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Graphism and Intersemiotic Translation. An Old Idea or a New Trend in Advertising?

Abstract

When visualizing verbal language, graphic design plays a prominent role as a major component for intersemiotic translation. To examine the relationship between verbal and non-verbal semiotic systems, the present research sets up a pilot study on three advertisements that use verbal language as part of their iconic messages, that is images made out of typographic elements, and examines how viewers respond to this form of visual information. Additionally it investigates, with the use of eye-tracking, where viewers look and compares scientific results of ›areas of interests‹ with the respondents' answers. It is suggested that even though these advertisements are classified as having a dominant iconic element made out of letterforms, the linguistic semiotic system seems to attract more the consumers' attention. This provides a platform for future research as altering the existing graphic design parameters of the advertisements examined would probably provide different results.

1. Intersemiotic Translation. Language Remains Necessary

Halfway through the previous century, the distinguished linguist and semiotician Roman Jakobson introduced the term *intersemiotic translation*, and the term *transmutation* as its synonym, defining it as »the interpretation of verbal

signs by means of signs of non-verbal systems« (JAKOBSON 2001: 139). Since then, many things have changed as regards the way this term is approached. Although a number of researchers have agreed with the observation made by Eco (2001: 67), that » [Jakobson] does not deal with other cases of transmutation between systems other than verbal languages«, just as many researchers strongly support that intersemiotic translation should not necessarily include verbal semiotic systems. The latter view seems to be winning over more and more researchers who study intersemiotic translation as a communication practice and foresee that its broad scope can result in significant communication benefits. Pym (2010: 108) observes that »Jakobson, rather like Eco, recognizes translation as operating in a very wide sense [...] (but) theories of semiosis are not always as revolutionary as they might appear«.

It seems that a kind of intersemiotic translation that relies solely on non-verbal systems is not really adopted as an advertising strategy. This is because advertisers often take care to include a verbal message (advertising slogan) in their advertisements, in an effort to overcome the ambiguity of the visual semiotic system in which they invested most in the wake of the technological revolution: that of the image. It may be that, as Mitchell (1986: 43) states, »the history of culture is in part the story of a protracted struggle for dominance between pictorial and linguistic signs, each claiming for itself certain proprietary rights on a ›nature‹ to which only it has access«. What seems to be interesting in advertising design is to investigate verbal and non-verbal semiotic systems from the perspective of graphic communication, which is looking at how graphic design parameters such as typefaces, grid, placement, font size etc. might influence eye navigation and consequently perception and interpretation. As Guidère (2000: 28) also states, »the linguistic signs of advertising texts are directly dependent on the iconic signs of the image«.

Looking at visual culture over the last two decades, there has been a trend for advertisers to increasingly invest in secondary semiotic systems that are iconic, such as colour and graphics. Semiotic researchers such as Roland Barthes (1964) and Groupe µ (1992) focused on the autonomy of these semiotic systems from very early on. In this paper we will study advertisements in which intersemiotic translation is achieved between the semiotic system of language and that of graphics.

2. Intersemiotic Translation and Advertising

It is true that monosemiotic texts are hard to find today. Advertising in particular has always drawn the interest of researchers who wanted to study the communicative dimension and success of combining different semiotic systems. This synergy, which researchers such as Kress and van Leeuwen (2001: 1–4) called *multimodality*, can undoubtedly be connected with intersemiosis, since different semiotic systems can convey the same message, especially when a message needs to be emphasized. Naturally, multimodality has been

profoundly connected with multimedia. However, as Torresi (2009: 8) states: »multimodality is achieved within each advertising text, even in the case of texts that are traditionally excluded from the definition of ›multimedia‹, such as print advertisements«. Multimodality focuses on the coexistence of different semiotic systems, whereas intersemiotic translation focuses on the same message being redundantly conveyed using different semiotic systems. Ira Torresi remarks about this phenomenon that:

In the case of print ads, advertisers [...] usually build up rich and highly structured multimodal frameworks, where redundancy plays an important part as it not only reiterates the message across time and space [...] but also ensures that the message gets through to the reader by simultaneously repeating it, or scattering its components, across several co-occurring sensory channels and modes of expression. (TORRESI 2008: 66)

Advertisers therefore do not merely use many different semiotic systems, but in fact repeat a message, usually the main verbal message or advertising slogan, using different semiotic systems.

3. Graphism and Advertising

When visualizing verbal language, graphic design draws and brings together knowledge from relevant, as well as appropriate, theoretical, historical and practical design references, in order to produce an effective visual outcome. When assigning visual iconicity to spoken language, it is not only the linguistic aspect of the advertising concept that matters, but also the way it is implemented. Walker (2001: 172) remarks that »the graphic presentation of written language can have a considerable effect on how it is read, interpreted and understood by readers, and it is important that designers and writers find out what kinds of graphic presentation may help readers to get the message.«

Whether for print or screen applications, all required graphic elements of an advertisement should be carefully defined and placed in the right hierarchical order and aesthetics. According to Goddard (1998: 6) »the root of the word ›advertisement‹ is the Latin verb ›advertere‹, meaning ›to turn towards‹. We believe that graphic design contributes greatly to this task, i.e., of making a specific target audience ›turn towards‹ something«. Typically, in an advertisement, what needs to be done first is to catch the viewers' attention and offer them a fascinating reading experience. As regards the starting point from which a page or screen is read, Carter et al. (2007: 62) mention that, when establishing a visual hierarchy from the most prominent to the least prominent element, »a designer carefully considers the relative importance of each element in the message, the nature of the reader, the environment in which the communication will be read, and the need to create a cohesive arrangement of forms within the typographic space«. Gestalt theory and design theory provide ways to achieve these arrangements of graphic elements, for example through similarity, contrast or location. As Moore and Fitz state,

Gestalt psychology principles of figure-ground segregation, symmetry, closure, proximity, good continuation, and similarity provide a simple yet powerful analytic vocabulary for discussing page layout and graphics. The six principles apply readily to typography, white space, data tables and maps, the relation between graphics and text, and other facets of textual design. (MOORE/FITZ 1993: 389)

Behrens also refers to these principles as one of the reasons that also artists embraced gestalt theory »is that it provided, in their minds, scientific validation of age-old principles of composition and page layout« (BEHRENS 1998: 301).

Graphic design in the context of advertising plays a major role. It constructs and visualizes a mental idea, a concept that needs to successfully reach its audience. There are unlimited combinations of graphic elements and any variation in the image, type, and space of an advertisement would lead to a different visual outcome and, in turn, to a different interpretation. Usually the major constituents of a typical advertisement are: headline, caption/sub-heading, illustration/photograph/image, body copy, logo/symbol/namestyle, slogan, and name/address/website. In an advertisement, the semiology, placement, and design of these components—apart from their conceptual identification—are deeply rooted in the culture they are built for, not only linguistically and independently, but also in synergy with each other. They have mutual references and support, and explain each other through a visual dialogue. Depending on the intended effect and the target audience of the advertisement, the selection of typefaces and styles for headlines, sub-headings or body copy is essential.

Typography has a multimodal nature of its own, adding connotative meanings to the verbal text that is being visualized. Van Leeuwen (2006: 154) suggests that »typography can be seen as a semiotic mode, systematic, multimodal and able to realize not just textual, but also ideational and interpersonal meaning«. For example, because of the differences in its design, historic and use references, a headline in upper-case Times New Roman has a different semiotic aspect than the same headline in upper-case VERDANA of the same size, colour, kerning and weight. While the first one was based on Old Style fonts and designed under the supervision of Stanley Morison in the early 1930s for newspaper use, the second one is a humanist sans-serif typeface designed by Matthew Carter in the mid 1990s for maximising legibility of text on screen. While the first one carries the prestige, seriousness, and tranquillity of reading in print, the second one has clarity, simplification, and popularity for screen based work/web design. At the same time, when constructing images for an advertisement, the set-up of a photograph is a study on its own, where many semiotic features take place. Kress and van Leeuwen (cf. 2006) refer to linguistic messages that are influenced by visual characteristics, and assign semiotic values to colour, horizontal and vertical composition, photographic angle, perspective, close-ups, framing, salience, and the position of images in relation to text.

In general, an advertisement needs to attract attention and convince. It is important that all graphic elements promote a strong concept, the macro- and micro-semiotics and design principles that apply each time taking into consideration the nature of the advertising brief, the suggested design solution, the target audience, and the expected outcomes.



Fig. 1: Advertisement of the mobile telecommunications company Cosmote

4. When Words Create Images

We will be studying three advertisements that appear during 2011 in Greek newspapers and magazines, simultaneously circulating in Greece and Cyprus, and have a particular feature: the advertisers have used the verbal message primarily as an iconic system. The iconic dimension of the semiotic system of language has been noted by many linguists and semioticians. Petrilli (2007:

324) remarks that »if verbal language itself is a conventional system, its method is mainly iconic«. Torresi, too, says that

no text can be said to be exclusively verbal: even words printed on paper or viewed on a computer screen have a visual dimension (the layout) and a tactile one (the paper, or the pressure of the fingers on the keyboard). (TORRESI 2008: 71)

The first advertisement (see fig. 1) is a composition prepared by the mobile telecommunications company Cosmote. The advertisement's verbal messages are divided into two categories: a) the messages written in green and white that are inside the green box, which is in turn penetrated by another box in which the company's name is dominant. These verbal messages are at the bottom of the advertisement and stand out visually from the rest of the composition because of the coloured boxes in which they have been placed; and b) the main advertising message¹ »επειδή και στις γιορτές θέλεις να μιλάς ασταμάτητα από το εξωτερικό ...« (meaning »because you want to phone all the time from abroad even during the festive season«), which is found in the top, left-hand part of the advertisement. This message has not been placed in a box and is in total harmony, chromatically speaking, with the advertisement's iconic message.

What makes this advertisement peculiar is the fact that the iconic message is constructed with the help of the semiotic system of language. This practice is not unfamiliar, particularly where the depiction of the Eiffel Tower is concerned, given that in Guillaume Apollinaire's² *Calligrammes* (1913) in the early 20th century, one of his poems was written in the form of the Eiffel Tower.³ In the Cosmote advertisement, the Christmas trees, moon and Eiffel Tower are formed using verbal messages that are semantically related to the advertisement's theme, namely that »when travelling abroad during the festive season, you can rely on Cosmote«. Furthermore, parts of the main verbal message are intersemiotically translated by means of the iconic message. Thus, the utterance »γιορτές« (meaning the »festive season«) is intersemiotically translated by the Christmas trees and the utterance »εξωτερικό« (meaning »abroad«) by the Eiffel Tower. Note that in these intersemiotic translations—where verbal signs are translated by iconic signs, which are, in turn, formed using verbal signs—there is also the rhetoric device of metonymy, since the concept of »festive season« is not only represented by Christmas trees in daily practice and the concept »abroad« is not only identified with the Eiffel Tower (which in turn is a metonymy for Paris) and, by extension, France. Another innovative aspect of this advertisement is that the verbal messages that make up the iconic message seem to be text messages that one would normally send friends or relatives during the holidays, such as »Hi! Guess where I'm calling from? I'm at the Eiffel Tower«, and so on.

¹ We should point out here that we do not examine all the verbal messages in our study of the three advertising compositions; instead, we focus on the main advertising message, or slogan, which, together with the graphics, forms part of the intersemiotic translation.

² Cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guillaume_Apollinaire [accessed June 5, 2013].

³ Cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eiffel_Tower [accessed June 5, 2013].



Fig. 2:
Advertisement of the Nestlé Company

Moreover, one might claim that the pictorial composition, which is made up of verbal messages and takes up 3/5 of the advertisement, also denotes a famous tourist attraction in Paris, the lit-up Eiffel Tower. We do not think that night-time, which is indicated in the advert by the moon, was a random choice, since it is at night that one can enjoy Christmas trees and the Eiffel Tower all lit up. In other words, even though it is formed using the semiotic system of language, the advertising composition also functions intertextually⁴ and intericonically, reminding the consumer of a known or familiar image. As Petrilli (2010: 245) notes, »the problem of iconicity has attracted attention largely because of its suggestive power, its power of evocation«.

The second advertising composition (see fig. 2) that we examine is from Nestlé and advertises the wholewheat cereal brand Fitness. Even

⁴ »Intertextuality« is a key term in semiotic studies, a practice favoured by advertisers, since »the notion of intertextuality refers to close relationships of content and/or form between texts. No text stands on its own. It is always linked to other texts« (MARTIN/RINGHAM 2006: 108).

though this is not specified in the advertisement, the product mainly targets women, judging from the female shape shown on the product's box and in the advertisement's iconic message. The main verbal message is *»τώρα όλα τα φερμουάρ κλείνουν εύκολα«* (meaning *»now all zips go up easily«*). The utterances that are intersemiotically translated in this advertising message are *»zips«* and *»go up«*. The first utterance, *»zips«* is intersemiotically translated by the slider and two rows of teeth, which are, in turn, formed using verbal messages consisting of the months of the year. Once again, the verbal message produces an iconic result which implies that the more months one eats this cereal product, the slimmer they will be and, hence, the more easily the zip of their (tight-fitting) clothing will go up. We can claim that the utterance *»go up«* is intersemiotically translated, since the zip's slider has fastened most of the teeth and is almost all the way up.

Iconicity is more evident in this advertisement since the majority of the composition is taken up by a photographic message. The verbal-iconic aspect is confined inside the photographic message and, furthermore, only to the zip's teeth. It is interesting to note that, although Roland Barthes (1961: 127–128) believed that photographs and texts are two co-operative structures whose units are heterogeneous and can therefore not be mixed, we see that the opposite applies here: that graphics make it possible for two heterogeneous units to mix and to produce a single result.

The third advertising composition (see fig. 3), a print advertisement of the Greek National Tourism Organisation, presents another peculiarity. The advertisement's main verbal message, *»ευχαριστούμε«* (meaning *»thank you«*), is formed using other verbal messages: the names of all the volunteers who have participated in the Advertising Self-Regulation Council's committees since 1/1/2010, as we are informed in the additional verbal messages at the bottom right-hand area of the advertisement. Thus, in what appears a rather unusual choice, verbal messages produce an iconic result that is another verbal message—in fact, the main verbal message in the advertisement. The advertisers' choice reminds us of Petrilli's (2010: 245) observation that *»the iconic dimension of signs is present in verbal language not only at the level of sound (use of onomatopoeia) and lexicon (where the icon effect is only virtual), but even more significantly at the syntactical level«*. It is true that we would not be able to decode this verbal message if we did not read it from top to bottom, from left to right, and if the word *»ευχαριστούμε«* was not divided into syllables in line with Greek grammatical rules (EY-XA-PI-ΣΤΟΥ-ME). This message has been placed on the left-hand side of the advertisement, iconically covering only the part of the photograph that depicts land, whose darker colour makes it an ideal background for bringing out this unusually designed message. The message can be read in two ways: there is the external reading of the expression *»thank you«* and the internal reading of a list of names.

tems coexist, but produce an interpretation. The verbal message is, in essence, a type of self-translation.

5. An Exploration of Consumers' Perspective

In the framework of our survey we also examined the viewers' responses through an exploration that was not aimed at giving solid results, but to examine preliminary responses. To conduct this pilot study, we selected a sample of forty Cypriot respondents, eleven men and twenty-nine women, and showed them the three advertisements we had chosen. We then asked them a number of questions in a questionnaire, which included open-ended, closed-ended and mixed questions (see Appendix). The respondents' answers were analysed using the statistical program SPSS 19. The sample's social parameters are the respondents' sex (eleven men and twenty-nine women were chosen), their age group (18–30 and 31–55), their occupation or status (university students and academic personnel). The selected sample was not fully stratified for it to be representative and for the answers to be statistically significant. It nevertheless provides information on consumer trends through the percentages shown in cross-tabulations.

The first question in the questionnaire asks respondents whether they like the three advertisements that were chosen. This is a general, introductory question intended to assess the advertising composition's aesthetic appeal. Eighty percent of the respondents replied in the affirmative and 20% in the negative, which proves that the advertisements are successful from an aesthetic perspective.

The second question asks respondents what the observed advertisements' key characteristic is, i.e., distinguish between linguistic and iconic elements, and we summarized the results according to their answers. With this question we aim to find out whether and how the peculiarity of the graphics and design of these advertisements are noticeable. The distribution of the respondents' answers shows us that there is a particularly high degree of polysemiosis. In particular, 22.5% of respondents named the semiotic system of typography to be the main feature of the compositions, 20% the semiotic system of language, 17.5% the iconic semiotic system, 15% spoke about letters or words being used to form an image, and a high percentage, 25%, mentioned other characteristics for the three advertisements, like hierarchy of information, logos, colours, visual rhythm, confusion in eye navigation, and complicated design in general.

The third question (see tab. 1) attempts to make it clear whether respondents classify these advertisements as textual or visual and asks them to justify their views. We found out that while most respondents (60%) described the advertisements as visual compositions, a significant percentage (40%) considered them to be primarily textual. A large proportion of respondents justified their views by saying that in these specific advertisements the

text is regarded as an image (37.5%), while other respondents believed that the image (35%) or language (27.5%) was dominant.

3.a. Do you think the advertising compositions are more textual or visual?		3.b. Justification			Total
		More images	More text	Text as image	
Textual	Count	1	11	4	16
	% within Q3.a.	6.3%	68.8%	25.0%	100.0%
	% within Q3.b.	7.1%	100.0%	26.7%	40.0%
Visual	Count	13	0	11	24
	% within Q3.a.	54.2%	0%	45.8%	100.0%
	% within Q3.b.	92.9%	0%	73.3%	60.0%
Total	Count	14	11	15	40
	% within Q3.a.	35.0%	27.5%	37.5%	100.0%
	% within Q3.b.	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Tab. 1:

Cross-tabulation of the question asking respondents whether they consider the advertising compositions to be more textual or visual, and of the justification they provided for their views

The fourth question asks respondents to specify which semiotic system they think is dominant in the advertising compositions they have before them (language, image, colour, graphics or something else). Twenty-five percent of the respondents thought the dominant system to be the graphics, 20% image, and 15% language. It is interesting to note that 4 out of 10 respondents believed that there are two dominant semiotic systems and not just one, made out of two major combinations, those of image & language and language & graphics.

In the fifth question (see tab. 2) we asked respondents whether they believe language is imbued with iconic significance. We then ask them to justify their answers. Even though the overwhelming majority of respondents answered in the affirmative (90%), judging from their justifications they did not understand the question, since a large proportion of those who answered 'yes' (44.4%) believe that the text can be translated by means of an image, 19.4% answered that images are more direct, 11.1% that there are more meanings to be found in images and 8.3% that the image is a more specific semiotic system than the others. In other words, the respondents focused on the advantages of the image rather than the iconic dimension of language, which they may not have ever pondered over before.

5.a. Do you believe that language is imbued with iconic significance?		5.b. Justification					Total
		More info in the picture	Picture is more direct	Picture is more specific	Text can be translated into picture	Other	
No	Count	0	2	0	0	2	4
	% within Q5.a.	0%	50.0%	0%	0%	50.0%	100.0%
	% within Q5.b.	0%	22.2%	0%	0%	25.0%	10.0%
Yes	Count	4	7	3	16	6	36
	% within Q5.a.	11.1%	19.4%	8.3%	44.4%	16.7%	100.0%
	% within Q5.b.	100.0%	77.8%	100.0%	100.0%	75.0%	90.0%
Total	Count	4	9	3	16	8	40
	% within Q5.a.	10.0%	22.5%	7.5%	40.0%	20.0%	100.0%
	% within Q5.b.	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Tab. 2:

Cross-tabulation of the question whether respondents believe language to be imbued with iconic significance, and of the justification they provided for their views

The sixth question is of translational interest and asks respondents whether some images ›translate‹ the advertisement’s verbal message. The respondents are then asked to specify the images they are referring to. They are essentially being asked to say whether they are aware of the existence of intersemiotic translation in the advertising compositions examined. A positive response was obtained from 81.6% of the respondents, but we note that the answers are very widely spread when it comes to pinpointing the advertisements in which this phenomenon was noted. Thus, 38.5% of the respondents said that intersemiotic translation was present in the third advertisement, 11.5% mentioned the first and third advertisements, 11.5% the second and third advertisements, 7.7% the first, 15.4% the second, 3.8% the first and second and 11.4% all three of the advertisements. The fact that 4 out of 10 respondents mentioned the third advertisement proves how much the iconicity of the verbal message increases when it is easy to read, when it takes up a large part of the composition and when it is short (only one word).

The seventh question asks respondents to say why the advertisers chose graphics to convey a message iconically. More than half of the respondents (54.1%) believe that the use of graphics makes an advertisement more interesting and interactive, while 18.9% provide the same reason, but use a different word, saying that the advertisement becomes more direct. Moreover, 13.5% consider graphics to be an alternative solution that departs from the usual advertising practices, 8.1% state that it makes the advertisement more memorable and a smaller percentage, 5.4%, consider the use of graphics in an advertisement to be an easier process.

8.a Do you think that the advertisements you have before you are innovative?		8.b Justification					Total	
		Alternative solution	More interesting/ attractive	More memorable	Easier to process	More direct		other
No	Count	0	2	0	4	7	9	22
	% within Q8.a.	0%	9.1%	0%	18.2%	31.8%	40.8%	
	% within Q8.b.	0%	50.0%	0%	50.0%	87.5%	71%	
Yes	Count	2	2	1	4	1	3	13
	% within Q8.a.	15.4%	15.4%	7.7%	30.8%	7.7%	23%	
	% within Q8.b.	100.0%	50.0%	100.0%	50.0%	12.5%	29%	
Total	Count	2	4	1	8	8	12	35
	% within Q8.a.	5.7%	11.4%	2.9%	22.9%	22.9%	34.2%	
	% within Q8.b.	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Tab. 3:
Cross-tabulation of the question whether respondents consider the advertising compositions to be innovative, and of the justification they provided for their views

In the eighth question (see tab. 3), respondents are asked to say whether they believe the advertisements they have before them to be innovative, and to justify their answers. With this question, we aim to determine whether these advertising choices, which are based on intersemiotic translation and graphics, are unusual to the viewers’ perspective. Interestingly, 62.9% of the respondents did not think that the three advertisements were innovative, even though 80% had stated earlier that they liked the advertisements. A large number of the respondents whose response was negative (55.3%) consider this form of advertisements to be weak as they felt it should be easier to decode an advertisement’s message. Of those who answered in the affirmative, the majority (30.8%) thought that decoding the message was easy, 15.4% thought this form of advertisements was a positive alternative solution, another 15.4% consider the three advertisements as an interesting and attractive process, and 7.7% answered that the advertisements were easy to memorise.

9.a. Do you think that the advertisements you have before you are successful?		9.b. Justification					Total	
		Alternative/ smart	More interesting/ attractive	More memorable	Easier to process	More direct		Other
No	Count	1	0	0	2	1	1	5
	% within Q9.a.	20.0%	0%	0%	40.0%	20.0%	20.0%	
	% within Q9.b.	33.3%	0%	0%	20.0%	33.3%	20.0%	
Yes	Count	2	2	1	8	2	4	19
	% within Q9.a.	10.5%	10.5%	5.3%	42.1%	10.5%	21.1%	
	% within Q9.b.	66.7%	100.0%	100.0%	80.0%	66.7%	80.0%	
Total	Count	3	2	1	10	3	5	24
	% within Q9.a.	12.5%	8.3%	4.2%	41.7%	12.5%	20.8%	
	% within Q9.b.	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

Tab. 4:
Cross-tabulation of the question whether respondents consider the advertising compositions are successful, and of the justification they provided for their views.

The ninth question (see tab. 4) asks respondents to say whether they think these advertising choices were successful or not. Strangely, although most of the respondents (62.9%) had not thought the advertisements to be innovative when asked previously, in this question a larger percentage (79.2%) thought that these three advertisements manage to communicate their intended messages successfully. The respondents justified their responses by saying that the advertisements' success is based on the fact that the advertising message is easily decoded and understood (42.1%), whilst most (40%) of those whose response was negative (20.8%) believed the opposite.

In the tenth question (see tab. 5), respondents are asked if they would change anything in the advertising composition they have before them. This question essentially asks respondents to indirectly point out the advertisement's weakness, given that the fact that an advertisement is innovatively peculiar does not mean that it cannot be improved to increase its chances of success. In this question, all the respondents answered in the affirmative. More specifically, 37.5% believed that the advertisement should have more clarity and simplicity, 16.7% felt that it needed less text and more images, 16.7% that a different design should have been chosen, another 16.7% that the advertisement should have been even more innovative, while 12.5% recommended other changes.

10.a. Would you change anything in the advertisements you have before you?		10.b. Justification					Total
		Less text	Different design	More clarity/ simplicity	More innovative	Other	
Yes	Count	4	4	9	4	3	24
	% within Q10.a.	16.7%	16.7%	37.5%	16.7%	12.5%	100.0%
	% within Q10.b.	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	16.7%	16.7%	37.5%	16.7%	12.5%	100.0%
Total	Count	4	4	9	4	3	24
	% within Q10.a.	16.7%	16.7%	37.5%	16.7%	12.5%	100.0%
	% within Q10.b.	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	16.7%	16.7%	37.5%	16.7%	12.5%	100.0%

Tab. 5: Cross-tabulation of the question whether respondents would change anything in the advertisements they were looking at, and of the justification they provided for their views

6. Eye Tracker and the Advertisements

Since the analysis of signs is a highly subjective process, we thought that it would be interesting to corroborate the respondents' answers with the aid of technology. Thus, by using an eye tracker on all the respondents and for each advertisement separately, we noted that their attention was focused mainly

on the verbal message, even though 60% of them believed that the visual and not the textual was dominant in the advertisements.

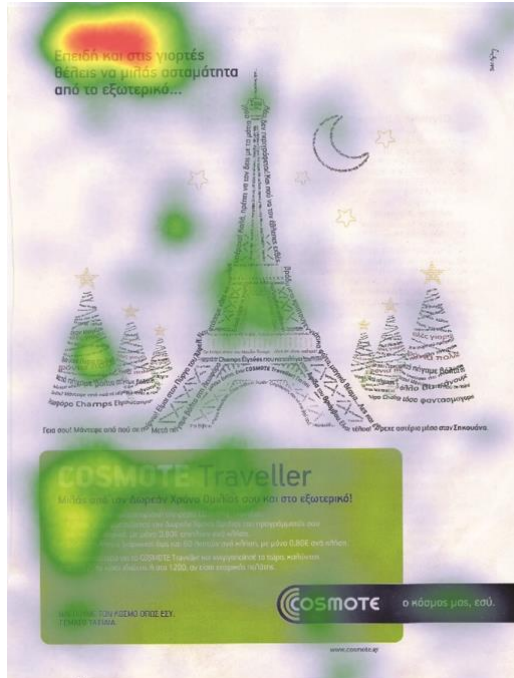


Fig. 4: Advertisement of the mobile telecommunications company Cosmote

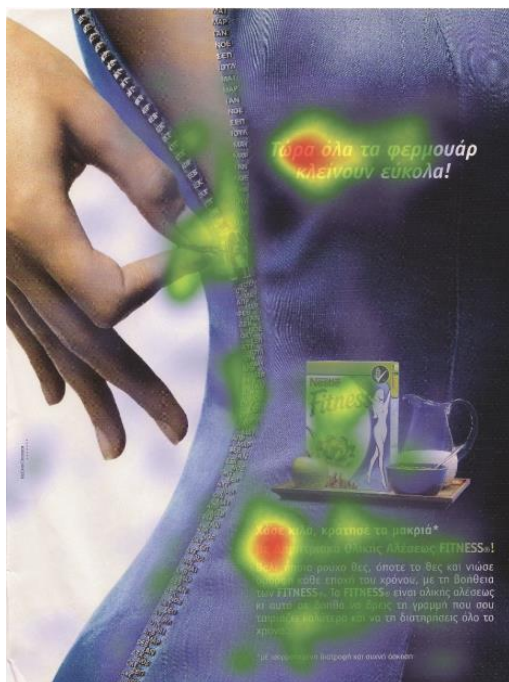


Fig. 5: Advertisement of the Nestlé Company

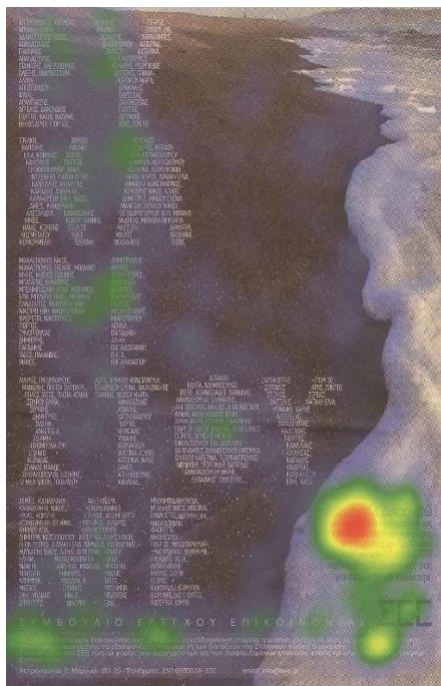


Fig. 6:
Advertisement of the Greek National Tourism Organisation

In these three advertisements, whose verbal messages produce an iconic result, the respondents appear to assign more significance to the advertising slogan (see fig. 4, 5, and 6), although the advertisements' singularity does seem to have been understood.

In our opinion, the results from the eye-tracker seem to support the view of many linguists and semioticians that the semiotic system of language plays a primary role in polysemiotic texts—a primary role that Ferdinand de Saussure (1979: 45), had pointed out in the very beginning of the twentieth century. De Saussure felt language to be the most important of all semiotic systems. His opinion was shared by many other prominent semioticians: Jakobson (1970: 511) noted that linguistics has a narrower scope, but that, on the other hand, any human communication involving non-verbal messages presupposes a circuit of verbal messages, without the opposite being possible.

Greimas and Courtés (1993: 398) emphasize the primacy of the linguistic system, claiming that natural languages have a special status compared with other semiotic systems. This occurs because, during the translation process, they alone can be used as target languages for all the other semiotic systems, whereas the opposite rarely happens. Similarly, Eco (1994: 263), after posing many questions on the dynamics of semiotic systems, concluded that every theory of meaning and communication has only one, primary object, and that is language, whereas all other semiotic systems are incomplete approximations and adulterated snapshots of semiotic devices. Lastly, Barthes (1964: 40) makes sure to mention that linguists and the public are in

disagreement over the matter, since the former consider the image to be a weak, fledgling system when compared with language, while the latter believe that the advertising message cannot exhaust the ineffable wealth of the image.

Even though the results from the eye-tracker sustain many of the pre-mentioned aspects of linguists and semioticians we need to consider that the issue of eye navigation is not of priority or importance between verbal and non-verbal semiotic systems but also a matter of comprehension and graphic design. Thus, advertisements with images designed to appear first in the visual hierarchy order would probably give different eye-tracker results.

7. Concluding Remarks

After studying the advertisements, we note that while all stand out for their peculiarity, they do have significant differences. Thus, the first advertisement differs from the second in that the entire iconic message in the first advertisement was formed using verbal messages, whereas in the second advertisement the verbal messages form a part of the iconic message. In the third advertising composition, the verbal message was formed iconically, however using verbal messages.

The main advertising message is usually found in the upper zone of the composition, in the space that is not taken up by the iconic message. In the first two advertisements, there is intersemiotic translation between the main verbal message/advertising slogan and the graphically-aided iconic construction. In the third advertisement, the two semiotic systems become one and the same.

The prominent role that graphics play as a major component of intersemiotic translation compared with language in the advertising text shows us that semiotic systems which were considered to have a secondary function—and hence were of secondary importance—can play a primary role in advertising practice and can result in communicative and, consequently, financial benefits for advertisers. Yet, even though these advertisements are classified as having a dominant iconic element, it seems that the linguistic semiotic system draws the consumers' attention first. Perhaps this is because, as Barthes (1964: 43) says, the verbal semiotic system (written or spoken language) is the most effective mode to transmit a message (information).

This pilot study on the specific advertisements provides a platform for further and more stratified research. Eye-tracker experiments can be done on advertisements where non-verbal semiotics systems are emphasised through design and other graphic parameters, as well as investigating how the meaning and design of verbal messages might also interfere on eye-navigation and comprehension of adverts.

Appendix

Questionnaire

Sociological information

1. Sex: male female
2. Age: 18-30 31-55
3. Occupation

Questions

1. Do you like the advertisements you have before you? (general, introductory question aimed at assessing the composition's aesthetic appeal)

2. What is the main feature/characteristic of the advertisements you have before you?

3.a Do you think the advertising compositions are more textual or visual?
textual visual

3.b Why?

4. Which semiotic system do you think is dominant in the advertisements you have before you?

- language image
colour graphics
other (state which)

5.a Do you believe that language is imbued with iconic significance?
Yes No

5.b Why?

6.a Do any images ›translate‹ the advertisement's verbal message? (intersemiotic translation)

- yes no

6.b If yes, then which?

.....

7. Why do you think the advertisers chose graphics to convey a message iconically?

8.a Do you think that the advertisements you have before you are innovative?
yes no

8.b Why?

9.a Do you think that the advertisements you have before you are successful?
yes no

9.b Why?

10.a Would you change anything in the advertisements you have before you?
yes no

10b. If yes, what would you change and why?
.....

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