might need quite lengthy chains of evidence to connect a particular item of mutual knowledge to the physical evidence which supports it, and in a largely inductive framework, each step in the chain may go well beyond the data.

They posit that the fact that some knowledge is considered mutual is generally a result of comprehension rather than a precondition for it. Mistakes in comprehension are much more likely to cause a wrong assessment of mutual knowledge than the other way around. it is because of the impossibility of achieving complete mutual knowledge that the code theory of communication does not effectively describe the situation in most instances.

The weaker concept of mutual manifestness or quasi-given information, while not, as Sperber and Wilson (1986, p.45) point out, strong enough to salvage the code theory of communication, has a role to play in inferential communication.

2.6 Mutual manifestness

The idea of something being manifest to a person is weaker than that of it being known or assumed. Sperber and Wilson give the following definition of manifest:

1. A fact is manifest to an individual at a given time if and only if he is capable at that time of representing it mentally and accepting its representation as true or probably true.

2. A cognitive environment of an individual is a set of facts that are manifest to him.

In other words, mutual manifestness is used to describe something which the speaker points out and the hearer knows in a weak way but until now had

never really entertained as a thought. An example given by Sperber and Wilson (1986, p.40) is the fact that Noam Chomsky never had breakfast with Julius Caesar. This is something which would be obvious to everybody when their attention is drawn to it but to which they are unlikely to have given any previous thought. Therefore a fact may be manifest to a person without being assumed or consciously known.

A particular set of facts and assumptions may be manifest in the cognitive environment of two different people. However, people sharing the same physical environment, for instance sitting in the same room, may have different perceptual abilities and, since cognitive abilities are affected by previously memorised information, people never share their total environments. And, of course, to say that two people share a cognitive environment does not imply that they make the same assumptions — merely that they are capable of doing so.

Similarly, members of the same organisation may have access to the same mutual cognitive environment. In a mutual cognitive environment, for every manifest assumption, the fact that it is manifest to the people who share this environment is itself manifest. In other words, in a mutual cognitive environment, every manifest assumption is what Sperber and Wilson call mutually manifest.

While mutual manifestness is not strong enough to salvage the code theory of communication, somebody who knows an individual's cognitive environment can infer which assumptions he is likely to make. In other words the concept of mutual manifestness can help the speaker to surmise what pragmatic implications a hearer might form.

2.7 Ostensive-inferential communication

Mutually manifest facts can also facilitate what Sperber and Wilson refer to as ostensive-inferential communication, which does not require the use of a code or language. The fact that communication can occur without the use of any actual language or code was acknowledged by behaviourists such as Skinner (1957), who refers to communication as verbal behaviour and to verbal communication as vocal verbal behaviour and tacitly by Grice who interspersed meaning of utterances with non-linguistic phenomena and actions.

The first essential of successful communication is for the speaker to attract the attention of the audience and let them know that she wants to

convey a message. In certain circumstances, the message itself can be imparted to the audience without resorting to a code. Sperber and Wilson give as an example the case of Mary and Peter sitting on a park bench. Peter suddenly leans back so that Mary has a good view of the people approaching, thus conveying to Mary that there is something worth taking note of. One of the people approaching is William, who both Mary and Peter know from previous knowledge to be a terrible bore, so, in accordance with the principle of maximising relevance, the whole message has been conveyed without resort to the use of language.

Searle (1969, p.38) points out that, in the same way, it may be possible by inference only to request somebody to leave the room, but it would be difficult to indicate to a person that he is required to undertake an involved and complicated scientific survey without using a specific code. Apart from these instances, it is linguistically and contextually inferred pragmatic implications that form the basis of the Relevance Theory of pragmatics.

2.8 Analytic, synthetic and contextual implications

As Richards (1985, pp.265f.) emphasises, a very important feature of the Sperber and Wilson theory, and one which gives it an advantage over previous theories of text and utterance interpretation, is the distinction it makes between analytic implications, synthetic implications and contextual implications.

Sperber and Wilson differentiate first of all between trivial implications and non-trivial implications. Trivial information in an utterance is material which just adds non-essential detail and which makes no contribution at all to explicating or analysing input assumptions. The human deductive device has access to elimination rules and therefore yields only non-trivial conclusions, which Sperber and Wilson define as follows:

> Non-trivial logical implication: A set of assumptions (P) logically and non-trivially implies an assumption Q if and only if, when (P) is the set of initial theses in a derivation involving only elimination rules, Q belongs to the set of final theses.

The non-trivial analytic implications of a set of assumptions are those that are necessary and sufficient for understanding it, for grasping its content. Therefore somebody who fails to access any of the analytic implications of an assumption will not have understood the assumption.

Synthetic implications are defined by Sperber and Wilson (1986, p.104) as follows:

> A set of assumptions (P) synthetically implies an assumption Q if and only if Q is one of the final theses in a deduction in which the initial theses are (P), and Q is not an analytic implication of (P).

A synthetic implication is based on a combination of at least two distinct elementary assumptions. These assumptions have to be brought together and combined in the working memory to yield synthetic implications. It is to a person's advantage to derive as many synthetic implications as possible before the set is dismantled and the constituent assumptions either forgotten or stored in their separate locations in the hearer's encyclopaedic memory. The following are examples of synthetic implications:

(38) a. The annual party is always held in the garden if it is not raining.

b. The annual party is held in the town hall if it rains.

c. It rained all day yesterday.

d. The garden party was held yesterday.

(39) The annual party was held in the town hall yesterday.

(40) a. We need a typically Irish girl to photograph for the colour magazine advertisement for Germany.

b. Germans think all typically Irish people have red hair

c. Mary would be ideal for this advertisement

(41) Mary has red hair.

Failure to grasp the synthetic implications of a set of assumptions (in contrast to failure to grasp the analytic implications) is not a failure to understand the information being offered, but a failure to exploit it to the full. Blakemore (1987, p.49) points out that a typical response by hearers who have failed to grasp the relevance of a remark is "so what?", indicating that they have grasped the analytic implications but not the synthetic implications. Of course, it is possible to understand a set of facts without ever computing their synthetic implications. A person could have acquired each of the assumptions at a different time and in different circumstances

and may never bring them together.

A crucial factor in Relevance Theory is the contextualisation of implications in a certain context. This occurs, for example, when new information is added to the context of the hearer's existing encyclopaedic memory to form new implications which could not have been derived only from the new information or only from existing knowledge. As Sperber and Wilson define it (1986, p.107):

> A contextual implication is new information in the sense that it could not have been obtained from (c), the stock of existing assumptions, alone; however, it is not just new information, since it is neither an analytic nor a synthetic implication of (P), the newly presented information, alone. It is a synthesis of old and new information, a result of interaction between the two.

This is not to say, of course, that "new" information is in any way more important than "old" information, and it is essential to note that the two subsets are in fact on a par. Obviously the only "new" information relevant in a particular context is that which will have some contextual effect. Sperber and Wilson (*ibid.*, p.120) give the following as examples of information which is completely irrevelant to somebody in the process of reading their book:

(42) 5 May 1881 was a sunny day in Kabul.

Similarly an obvious statement such as

(43) You are now reading a book

will not add anything to the context.

There are instances of course where overstating an obvious assumption can have the result of introducing doubt into the hearer's mind. There are times too when seemingly irrelevant information can be used as a gimmick to make a message more striking and the reader/hearer assuming relevance will take the trouble to work out how the content can be relevant to the context. The following is an example of contextual implication:

(44) a. Any time I'm in Sligo I visit Mary and Fred.
b. Their house in on the lakeshore, near the Isle of Inishfree.
c. Visiting them always reminds me of the poem by Yeats.

(45) The poem that visiting Mary and Fred reminds me of is called 'The Lake Isle of Inishfree'.

Here encyclopaedic knowledge of the poems written by Yeats would enable the hearer to access (45).

2.9 Effort and yield

In everyday circumstances communication is an instant process. The hearer who does not see the point or access the contextual implications of an utterance instantly will not make the effort to apply different premises until he finds a satisfactory conclusion. In more poetic texts he may have to form a premise and have it confirmed or not confirmed in the next part of the text. In either case, if he does not access an interpretation consistent with the Principle of Relevance he will quickly abandon the effort and the communication will have failed.

The effort which the hearer will have to make to access the implications of an utterance is very important in judging its relevance. Obviously the occasion of the utterance will have a bearing on how much effort the hearer is prepared to make to interpret the message. As Blakemore (1987, p.20) points out, a person attending a seminar would expect to put more effort into interpretation than somebody sitting around in a relaxed atmosphere having a drink. Similarly, a person reading a scientific or professional journal would be aware that he would have to put more effort into accessing the information given than somebody reading a leisure-time magazine. While it is necessary to impart enough information to allow the hearer to disambiguate references and access the implications, giving too much information, far in excess of what the hearer would need to be told, can sound extremely patronising and annoy the hearer.

2.10 Linguistic style and relevance

Sperber and Wilson use the term "poetic effect" to refer to the effect of an utterance which achieves most of its relevance through a wide range of weak implicatures. A speaker aiming at optimal relevance may use hyperbole or metaphor rather than the literal truth on occasions. Sperber and Wilson give the following examples:

(46) . Bill is the nicest person there is.

What is really meant here is that Bill is a very nice person. Similarly a standardised metaphor such as

(47) This room is a pigsty

may be the most appropriate and relevant description. In the same way a speaker will aim at optimal relevance rather than the literal truth. She may for instance round off figures and say to her friend that

(48) The cost of the holiday was £400

instead of the literal truth

(49) The cost of the holiday was £399

The style and register must therefore be chosen to suit the occasion. As Sperber and Wilson point out (1986, p.224), "Stylistic effects are just differences in the way relevance is achieved".

2.11 Conclusion

Relevance Theory favours an inferential model of communication. Emphasis is on speaker meaning and hearer interpretation by means of contextual implications; in other words, the effect of the message conveyed — the new information — on existing information and on the cognitive environment of the hearer, who has access to all the assumptions, both global and local, that are stored in his memory and comprise his belief set. The interpretation selected will be the one offering optimal relevance, i.e. which is consistent with the hearer's context and the occasion of the utterance, instantly accessible and yielding the most contextual information to the hearer at least effort on his part.

Relevance Theory could therefore be said to be a type of economics of communication theory, equilibrium being attained at the point where the maximum possible yield of information is conveyed by the utterer and at the same time the minimum possible effort is required from the hearer. In other words, equilibrium occurs in the situation where information is conveyed most effectively and economically, having regard to the purpose of the communication, the content and context.

3 Contextual implications in advertising

3.1 Role of contextual implications

As Levinson (1983, p.387) points out, communication problems arise in cases where "humans communicate at a remove through space or time, by means of recorded or written messages". Advertising is such a case. As with other types of communicated messages, advertising can only be relevant to the hearer when it interacts with existing information in his cognitive environment to produce contextual effects. As discussed in section 2.8, Sperber and Wilson specify three types of contextual effects; contextual implications, strengthening of existing assumptions, contradiction of existing assumptions, in which case the relative strength of the new information and existing assumptions will determine what alteration is actually made in the hearer's cognitive environment by the deductive device.

This study is mainly concerned with contextual implications and how they form what could be described as the crucial pivot on which "poetic effects" in advertising depend. Advertising text, tending to a great extent towards the poetic, can often be seen to rely on weak implicatures and leaving much of the actual interpretation of the message to the hearer.

In processing a literary text the reader must, as Richards (1985, p.276) points out, "have unrestricted access to memorised material and the free use of assumptions in order to access productive contextual implications that come from both linguistic and extra-linguistic sources". While advertising resembles the literary text in that it can depend on weak implicatures to achieve communication by means of an interesting poetic style, there is the difference that, whereas added processing may be seen to increase the "literariness" of literary texts, in advertising there is always a general direction or area of contextual implications that the advertiser wishes the hearer to access. In other words, as Leech (1966, p.25) indicates, most advertising is loaded language aiming to change the opinions of its audience. Wilson and Sperber (1986b, p.78) state that: "The implicatures of an utterance are the contextual assumptions and implications that a speaker aiming at optimal relevance must have expected the hearer to supply".

The advertiser will also have to work on the basis of assumptions about the context of members of the target audience. Sperber and Wilson equate communicating to modifying the hearer's cognitive environment; but as

they point out (1986, p.58), the actual cognitive effects of a modification of the cognitive environment are only partly predictable. The advertiser, like the communicator in any other situation, can communicate something without its being strictly speaking "meant" by her.

The advertiser endeavours to communicate with a particular target audience (local, global or specific) using scarce resources of time, medium and language. While language could be said to be scarce in the sense that only a certain number of words can be fitted into the space or time at the advertiser's disposal, variations in linguistic style can increase or decrease the number of contextual implications. The cognitive environment of the hearer when he hears or sees the advertisement is a given but to a great extent imponderable factor. The hearer factor of effort is aligned more with the effort involved relative to the contextual effects achieved than with effort as an independent consideration. As will be discussed in section 4, contextual implications can vary with linguistic style, and it is linguistic style rather than the length of the text that, in association with the hearer's context, determines contextual implications. In other words, linguistic style could be said to be the factor with which variation is possible and which can be applied in a variety of different combinations to the other factors which are relatively inelastic.

The important consideration is, of course, not what the advertisement is meant to mean or convey, but what the hearer or reader interprets it to mean or convey — the whole point of the advertisement is for the hearer to access the intended implications. Even if the ideal combination of non-linguistic factors can be achieved through market research and the right media and budget are available, the effect of the linguistic message which the advertiser tries to convey can still be an imponderable factor.

Analysing advertising from the relevance-theoretic point of view allows us to examine it from a more neutral angle. Implied information has to be imparted to the audience in an interesting and creative way, the product has to be seen to be relevant and to fulfil a particular need, and the hearer has to be willing to make the effort to access contextual implications. Whatever the general effect of advertising as an overall entity, if a particular advertisement does not achieve the relevant contextual effects in the audience, that particular advertisement will be a failure as a communication.

3.2 Categories of advertising

Advertising is usually divided into consumer advertising (what Leech 1966 refers to as commercial consumer advertising), information advertising, trade/technical advertising, and prestige advertising (which is intended to enhance the image of the company that is advertising rather than to sell any particular product). Here, commercial consumer advertising is further divided according to stages in the product life cycle, which Kotler (1976) refers to as introduction, growth, maturity and decline.

Vestergaard and Schröder (1985, p.21) put forward a system for dividing information in advertisements into units within sentences so that sentences are viewed as consisting not of subjects, objects and verbs, but rather of units of information which can be positioned in various ways relative to each other, whereby varying degrees of prominence are attached to them.

Contextual implications appear to have a role in every type of advertising, even to some extent in information advertising. They apply in trade advertising just as in consumer advertising. Examples are taken from each category. When products are at the introduction stage, the product and its advantages tend to be the focus of the advertisement. At the growth and maturity stage the product tends to be the presupposition, with extra contextual implications tending to be the focus. For instance, the cellular telephone is a product that could still be considered to be at the introduction stage, and the focus in advertising copy used by the manufacturers of all the brands of this product tends to be the tangible advantage that the customer can suddenly attain by having the product.

Two examples of these advertisements are given here:

(50) Is it just the successful who get mobile phones or does success follow the 'phone'?

Cellular communication isn't just a rich man's toy. It's an essential tool for effective, efficient, economic business.

As with any business partnership it's the quality of the team which makes the difference.

Talking can give you the ingredients for success within a specialist network, capable of providing the support and service to keep you ahead in mobile communication.

(*Mail on Sunday*, 7 August 1988)

(51) We won the contract because we had one small advantage.

I paused, savouring the moment. We'd won because although I'd been in the wrong place at the wrong time, I had the right phone in my jacket pocket.

(*Sunday Times*, 10 July 1988)

3.3 Product advantages

It is generally acknowledged and need not be discussed here that, whether the advertiser stresses his product's aesthetic or utilitarian qualities, it tends to be the result of use rather than the composition of the product that is advertised. The consumer would seem to be interested in the result of using a product rather than the product itself.

In a non-advertising context several studies of cued-recall of short narratives have shown that the implied result of an action was recalled or regarded as true by the listeners rather than the action itself. In other words, it seems that the message that was relevant was accessed rather than the details. For instance Johnson et al. (1973, pp.203ff.) found that when stories involving events with suggested probable consequences were read to subjects, they tended to recall as true the consequence of the action or event. For example, in the case of the narrative:

(52) When the man entered the kitchen he slipped on a wet spot and dropped the delicate glass pitcher on the floor. The pitcher was very expensive and everyone watched the event with horror.

Subjects tended to recall (53) as being an actual sentence from the story:

(53) When the man entered the kitchen he slipped on a wet spot and broke the delicate glass pitcher when it fell on the floor.

Harris and Monaco (1978, cited in Geis 1982, p.37) found that their subjects more frequently recalled the pragmatic implications of a sentence rather than the sentence itself. In the case of the sentence:

(54) The angry rioter threw a rock at a window

subjects tended to recall that the window was broken rather than (54) itself. As Geis points out (*ibid.*), this sort of experiment shows that "in our normal mode of using language we are as listeners concerned with the 'gist' of what

others say to us".

The "gist" of what is said in an advertisement will be interpreted by the hearer in association with his encyclopaedic knowledge of the product, the advertiser and the medium, and also what might interest him about the product. As Vestergaard and Schröder (1985, p.117) point out, most people would probably agree that "many individual consumer adverts function on the level of the day-dream". Berger (1972, p.148; cited in Vestergaard and Schroder 1985, p.118) states that "The gap between what publicity actually offers and the future it promises corresponds with the gap between what the spectator-buyer feels himself to be and what he would like to be".

Williamson (1978, p.31) maintains that "The technique of advertising is to correlate feelings, moods or attributes to tangible objects, linking possible unattainable things with those that are attainable, and thus reassuring us that the former are within reach [...]." While, as will be discussed in section 4, the degree to which an advertisement relies on implicatures relative to the proposition expressed linguistically will vary according to many factors, including whether the product could be said to have a high aesthetic value or whether it is for use to fulfil a more utilitarian need such as relief of a headache or other health problems, even the most semantically clear and unambiguous advertisement can have pragmatic implications. This follows from the fact that, as Richards (1985, p.261) states:

> No theory of the text is possible without either a theory of contexts or a theory that connects the two, and it proposes that utterances are processed not only as a result of a reader's perceptions of what propositions exist in a given text but upon propositions that originate, always, in every circumstance, in the reader's supplied context.

The reader's context is taken to be equivalent to his cognitive environment or the set of assumptions that are manifest to him.

3.4 Background and foreground implications

Sperber and Wilson (1986, p.209) emphasise that "The processing of each implication can contribute to the overall relevance of the utterance in two ways, either by reducing the effort needed to process it, or by increasing its contextual effects." An implication that has contextual effects of its own and is therefore relevant in its own right, is a foreground implication. What Sperber and Wilson refer to as a background implication can, although it has

no contextual effects in its own right, contribute to relevance by giving access to a context in which contextual implications can be achieved and can therefore reduce the processing effort needed. The fact that a communication is an advertisement would tend to form at least a background implication.

3.5 Contextual implications — favourable and unfavourable

Irrespective of the contextual effects the advertiser may wish the hearer to access, the text combined with his cognitive environment can very often give rise to negative contextual implications. From the advertiser's point of view it could be said that achieving optimal relevance would consist of maximising contextual implications which are favourable to the advertiser while involving the hearer in the least possible effort. It can happen occasionally, of course, that the purpose of the advertisement is to encourage the hearer to stop using a product or not to do something, such as to cut down on cigarette smoking. In other words, the purpose may be what Kotler (1976, p.11) refers to as countermarketing. In this case, the formation of negative contextual implications about the product would obviously be intended. In normal circumstances contextual implications unfavourable to the product would be negative contextual implications.

While, as Gazdar and Good (1982) point out, it would be impossible to quantify contextual implications and effort, as no two hearers will have exactly the same context, keeping this aspect in mind might help the analysis. Just as speakers make some estimate of the hearer's cognitive environment when communicating, so the advertiser has to make some estimate of the possible environment of the audience, even if this is only from environmental knowledge or market research.

The interpretation of any advertisement involves the audience in accessing contextual implications. (55) is an example of what might be regarded as a semantically very clear and unambiguous statement of one selling point in an advertisement.

(55) The price of product A is reduced by 50% from today.

The referents here are clearly product A and the price of product A. There is no need for disambiguation and reference assignment. However, as each member of the audience is reading it or hearing it in association with his own existing cognitive environment, including his encyclopaedic knowledge of the advertiser and the product, the deductions he will make could include

several unfavourable contextual implications, such as, for instance,

(56) a. It is (perhaps suspiciously) unusual to have such a large price reduction for a product.

b. Sales were probably not as high as the manufacturer hoped.

c. The manufacturer must need to clear the stock.

All these unfavourable contextual implications could lead to the conclusion that

(57) Product A is not an excellent product.

On the other hand, the hearer/reader may have in his context the knowledge that he wanted by buy product A last week but was put off by the price. He was convinced at the time that it was a good product. This new information that the product is now 50% cheaper may lead him to buy it but it is unlikely that he will not also access the implications (56) a-c. Therefore his decision on whether or not to buy the product will be influenced by the relative strength of (57) against his previous assumption that product A is a desirable product. The advertiser will also risk adverse effects on her firm's image in the context of customers who have recently bought the product at the higher price. For instance, advertisement (55) could be responsible for contextual implications such as the following:

(58) a. I was overcharged for product A last week.

b. I did not get a good deal from the supplier of product A.

Contextual implications accessed by reading the advertisement will also of course be influenced by the hearer's encyclopaedic knowledge about the advertiser, experience with previous products from the same manufacturer, effects of the particular advertising medium used, and whether a known presenter was used to convey the message or whether it was conveyed giving the effect of being anonymous. In other words, the message of an advertisement is not interpreted by a reader in terms only of the semantic content or of the proposition expressed. Any reader who studies an advertisement and accesses an interpretation relevant to him and relevant to his needs obviously draws on pragmatic factors.

3.6 Information categories

As discussed in section 2, contextual implications are formed by the hearer by combining information already existing in his cognitive environment and information presented in the utterance or text. As stated in 2.8 above, Sperber and Wilson emphasise that of course the "new" information is not in any way more important than the "old" information and that it is essential to note that the two subsets are in fact on a par. Chafe (1976, p.30) suggests using the terms "newly activated" and "already activated". Sperber and Wilson point out (1986, p.203): "It is often suggested that instead of binary distinction between given and new, focus and presupposition and so on, what is really involved is a gradient or hierarchical structure".

For the purpose of this analysis only, it is proposed to categorise each unit of information in accordance with how accessible it is judged to be to the target audience. This accessibility of information units would be independent of syntactic style or phonological focus. It refers only to how accessible units of information which have a role in forming contextual implications could be judged to be in the hearer's cognitive environment. In other words this information would help to determine the effort involved in accessing contextual implications from specific premises. It is proposed to divide each unit of information, whether old or new, according to whether it is manifest, environmental, factive, reminder, or incidental:

Manifest information

Following Sperber and Wilson, information that could be obvious and clear to the audience when it is brought to their attention but which in the normal course of events they would not recall or access in a particular situation without its being brought to their attention. This would include information stored in the long term memory.

Environmental information

Information which could be expected to be in the short term memory of the target audience because of the physical environment, linguistic environment, news media environment, group membership.

Factive information

Information which presents facts probably unknown or not fully accessed by the target audience up to now and which is presented in a readily accessible way.

Reminder information

Repetition of information already in the text, or very recently conveyed information.

Incidental information

Information which, although not trivial in the sense described by Sperber and Wilson, is not essential to the main message put forward. This term is also applied to information for which a particular reader could be said to be in an overhearer situation, as for instance non-smokers reading an advertisement for cigarettes or non-golfers reading an advertisement for golfing equipment.

Information units would not, of course, be in the same category for every hearer. For example, information could be manifest in the case of one hearer and environmental in the case of another. An example of this might be information involving a profession, which would be environmental to members of that profession and manifest to non-members of the profession.

Drawing on non-linguistic information, the more data the advertiser has on the target audience and their background, the easier it should be for her to decide how accessible particular units of information would be to them. Environmental information would normally be in the hearer's short-term memory and so accessing it would not involve effort. Factive information if conveyed clearly should not involve extra effort. Because it is not in the short-term memory, deductions involving manifest information could be said to involve an effort factor. Reminder information can tend to be boring and, although it is readily accessible, because of the boredom factor involved, making use of it could be said to involve some degree of effort.

Points are illustrated here by a random selection of advertisements from radio and print media, including newspapers, special interest publications and trade magazines. The findings here are general observations which, when tested, applied generally to a large selection of advertisements. Emphasis is on the actual overall interpretation of an advertisement and contextual effects rather than on trying to draw a line between semantics/pragmatics, explicature/implicature. But taking, for instance, the first two lines in advertisement (59)

(59) 1. The Eskimos in Greenland lead a physically active life
2. and live largely on fish.

where there is no problem with reference assignment or disambiguation but there is what could be referred to as the background implication that these sentences have some contribution towards a proposition that has yet to be expressed. In other words, because it is an advertisement, the hearer will know that it is not the beginning of a story about life in Greenland and will have to wait to interpret the significance of the text.

As Sperber and Wilson (1986, p.204) point out,

> because an utterance is produced and processed over time, the hearer will be in a position to access some of its constituent concepts, with their associated logical and encyclopaedic entries, before others. For a speaker aiming at optimal relevance, efficient exploitation of this temporal sequencing will be crucial.

(59) is a generic advertisement for fish, obviously a product at the maturity stage, so the product itself tends to be the presupposition. The focus here is on some new advantages of eating fish shown by recent medical research. (Division is into information units rather than according to sentences or paragraphs.)

(59) 1. The Eskimos in Greenland lead a physically active life and
2. live largely on fish —
3. it's the only food their barren country produces.
4. Greenland Eskimos almost never suffer from coronary disease.
5. Localised studies in Europe also show that the more fish people eat
6. as part of a physically active lifestyle,
7. the less likely they are to get heart attacks.
8. We've got an abundance of fresh fish in Ireland.
9. If you'd like to know how to use fish as part of a delicious calorie-controlled diet,
10. 'phone BIM Fish Cookery Advisory Service at Dublin 841544 or write to BIM, Crofton Rd, Dun Laoghaire.

(RTE Radio 1, 29 March 1988)

(60) shows a table of contextual implications accessed. Each implication

is given marked references in accordance with the type of information that the implication or effect appears to consist of:

M	=	Manifest
E	=	Environmental
F	=	Factive
R	=	Reminder
I	=	Incidental
Ci	=	Contextual implication
Si	=	Synthetic implication

(60) a. This area of Greenland is non-industrialised, some aspects of the Eskimos lifestyle are healthier than ours [Ci M].

b. Eating fish is part of their healthy lifestyle [Ci M].

c. Fish is the staple diet of Eskimos and keeps them healthy [Ci FM].

d. Because of their lifestyle Greenland Eskimos are not subject to coronary disease [Si FM].

e. Eating fish is the important factor here (this is the important factor, everyone knows about active lifestyle) [Ci FE].

f. Exercise is also important in a healthy lifestyle [Ci I].

g. Europeans can imitate the healthy aspects of Eskimo life by eating a lot of fish [Ci FM].

h. People can initiate this healthy lifestyle by eating fish (and by exercise) and still live in Europe [Ci FME].

i. There's no reason why we can't eat plenty of fish in Ireland and imitate the healthy lifestyle [Ci FE].

j. A slight change in our diet could help prevent heart attacks [Ci F].

k. This is an idea for making the diet interesting [Ci F].

l. Any method of preventing a heart attack could be worth considering [Ci E].

Negative contextual implications are: boring diet, so much fish; talking about health again.

Sperber and Wilson (1986, p.204) point out that

the sooner disambiguation and reference assignment are achieved the less processing will be required. The greater the number of possible interpretations that have been borne in mind as the utterance proceeds, the greater the processing cost.

Obviously, as already stated, no disambiguation or reference assignment is required here — but an effort factor could be considered in the amount of time it takes for the point of the information to be accessed. Hearers tended not to access the point of this advertisement before 4 and 5. The contextual implications that the advertiser wants to convey here are probably

(61) a. Fish is good for your health.
b. Eating fish will prevent you from getting a heart attack.
c. There's plenty of delicious healthy fish available.
d. There are lots of fish recipes available.
e. Eating a healthy diet need not be boring with fish.

Presenting the evidence to the audience and bringing them through the argument using contextual implications and then asserted claims helps to make this advertisement more interesting and plausible. The implications are made up of a mixture of manifest, factive and environmental information. The information on health and nutrition is classified as environmental because of the great emphasis on the health aspects of diet in all the media. Information concerning the Eskimos and their lifestyle is classified as manifest as it is not something that would normally be in the hearer's short term memory. Some effort factors would be involved because of the use of manifest information in the contextual implications and the slight delay in accessing the point of the advertisement. Taking what might be proposed as a semantically straightforward and shorter version of (59):

(62) Eating fish is healthy and prevents heart attacks.

Apart from the fact that asserting such a strong claim might be disallowed by the radio station, it could also raise a lot of doubt in the hearer's mind, as the medical evidence has not yet been emphasised in the media. The reaction would probably be:

(63) This is a very strange claim to make for fish.

The claim in (60) would tend to be combined with the hearer's encyclopaedic knowledge that he had not heard this claim before and would wonder why it had suddenly been made. People involved in the fish trade on the other hand, especially those who read trade journals, would tend to be familiar with the information in (57). If (57) were to appear in the trade press (apart from the fact that it is a radio advertisement and probably would not be suitable for print media) all the manifest and factive information would tend to be environmental or reminder. An advertisement with such a high number of implications accessed from environmental and reminder information would tend to sound boring and patronising. While contextual implications accessed from environmental information combined in a suitable way with factive information tend to give a high level of immediacy to the advertisement, a combination of too many contextual implications made up of environmental and reminder information with a lack of information that is factive to the reader can make a message boring.

As Sperber and Wilson (1986, p.218) emphasise, it is necessary, whatever the occasion, to impart enough information to allow the hearer to disambiguate references and access the implications. However, if too much information is given in the utterance, information far in excess of what the hearer would need to be told in order to interpret the message, it can sound extremely patronising and annoy the hearer. They maintain that:

> The more information she leaves implicit, the greater the degree of mutual understanding she makes it manifest that she takes to exist between her and the hearer" and stress that "even a slight mismatch between speaker's estimate and hearer's abilities may make what was merely intended to be helpful seem patronising or positively offensive to the hearer.

If people involved in the fish trade took the trouble to go through advertisement (59) and accessed something on the lines of the contextual implications given in (60), the break-down of the classification of information units might be something like (64):

(64) a. This area of Greenland is non-industrialised, some aspects of their lifestyle are healthier than ours [Ci E].

b. Eating fish is part of their healthier lifestyle [Ci E].

c. Fish is the staple diet of Eskimos and keeps them healthy [Ci E].

d. Because of their lifestyle Greenland Eskimos are not subject to coronary disease [Si E].

e. Eating fish is the important factor here (this is the important factor, everyone knows about active lifestyle) [Ci E].

f. Exercise is also important in a healthy lifestyle [Ci I].

g. Europeans can imitate the healthy aspects of Eskimo life by eating a lot of fish [Ci R].

h. People can imitate this healthy lifestyle by eating fish (and by exercise) and still live in Europe [Ci E].

i. There's no reason why we can't eat plenty of fish in Ireland and imitate the healthy lifestyle [Ci R].

j. A slight change in our diet could help prevent heart attacks [Ci R].

k. Here's an idea for making the diet interesting [Ci R].

l. Any method of preventing a heart attack might be worth considering [Ci E].

For members of the general public and housewives listening to the advertisement the combination of manifest, environmental and factive information and the slight delay in discovering the point of the advertisement require enough effort to prevent the advertisement from being boring, at least initially. Too frequent repetition of the same advertisement would of course make it boring for them too.

As McGuire (1969, cited in Geis 1982, p.50 states): "There is another motivation for employing conversational implicatures. Since they have to be "worked out" by the listener, the listener may find them to be more persuasive than asserted claims".

It might be appropriate to take a random example of an advertisement mentioning health in connection with fish taken from the February 1988 issue of *Seafood Leader*, an international fish trade magazine:

(65) REAL SEAFOOD

for the health of it

FRESH
FROZEN Windjammer
CANNED Seafoods

In this case the readers would have access to all the facts about the findings on eating seafood and health as encyclopaedic knowledge in their cognitive environment. It would tend to be environmental information to them. People in the seafood trade tended to access other contextual implications, such as the environmental information that Windjammer supply only actual seafood (not artificial substitutes) and the reminder information that frozen and canned products are good food value just as fresh products are. This does not mean of course that an advertisement such as (65) could not be used in advertising to the public, just that they probably would not yet be able to access all the contextual implications regarding the health aspects of fish.

Another occasion when contextual implications have a role to play is the case where a product advantage is not asserted because of possible opposition from other sources or where the advertiser does not want to highlight a particular product advantage. This is the case in (66):

(66) 1. The new range of fresh St Michael fish
2. from the Atlantic
3. will be available from
4. Thursday 22nd October at Marks & Spencer, Mary St., Dublin.

(*The Irish Times*, 22 October 1987)

The fact that the fish is "from the Atlantic" could in some circumstances be incidental information, the main message being that the shop has a new range of fish. In this instance, because of environmental information regarding the ongoing problem of nuclear waste in the Irish Sea and how dangerous it is perceived by them to be to eat fish caught off the east coast, on reading the term "fish from the Atlantic" people tended to form contextual implications on the following lines:

(67) a. Fish from the Irish Sea could be dangerously radio active.
b. There is no nuclear pollution in the Atlantic.

c. St Michael fish comes from the Atlantic.

(68) St Michael fish does not contain harmful radioactive material.

These contextual implications would tend to be from environmental information (information in news media on problems with nuclear waste in the Irish Sea) and factive information (fish from St Michael brand comes from the Atlantic). Environmental information tends to give the message a high immediacy value if linked in a realistic way with the factive information presented. In this advertisement if the hearer failed to access these contextual implications the message could still be conveyed that the new range of fish was in the shop so the advertisement would not have been a waste. It would mean that just one of the implied advantages of the product would fail to be accessed by the reader. Obviously, the claim that because fish comes from the Atlantic it could not be affected by radioactive material could not be asserted in an advertisement as there would be protests from several areas, such as fishermen who work in the Irish Sea, shops known to get their fish from the Irish Sea, and possibly government departments who insist that there is no danger attached to eating fish from the Irish Sea. In other circumstances mentioning the fact that the fish is from the Atlantic would mean that readers would tend to access completely different contextual implications, something on the lines that the Atlantic is a fresh, clear ocean, ideal waters for fish.

3.7 Conclusion

The indications are that the type of information that has to be drawn on to access contextual implications can therefore affect the amount of effort the hearer will have to make to access the implications, and can influence whether members of the target audience will find the contextual implications they access interesting, incidental or boring, or whether they access the implications at all. Even if a hearer is in fact in an overhearer position, having no use for or no interest in the product being advertised, he might still find it interesting to read through the advertisement. Some contextual implications can only be accessed in association with particular information which is environmental at a particular time or to a particular audience. While, as Gazdar and Good (1982) point out, it would be impossible to quantify contextual implications and effort, as no two hearers will have exactly the same context, keeping this aspect in mind might help the

analysis. Just as speakers make some estimate of the hearer's cognitive environment when communicating, the advertiser has to make some estimate of the possible environment of the audience, even if this is only from environmental knowledge or market research.

It has often been suggested that because of the vastly superior knowledge about the product that the advertiser has relative to the potential consumer, the advertiser and the audience are in a relatively unequal position. From the perspective of Relevance Theory, however, it appears that if the advertiser does not make the effort and does not succeed in getting the stylistic factors right, the hearer will not make the effort to access the message. A relevance-theoretic analysis would seem to suggest that there is more of an interaction between advertiser effort and hearer effort than is generally acknowledged.

4 Contextual implications and linguistic style in advertising

Stylistic effects can be used to increase contextual implications considerably and thus vastly improve the yield of relevant information conveyed by a text. Wilson and Sperber (1987, pp. 18-19) emphasise that "by demanding extra processing effort [...] the speaker can encourage the hearer to look for additional contextual effects in the form of additional weak or strong implicatures".

4.1 Disambiguation and reference assignment

One of the more productive devices in terms of contextual implications appears to be disambiguation and reference assignment in cases where, although one of two or three possible referents turns out to be the normally "correct" one for use in the particular text, the alternative referent has some valid applications either as an aid to memory or as another aspect of the characteristics of the product or service in question. In other words, the effort of disambiguation produces definite positive contextual implications. In the most effective cases, the contextual implications would include the fact that the alternative referent could actually be substituted in the text. This can be particularly effective too in cases where the "correct" interpretation could be said to be only manifest information (not in the hearer's short term memory) and the more relevant interpretation, which is accessed first by the reader, tends to be environmental information.

As Leech (1966, p.184) points out,

> In informative or reasoned discourse, ambiguity is usually considered a fault to be eliminated. In poetry, on the contrary, it is usually treated as a means of enriching the communicative resources of the language, by a superimposition or juxtaposition of alternative interpretations.

Advertising abounds in this type of stylistic ambiguity. An unstructured selection of advertisements is taken here.

(69)
1. Tipperary has been on people's lips for a long time
2. but the reason they're singing its praises so much now
3. is that it has at last been recognised for what it is — a pure natural mineral water, as determined by the EEC.
4. If you ask for water you'll probably be given spring water — if you ask for Tipperary — you'll get Irish natural mineral water.
5. Spring water really does have a long way to go before it's anywhere near Tipperary.
6. Tipperary — Ireland's first natural mineral water.

(RTE Radio 2, 18 August 1988)

The brand name suggests that the product Tipperary is made in the Tipperary area. The place Tipperary also features in the well-known song "It's a long way to Tipperary", information which the advertisement uses effectively.

Here the effort factors involved in disambiguation could be seen to have contextual effects. There are two possible referents for 1, accessible from 1 plus the hearer's supplied context: (a) the song Tipperary has been popular for a long time; (b) the Tipperary brand of table water has been drunk by people for a long time. The tendency here is to access (a) first of all as an interim hypothesis because the song is better known than the drink appears to be at the moment. It could be said to be environmental information for most people and supplies the most relevant interpretation. The drink tends to be at best only manifest at the moment, because it has not been publicised to a great extent and there are many brands of table water on the market. It would appear in cases of ambiguous reference assignment that people tend

to take the one that could be classified as environmental information in their cognitive environment as relevant. As the message is processed over time, Tipperary, being the brand name of the product and also probably the place where it is produced, will be essential information that the hearer would need to include in his interim hypothesis.

Disambiguation is again required for 2, since it could mean either (a) the reason people are singing the song praising the place Tipperary so much now, or (b) the reason people are praising the product Tipperary so much now. Here again, (a) appears to be the more immediate interim hypothesis because it can be accessed from contextual implications derived from environmental encyclopaedic knowledge and 2. Accessing (b) would involve accessing the synthetic implication derivable from combining 1 and 2 and the added contextual implication derivable from this plus manifest information in the hearer's encyclopaedic knowledge.

Disambiguation of the referent occurs in unit 3: "is that it has at last been recognised for what it is — a pure natural mineral water, as determined by the EEC". With this disambiguation it becomes clear that, although it is the brand name of table water that was intended to be the referent, contextual implications could also be accessed on the lines that (a) the song Tipperary could also have been the referent in 1 and 2, (b) this mineral water is named after Tipperary, and (c) this mineral water must be made in Tipperary.

The contextual implications accessed in 4 tend to be that if you ask for water the chances are that you be given one of the more well known brands of table water. They are described as spring water, but this is not a distinction people appear to be aware of. The distinction between spring water and mineral water could well come under what Putnam (1975, cited in Chomsky 1986, p.18) describes as the "division of linguistic labour". As Chomsky puts it:

> In the language of a given individual, many words are semantically indeterminate in a special sense; the person will defer to "experts" to sharpen or fix their reference. Suppose, for example, that some one knows that yawls and ketches are sailing vessels but is unsure of the exact reference of the words "yawl" and "ketch", leaving it to specialists to fix this reference. In the lexicon of this person's language, the entries for "yawl" and "ketch" will be specified to the extent of his or her knowledge, with an indication that details are to be filled in by others,

> an idea that can be made precise in various ways but without going beyond the study of the system of knowledge of language of a particular individual.

In our case environmental information tends to cause "spring water" to be interpreted as "other brands of table water".

From contextual implications two hypotheses could be formed about 5: (a) other brands of table water are produced in areas that are a long way from the Tipperary area; (b) the Tipperary brand of mineral water is far superior to competing brands. Most hearers also access here that the words "a long way" also occur in the name of the song. From information already given in the text that the referent for Tipperary is the table water, so that the table water Tipperary would have become environmental information, (b) is the more readily accessed interpretation. Because the claim in 5 is implied by poetic language using weak implicatures, there probably could not be any objection to it by other table water manufacturers.

This advertisement appears to give the hearer the opportunity to form a selection of contextual implications about Co. Tipperary and the product. The interaction of a song, which is environmental information to most people, and a product fairly new on the market, which would tend to be only manifest to people, is an interesting process. Here a range of contextual implications are achieved from the use of the name Tipperary, the implied reference to the song Tipperary and the name of the place Tipperary and the distinction between mineral water and spring water, which appears to involve a division of linguistic labour. Because of the number of contextual implications here, this advertisement seems to make a high degree of impact. According to Leech (1966, p.29) this is likely to make it memorable:

> What makes one piece of language intrinsically more memorable than another? To some extent, the ease with which we remember a thing depends on the impact it first made on us; in this the goal of memorability coincides with that of attention value.

Carston (1988, p.158) posits that calculability and cancellability, which Grice maintains to be essential properties of implicatures, also apply to all aspects of utterance meaning which are derived pragmatically rather than *via* a process of linguistic decoding. Thus the results of disambiguation and reference assignment (which are standardly acknowledged as being involved

in establishing the explicature of an utterance) are also cancellable and calculable. Because of this property of cancellability the use of disambiguation in bringing about hypothesis formation would appear to be a very effective stylistic device in advertising. Using disambiguation for stylistic effects appears to be very prevalent in every category of advertising, including prestige advertising, an example of which is cited in (70):

(70) 1. **Looking after the nation's capital**

2. Night falls on the Liffey but the city never sleeps. Across Dublin, in hospitals and power stations, in churches and theatres, people are looking after Ireland's Capital in different ways.

3. The Irish Permanent has been looking after Dubliners' savings for more than a century. We have safeguarded their nest-eggs, repaid their trust with interest, and fulfilled the dreams of generations of homebuyers.

(*Irish Times*, 8 July 1988)

The headline could mean (a) looking after Ireland's capital city, or (b) looking after Ireland's money. The slightly more epistemically immediate interpretation seems to be, perhaps because of environmental information about the Dublin millenium, the interpretation in (a). Contextual implications accessed from 2 and 3 included: (a) the Irish Permanent fulfils a need just as vital to Dublin as that of what are normally regarded as essential services such as hospitals and power stations (this is probably a very valid claim implied here but it would be difficult to assert tactfully in a prestige advertisement); (b) Dublin helped the Irish Permanent in its achievements; (c) the Irish Permanent helped Dublin in the capital city's achievements.

Contextual implications here are made up of environmental information (a building society looks after savings; 1988 was Dublin's millenium year), manifest information (capital can refer to a capital city or financial assets) and factive information (the Irish Permanent built up its business in Dublin and with Dubliners).

(71) is an example of contextual implications accessible from disambiguation of an advertisement headline in a grocery trade magazine:

(71) **New Wright's Baby Softees—your latest source of disposable income** (*The Grocer*, 30 July 1988)

As this product (Wright's baby sponges) is at the introduction stage, the product and its advantages to the reader (the person involved in the grocery trade) are highlighted. Contextual implications derivable from the headline could include that the advertiser is saying: (a) you will have extra discretionary income at your disposal if you stock this new product which will sell very well; (b) you will get a share of your customers' discretionary income when they spend it in your shop buying this new product.

This advertisement is an example of the general trend, mentioned by Vestergaard and Schröder (1985, p.65) for advertisements to have "an opening poetic section and a following informational section in the body copy". Both (a) and (b) are confirmed in the body copy of the advertisement, where the additional information is given that this is a disposable product that the income will be derived from, so it will presumably be purchased more frequently. This adds a third valid interpretation to the headline: (c) you will get income from a disposable product.

By using this particular heading in (69) a wealth of contextual implications covering the three valid ways this headline could be interpreted are introduced. If this headline read, for instance:

(72) New Wright's Baby Softees — your latest source of high income

these extra contextual effects would be lost. "High" appears to be a more neutral word and would not have the same amount of contextual implications.

The psychological basis of Relevance Theory helps to clarify the interaction of negative and positive contextual implications in (73), an advertisement placed by the Irish Revenue Commissioners. This would normally come under the heading of information advertising.

(73) Self-assessment is more attractive because it's less appealing
(*Irish Times*, 1 September 1988)

It would appear that even though the intended message is that filling in self-assessment forms (by the self-employed) avoids having to appeal against estimates drawn up by the Revenue Commissioners, the reader, before consciously accessing this explanation, will first think of the negative contextual implications. Contextual implications accessed could be on the following lines: (a) making income tax returns is not appealing; (b) having income assessed is not appealing; (c) income assessment by the

Revenue Commissioners can result in income being assessed as higher than it is; (d) having income assessed can result in appeals having to be made about the amount of tax demanded; (e) self-assessment may not involve appeals against amount of estimated tax. Thus self-assessment might be the lesser of two evils.

This is a case where a very strong assumption could exist in the reader's cognitive environment that any forms connected with income tax are very troublesome. By the process of disambiguation of the expression "less appealing" an effort appears to be made to highlight the positive side of the new system and to change the reader's attitude by having to work out here that "less appealing" is intended to mean "less troublesome".

(74) **Vital Supporting Roles in some of London's best Theatres**
(*Sunday Independent*, 17 April 1988)

(74) is an example of a case where, although after disambiguation initially the clear and only referent for "theatres" is operating theatres, there is nevertheless a subtle and effective implication derivable from the headline, contextual implications and the statement in the body copy of the advertisement to "take into account the excitement of working in the heart of London's West End". Implications accessible synthetically from the headline plus this sentence, and contextually from encyclopaedic knowledge, are that working in the hospitals mentioned would have the added advantages of working in an area where recreational activities such as the opportunity to go to the theatre very frequently are available.

(75) **Tip the scales in your favour — choose fresh fish first**
(*The Irish Woman*, December 1987)

(75) is a case where the extra processing effort involved seems at best only to allow the reader to access a background implication, that fish also have scales. This is not really a case of disambiguation because obviously the heading can be interpreted as "tip the (weighing) scales in your favour". However, if the referent is taken to be fish scales, the statement "tip the (fish) scales in your favour" is not something that could realistically be taken to represent a fact or an action. From the next sentence, "Choose fresh fish first", the background implication could be accessed that fish also have scales and this is intended to be a metaphor. However, no valid complete

positive implication appears to emerge from this comparison.

(70)-(75) are all examples where the disambiguation process was used effectively to introduce contextual effects covering extra areas than would have been the case without the use of disambiguation. It appears to be particularly successful when it also happens that what turns out to be the non-correct area is the environmental information and so is judged by the reader/hearer to be the most relevant and is accessed in the interim hypothesis.

4.2 Anticipatory hypothesis

Another method of increasing contextual implications appears to be by using a creative style in which the reader is left to form anticipatory hypotheses, which are then confirmed or cancelled. The most straightforward instance of this appears to be when the usual anticipatory hypothesis is cancelled. Sperber and Wilson (1986, pp.211f.) give an example of this process from everyday conversation:

(76) a. I'm sorry I'm late
b. my car broke down

(77) a. I'm sorry I'm late
b. my car was booby trapped

Normally the hearer on hearing "my car", following on the fact that the speaker was late, would anticipate the rest of the sentence in (76), which would then only be a confirmation of anticipated information and could be conveyed by the speaker of (76)b saying only "my car". On the other hand, in normal circumstances the hearer would not anticipate (77)b, so following on (77)a it would be completely new and unexpected information and would therefore have significant contextual effects.

(78) is an example of the use of cancellation of anticipatory hypothesis in an advertisement:

(78) 1. Everything you've always loved about Alpen
2. and less
(*New Woman*, August 1988)

The second part of the headline contrasts with what would have been

expected, which is "more". By using "less" the contextual implication emerges that there is something different in the rest of the advertisement, something has actually been taken out of a good product, which is an unusual process. "Everything you've always loved" presupposes that the reader already likes eating Alpen. The fact that something that the reader already likes now has something subtracted from it is a contextual effect interesting enough to the reader to make him decide that it is worth reading further to see what the meaning of "less" is. When the significance of "less" is clarified — "New Alpen No Added Sugar means what it says. It doesn't contain a grain of added sugar" — the reader will access the background implication that the statement in the headline is a valid description of the preliminary to what is said in the rest of the copy. In other words, it could be said that in Searle's terms it fulfils the sincerity condition of giving information consistent with the information which the headline implied would be given and which the advertiser herself believes because she has proceeded to show the audience how it is true. This appears to be an important consideration, because when the actual message given in the advertisement is finally accessed, even if the reader could not anticipate the content, he should be able to confirm that, with hindsight, it does actually say what the headline promised.

The use of anticipatory hypotheses appears to be fairly prevalent when the use of a completely new type of service is being introduced and the purpose appears to be to get the reader to access contextual implications featuring possible advantages of the service before he is told about the service itself.

(79) Now you can run a Volkswagen on Volkswagen
(*The Daily Telegraph*, 16 June 1988)

The anticipatory hypothesis on reading "now you can run a Volkswagen on" in (79) tends to be a brand of petrol or diesel, or occasionally a particular sum of money. The next item in the sentence, "Volkswagen", is sufficiently unusual to make people want to read on and work out the text. It turns out to be something that follows on from the heading, an actual leasing arrangement from Volkswagen suppliers.

A similar effect is obtained in (80):

(80) Ever thought of using your bathroom for a wedding?
(RTE Radio 1, 29 August 1988)

The situation depicted in this opening sentence is so unusual that a hearer's first reaction is to wonder what is coming next. The implication accessed from encyclopaedic knowledge that this is a most unusual statement helps to form the contextual effect that this advertisement is at least worth listening to because it promises to say something different and it would be interesting to see what it means. The hearer will also access from encyclopaedic knowledge the fact that the advertiser is not suggesting that wedding guests should be entertained in the bathroom. Interim hypotheses included that it could be an advertisement for a super new style of bathroom or it could be some type of mortgage system. Even people who accessed mortgage system as a provisional premise were interested in listening to the rest of the advertisement to see what exactly was the implied message.

(81) is an interesting example of the use of anticipatory hypotheses in an advertisement taken from a trade magazine:

(81) 1. Mike just made some home improvements
2. with your money
(*Seafood Leader Buyers Guide*, 1988)

A straightforward interpretation that the reader presented somebody with the money to make home improvements is obviously unlikely to be the correct one. When an informal check was made with people who had not seen this advertisement before, none of them came up with the correct hypothesis. Anticipatory hypotheses included: this advertisement could be for (a) a bank, (b) a finance house (or similar institution where money is saved and is made available to borrowers), (c) a security firm (somebody could for instance have stolen the money). The advertisement is in fact for a debt collecting service. This information is given at the beginning of the body copy:

(82) Like Mike, most slow payers have no shortage of money. It's just that they're putting it to [...] other uses. Buyers like Mike are counting on you to let them off easy. We make them serious about your money.

One of the reasons for this effective use of interim hypothesis formation on the part of the reader is that business people probably would not wish to admit they had trouble with debtors or to be reminded about this fact. (81)

appears to be a very effective way of getting around this problem in an advertisement that would attract attention. While the correct interpretation may not have been accessed without reading on through the advertisement, it follows as a logical consequence of the headline and so would seem to be an acceptable solution.

In cases where the headline message is not clear and the reader is left to form an interim hypothesis, it seems to be important that the effort involved in working out the correct interpretation is seen by the reader to have paid off in terms of relevant information even if, when it has been accessed, he has no interest in the product and is left in an overhearer position.

(83) **A two week holiday now available in one hour**

(*Essentials*, September 1988)

On checking with people who had not seen (83) before, anticipatory hypotheses included: this could be an advertisement for (a) a travel agency, (b) a fast booking service for holidays confirmed in one hour, (c) a prize for a competition. On reading the smaller print in the advertisement none of these anticipatory hypotheses are confirmed. It is in fact an advertisement for a photographic developing service for holiday photographs. So the actual message intended is that "photographs of a two week holiday which you have already taken are available in an hour from our photo developing service". This would seem to be disappointing information and not a contextual effect that follows from the headline. The hearer might tend to access negative contextual implications if he has gone to the trouble of reading through an advertisement and the message turns out to be for a completely different or for a much less valuable service than had been anticipated from the headline.

Garden-path type sentences, which seem to convey false information on first reading, can also be an interesting stylistic effect used in advertising. (84) is an interesting example:

(84) How to control mild to moderate hypertension with a good breakfast

(*Irish Medical Times*, 5 August 1988)

It seems that the first interpretation that would be relevant here is: eating the right kind of breakfast will control hypertension. This would probably be a

rash enough statement to make a member of the medical profession read on to see what kind of new idea this was. Information unit 2 in the body copy of the advertisement gives the "correct" interpretation: "Capoten — new tablets which only need to be taken once a day — with breakfast for instance."

Stylistic effects which involve the reader in having to make an interim anticipatory hypothesis seem to be roughly divided into (a) cases where the hypothesis anticipated is obvious to the reader but is later contradicted, and (b) cases where the reader may or may not work out the correct interpretation from the headline but this is usually very difficult and he has to read the copy before confirming orcancelling the anticipatory hypothesis. Anticipatory hypothesis seems therefore to be another area where the reader has to draw on contextual implications combining the problematic copy and his cognitive environment.

4.3 Phonetic effects

Numerous types of stylistic effects are used in advertisements to maximise contextual implications. In (85) and (86), for instance, cross-language phonetic effects are used to achieve extra implications that would seem to justify the extra effort. In both examples a French word or expression is inserted which is roughly equivalent in pronunciation to an English word that conveys relevant information. The French expression also conveys additional information, heightening the number of contextual implications.

(85) Leau Cal. Perrier

(*Sunday Tribune*, 14 August 1988)

(86) C'est what you want

Tell-a-phone

(Poster advertisement reprinted in *Irish Advertising and Marketing Journal*, July 1987)

In (85), in addition to the contextual implication that this drink is low in calories, there is also the implication that it is French and it is table water (the brand is already well known). In (86), besides the implication that the best way to communicate a message is by telephoning, there is the implication that telephoning is the easiest way to do it and this is really what

you want to do. And you can always telephone your friends in France.

4.4 Repetition

Wilson and Sperber (1987, p.22) state that

> Within Relevance Theory the traditional claim that repetition has an emphatic effect can be explained and made more precise. Since repetition demands additional processing effort, a speaker aiming at optimal relevance must expect it to achieve additional contextual effects.

They use (87) and (88) to substantiate the point.

(87) There was water everywhere.

(88) There was water water everywhere.

In interpreting (87) the hearer must make some assumption about how much water there was, whereas in interpreting (88) he simply assumes that there was more water than could be conveyed by the use of (87). The deliberate increase in processing effort is offset by an increase in implicatures.

An advertisement for the Gap Shop provides an example of the use of repetition to highlight the huge reductions in their sale:

(89) The Gap — better buy now, better buy now, better, cheaper, better buy now.

4.5 Length of text

Winter (1964, cited in Leech 1966, p.58) studied for comparison batches of newspaper advertisements for two classes of product, patent medicine and women's clothing. Although the actual vocabulary used for advertising both types of product was very similar, women's clothing advertisements had very short body copy and emphasised by means of illustration, headlines and caption the imaginative appeal of the product. Patent medicine copy typically aims to win over the consumer by explanations of the advantages it brings. With some products the advertiser needs to give more information to enable the reader to access a relevant interpretation.

In other words, as in an everyday situation, the advertiser tends to leave implicit everything that the addressee can access with greater ease than if it was explicitly put into words. In general it appears that products or brands completely new on the market need to use longer copy to give the addressee

an opportunity to access what could be a relevant interpretation to him. It appears also that products advertised using very little text fall generally into two main categories: (i) products whose advantages have been advertised already at length, so that repeating them would only be a repetition of reminder information, making the whole process boring (devices such as one or two line reminders can have a type of intertext effect with previous advertising); (ii) products that could be said to be sold at the daydream level, where emphasis is on an inherent aesthetic value that could be seen to fulfil a prestige or social need rather than solving an everyday problem or fulfilling a basic need such as nutrition or curing health problems. This latter category would include products such as designer clothes, cosmetics, drinks, and non-essential household items, especially established brands. In this case the reader may need less help in accessing relevant contextual implications. The relevant factor again seems to be the number of contextual implications and how much help the reader needs to access them.

For example, in an advertisement for Gold Label fashions,

(90) THE DOTTED LINE

besides referring to the particular pattern of the dress pictured in the advertisement, was also taken to refer to being in the position of being able to sign on the dotted line, in other words to have plenty of credit available, leading to the implication that Gold Label fashions are popular with successful people.

An advertisement like (91)

(91) Foster's the Australian for lager

has the advantage of being reminder information of the message recently conveyed in a television commercial and also offering many contextual implications that the reader might be able to access. Obviously the literal meaning that there is an Australian language and the word in this Australian language that means lager is Foster's is not the absolutely correct one. Contextual implications could include: (a) Foster's is an Australian lager; (b) the only brand of lager that Australians drink is Foster's; (c) when Australians drink lager it is always Foster's; (d) Australians always ask for the lager brand, rather than for lager itself as a product; (e) when Australians ask for lager they always use the expression 'Foster's' instead of lager.

An advertisement for Wedgwood provides an interesting example of the

use of a product name to encourage contextual implications.

(92) Wedgwood wouldn't you.
(*Marie Claire*, September 1988)

This seems to convey that the advertiser is suggesting to the reader something on the lines of: (a) "You really would like a Wedgwood dinner service, wouldn't you?" and (b) "You really would like to treat yourself to this, wouldn't you?"

4.6 Media-specific contextual implications

A car is a product with which each owner could be said to have a personal relationship, and the qualities, both actual and implied, that would be demanded of it vary considerably from person to person. This would appear to be reflected in the type of contextual implications inherent in advertisements in publications with different target audiences. Examples (93), (94) and (95) illustrate this point.

(93) **Bread winner**
(*Autocar*, 20 July 1988)

(94) 1. The 4WD Subaru Justy
2. A cat among the pigeons
(*Homes and Gardens*, September 1988)

(95) The real beauty of it is the new 2.7 litre engine
(*The Daily Telegraph*, 17 August 1988)

(93) is targeted towards the motor enthusiast or somebody actually in the motor trade. The disambiguation required to interpret this headline involves contextual implications concerning usefulness for work, getting to work, in this way earning money, unlikelihood of extra expense being caused by faults in the car, dependability, value for money. In (94) the contextual implications involve how nifty this little car is, how manoeuverable in a tight corner, how easy to drive for a person who has a very busy schedule and varied life. (95) draws on contextual implications implying that the Rover's initial appeal involves prestige and elegance but when in use it is the mechanical parts that are really important.

Similarly with non-essential products such as film and developing

photographs, which have been taken as a leisure time or hobby pursuit. Both (96) and (97) use disambiguation very effectively.

(96) With new Kodacolour Gold 400 film you get a longer day
(*The Economist*, 13-19 August 1988)

(97) Well, I shot the dog — say "Cheese", Rex — [sound of barking] and I shot my sister's husband snoring in the garden [sound of snoring] and I shot the Hot House Flowers in Grafton Street [screams]
(RTE Radio 2, 19 August 1988)

(96) draws on contextual implications which would probably be accessed by the business person who may travel widely and for whom time is at a premium. The implications connected with a "longer day" would aim to be of interest to readers of *The Economist*. (97), on the other hand, was transmitted at a time when a large section of the audience would be housewives who would be more budget-conscious, and there would also be a lot of young people listening who would have less money to spend. Disambiguation and cancellation of anticipatory hypothesis are used very effectively here. The contextual implications intended to be accessed would probably be that it is so easy and inexpensive to have film developed by An Post (the advertiser in question) that there is no need to feel guilty about "shooting" everything around you with your camera, you are not going to incur a huge amount of expense.

4.7 Intertext

Another interesting stylistic effect that relies on contextual implications is the use of an intertext device. A seemingly effective use of intertext is the case where first of all an advertisement appears for which the referent is very difficult if not impossible to access, even when the reader combines the text with his cognitive environment. The same advertisement is often repeated several times to try to interest the reader and to get him to form an interim hypothesis. The effort factor of processing over time is very great in this case. After a time interval a complete advertisement with the full message is published. This has the added advantage that the recall value of the initial advertisement is increased because of the extra processing involved. On reading the second advertisement the implications of the first insertion

become clear. Very effective use of intertext is made in examples (98) and (99).

(98) 1. Dr Jane Barry Esq.
2. The secret is out
3. Make an appointment
(*Irish Times*, 15 September 1988)

(99) 1. Make an appointment
2. with Dr. Jane Barry Esq.
3. in Colours at the Abbey
4. From Sept. 28th.
(*Irish Times*, 16 September 1988)

Intertext can also be very effective in refuting claims made by other advertisers without using "knocking" copy. For instance, on RTE Radio 1 during August 1988 there were several commercials advertising the banking services offered by building societies. Example (100) appears very effective for a bank in refuting these claims:

(100) A: Good morning, can I help you?
B: I certainly hope so. Can you give me 24 hours access to my savings, and I'd like a credit card, a cheque book, an access card and maybe an overdraft. I need the widest range of savings products available, branches all over the country and I like to be looked after. Got all that?
A: No, I'm afraid we can't help you — this is a building society, we're not the Bank of Ireland.
(RTE Radio 1, 16 August 1988)

4.8 Illocutionary force

Relevance Theory would also account for the fact, pointed out by Leech (1966) and Geis (1982), that sentences in advertisements can have different illocutionary force from sentences in everyday language. For instance, advertising abounds in imperatives but from encyclopaedic knowledge the hearer can access the fact that this is just an elliptical device. Statements

such as "add colour to your cooking" or "protect your home" abound in advertising texts. In ordinary conversation this would have to be put in a much more polite fashion. As Geis (1982, p.18) points out:

> Imperative sentences are, par excellence, the vehicle for giving orders, but [...] the speaker must enjoy a superior social status relative to the listener to give a felicitous order and advertisers do not enjoy such a social advantage over viewers.

From the statement "protect your home", for instance, appearing in an advertisement, the reader can access from the statement plus the fact that it is an advertisement that what is meant is something like "We would recommend that you protect your home".

4.9 Implicature cancellation

The fact that implications are cancellable is another property that makes them particularly useful in advertising texts. Especially in radio advertising, instances where a strong claim is implied, which the listener would tend to access as the most relevant one, and is then followed up by a weaker assertion, are numerous. (101) and (102) are interesting examples of this:

(101) 1. In any field the words Gold Medal mean — well — you're first.

2. That's why Denny Gold Medal sausages are so aptly named.

3. They've not only got the great Denny tradition but Denny were the first to introduce 70% minimum meat in their sausages — and they were the first to date stamp them.

(102) 1. Like a holiday break? That's what An Post is offering everyone buying a T.V. licence before the end of September.

2. You can have free holiday accommodation for two at any of one thousand hotels throughout Ireland, Great Britain and on the continent.

3. For a small handling charge of £3.50 for each 3 night voucher you can opt for a 3 and 5 night holiday.

4. Provided you take and/or pay for your meals in the chosen hotel.

In (101) the contextual implications derivable from 1, 2 and encyclopaedic knowledge would tend to be: Denny's sausages are called Gold Medal because they are the best or have won a prize. This implication is cancelled in 3, which leaves the weaker synthetic implication from 1, 2 and 3: Denny's are the first in their field because they introduced before any other sausage manufacturer the minimum requirement of 70% meat in their sausages and they date-stamped their sausages before anybody else did. The asserted claim at the end of the advertisement, having implied and weakened the claim that they won a first prize or were top of their class, is that Denny's Gold Medal sausages are really a winner because of value and freshness and not because they won any prizes.

In (102) the contextual implications from the hearer's context plus 1 would seem to be: if you buy your T.V. licence as you should you will get the chance of a free holiday break (i.e. An Post are offering you a holiday break). Possibly you might have to do more than just obey the law and buy your T.V. licence, but the implication seems to be that there is no more expenditure involved. This interim hyposthesis seems to be confirmed in 2. However, 3 introduces the information that there is in fact a charge, although small, while 4 introduces information about charges. Here the claim appears to be substantially weaker than would have been anticipated from 1. Even though technically accommodation in the hotels is still free, there appear to be quite substantial charges.

Returning to the problem discussed by Geis (1982) of weak claims being interpreted as much stronger because the stronger claim is more relevant to the hearer, contextual implications appear to play an important role in determining how the reader or hearer will actually interpret the claim in relation to a particular product or event. For instance, in (59), in spite of the qualifying adverb "almost" being used in the sentence "Greenland Eskimos almost never suffer from coronary disease", this sentence tended to be interpreted as "Eskimos never suffer from coronary disease". This appears to be partly because the Eskimo lifestyle is only manifest to listeners and there seems to be general environmentally implicated information in their cognitive environments (apart altogether from this particular advertisement) that heart disease is something caused by a more industrialised lifestyle. The claim that "localised studies in Europe also show that the more fish people eat, as part of a physically active lifestyle, the less likely they are to get heart attacks" tended to be interpreted as "fish could help prevent heart attacks".

This could possibly be because of the emphasis in the media on the problems of heart attacks and the fact that people are sceptical that any one measure could prevent them.

As Geis (1982, pp.60-67) points out, interpretation of what percentage of a group is referred to when a term like "many" is used varies with the context. In an informal experiment with a group of students, he asked them to quantify, in the hypothetical case of tests of a new drug on a group of patients, how many of the tests would have to be positive before they would say the drug worked in many cases. The claim tended to be interpreted as relatively strong.

As Geis has pointed out and as was discussed in section 2, the actual interpretation of an implied claim would seem to depend on its relevance to the hearer/reader. There are numerous examples in advertising of claims that are not actually asserted but implied. There are instances such as:

(103) Hedex is specially formulated for headaches. It's available in easy to swallow caplets, or soluble form. And it acts fast. In fact Hedex contains the ingredient that's most often recommended by doctors. It is also made by a name you can trust: Sterling Health. (*Woman's Way*, 24 June 1988)

It is not actually asserted that Hedex cures headaches. But the reader glancing at the advertisement and interested in a cure for headaches will probably not examine the sentences in detail and thus will probably not notice the non sequitur.

4.10 Conclusion

While it would be impossible here to detail all the stylistic effects in advertising based on contextual implications, this random survey shows that Sperber and Wilson's Principle of Relevance would seem to account for the effectiveness of them all. The reader/hearer will pick the first interpretation consistent in his context with the Principle of Relevance. If in a particular advertisement this turns out to be the wrong interim hypothesis, it can either have some meaning in relation to the message or help to make the advertisement more interesting because of the extra processing effort. The most relevant disambiguation in accordance with the headline may not always be the "correct" one on reading through the advertisement, but other

contextual implications can be derivable from the interim interpretation. It appears to be contextual implications, as defined by Sperber and Wilson, that account for all these stylistic effects. To reiterate again the statement made by Sperber and Wilson (1986, p.224): "Stylistic effects are just differences in the way relevance is achieved".

5 Conclusion

This study of advertising language indicates that a relevance-theoretic analysis helps to illustrate the role of linguistic style (which can bring about the formation of numerous contextual implications) as a tool for conveying a great deal more than is actually said. Linguistic style is the variable factor which, when applied in variation to the inelastic factors of time or space, can increase the quantity of information conveyed.

Contextual implications (as discussed in 2.8) help to illustrate the fact that a one-to-one relationship does not exist between the number of words used and the processing effort involved. Relevance Theory, as noted in 2.11, is a type of economics of communication theory and helps to define a possible point of equilibrium between effort and yield. No two people have exactly the same context and therefore exact equilibrium of contextual effects and effort can be difficult to quantify. Optimal relevance is said to be achieved at the point where maximum yield of information is attained with minimum effort. A type of creative equilibrium can be attained at the point of optimal relevance in poetic language, where maximum yield of contextual implications is achieved with an acceptable amount of effort.

The type of information used, i.e. manifest, environmental, factive, reminder or incidental (as discussed in 3.6) is a contributory factor in determining the amount of effort required. Information does not always fall into a uniform category, it could, for instance, be environmental for one reader and manifest for another. For this reason an advertisement may need to be changed or modified according to the target audience. In the same way, the amount of effort required from the hearer may need to be modified according to the circumstances in which the advertisement is likely to be seen.

Similarly (as discussed in 4), the interaction of information which is in different categories for the hearer can give rise to extra contextual implications. An accurate estimate by the advertiser of information

categories which apply in the case of a particular target audience can be a key factor in attaining creative equilibrium.

An important factor in forming contextual implications in advertising, which is perhaps not given enough emphasis in Relevance Theory, is the hearer's encyclopaedic knowledge of the speaker/advertiser. For instance, information from a food company about the health benefits of their product, even when backed up by independent scientific evidence, can be interpreted by the hearer as motivated by self-interest and therefore a slightly prejudiced statement.

As with other types of poetic language, the degree of responsibility for the interpretation of an advertising text which is left to the hearer/reader is often substantial. Contextual implications play an important role in communication. In advertising, the intention to produce specific contextual effects in the hearer's cognitive environment appears to be a significant factor in the formulation of the text. Thus an advertiser lacking an accurate estimate of the cognitive environment of a typical member of the target audience will have problems in attaining effective communication of the desired message.

Creative devices such as hypothesis formation and hypothesis cancellation, phonological devices, and ellipsis all work by means of contextual implications. Even a seemingly straightforward and simple message involves a pragmatic element, so that the goal of getting across only one message in an advertisement tends not to be realistic.

Relevance Theory would appear to be an ideal tool for analysing the text/context interaction on which the effectiveness of advertising texts depends. As Richards (1985, p.265) puts it, Sperber and Wilson's "account of the interaction process involved in the derivation of contextual implications represents the most coherent programme yet for establishing a principled systematic connection between text and context".

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