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Advertising Across Cultures:
A Linguistic-Semiotic Analysis of
British and Italian TV Commercials

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INTRODUCTION

Advertising. This genuinely English word, denoting a practice inextricably tied to the New World, originated in ancient Rome. In fact, it comes from the Latin *advertere*, a compound verb composed of the preposition *ad* (=to) and the verb *vertere* (= to turn). Thus, *advertising* means to turn the audience's attention to a particular product, service, or pattern of behaviour, in order to entice them to buy or acknowledge it.

In the contemporary capitalistic world, the omnipresence of advertising in everyday life has made this task increasingly difficult to accomplish. Exposure to the many different stimuli provided by hoardings, paper advertising, radio and TV broadcast ad breaks, and internet banners and pop-ups has created, in the target audiences, what I would define as *emotional saturation*. Advertising has become such an ordinary component of people's lives as to pass unnoticed, and finding new solutions to this problem is one of the greatest challenges faced by marketing experts at present time.

Cross-cultural marketing and studies in *consumer behaviour across cultures* have suggested an approach to the problem based on the postulate that different cultural patterns determine different emotional responses that translate into distinct purchase dynamics. Contesting the global marketing tenet whereby similar mental processes underlie standardised buying patterns anywhere in the globalised world, cross-cultural marketing and consumer behaviour theorists have claimed that cultural frameworks have a strong impact on consumerist practice. Marieke de Mooij (2004: 5) has noticed that "Countries similar economically are not necessarily similar in their consumption behavior, media usage and availability patterns", and as people's education and wealth increase, their tastes actually diverge. Consequently, the efficacy of *global advertising* is brought into question. The idea that standardised advertising patterns can fit different cultures to sell similar products is rejected as a myth created by marketing managers and justified by economies of scale. From the perspective of cross-cultural marketing, culture-bound appeals are the new frontier of effective advertising.

This study stems from my interest in the theories presented above. Assuming culture-bound advertising to be best practice from a cross-cultural marketing

perspective, I intend to explore the *relationship (if any) existing between national culture and the language of television advertising*. Paramount to my research work is the idea of TV advertising as the form of *multimodal communication par excellence*. TV advertising establishes a double communicative connection: one between the people represented in the advert, also called *represented participants* (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996, 2006), and one between the sender (i.e. the advert maker) and the receiver (i.e. the viewer) of the advertising message, also called *interactive participants* (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996, 2006). In both cases, the message conveyed is of a multimodal nature, in that it relies on multiple semiotic modes (i.e. linguistic and paralinguistic).

This communicative perspective on advertising is not dissimilar from the notion of *advertising as discourse* provided by Guy Cook (2001: 4), who defines *discourse* as “[...] text and context together, interacting in a way which is perceived as meaningful and unified by the participants (who are both part of the context and observers of it)”. He explains that *text* consists of linguistic forms, which can be artificially separated from the context for the sake of analysis; *context* is a general label, encompassing a number of non-verbal elements (paralanguage, situation, co-text, intertext etc.) and the communication participants themselves.

Analysing an advert in terms of communication or discourse therefore means moving beyond a sector-by-sector examination of its single components, and studying it as a unitary multimodal text. TV commercials have been chosen because they offer a wider range of contextual elements (e.g. movement and prosody) than other types of adverts, thus enabling a more in-depth interpretation of the advertising text.

The analysis is conducted on *two sub-corpora of TV commercials recorded in 2005 from the main national channels in the UK and Italy*. The selection of two comparable sub-corpora from different national contexts is easily explained within the cross-cultural framework of this study. In an analysis aimed at determining the impact of national culture on the communicative choices of TV advertising, the comparison between sub-corpora from different cultural matrices allows both the commonalities and the contrasts to be highlighted.

A *multi-disciplinary methodological approach* is preferred in the analysis of the samples, basically combining *discourse analysis* (Brown and Yule 1983; Stubbs 1983; Yule 1996) with *social semiotics* (Hodge and Kress 1988; Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996, 2006; Van Leeuwen 1999). Verbal and non-verbal modes are analysed *per se* and in mutual interaction, trying to achieve a comprehensive interpretation of the multi-modal text. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey's theory of *interpersonal communication styles across cultures* (1988), and de Mooij's closely connected study on *advertising styles across culture* (2005) provide the link between the linguistic and semiotic data extracted from the analysis, and *Hofstede's theory of dimensions of national cultures* (2001) provides the socio-cultural framework within which it is interpreted. In his highly influential *Culture's Consequences*, Geert Hofstede identifies five independent dimensions of national culture differences (*power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, and long term versus short term orientation*), each of which is rooted in a basic problem with which all societies have to cope, but on which their answers vary.

The time and space constraints that apply to a research work conducted from such a methodological perspective made it necessary to choose only a subset of the whole corpus for analysis. Consequently, *three main groups of samples have been selected*, two coinciding with specific product categories (*banking and financial products and services and supermarkets and convenience goods*) and one including sundry commercials sharing *sex appeal* as an advertising technique.

An introductory chapter provides the readers with a historical overview of British and Italian TV advertising, and includes some preliminary considerations on the relationship between culture and advertising.

In conclusion, the complete work consists of eight parts, structured as follows:

Introduction

Chapter 1: Historical outline of TV advertising in the UK and in Italy, and general observations on the role of culture in advertising.

Chapter 2: Aims of the study and methodology.

Chapter 3: Interpersonal communication styles and advertising styles.

Chapter 4: Analysis of the Banking and Financial Products and Services commercials from the British and the Italian sub-corpus.

Chapter 5: Analysis of the Supermarket and convenience goods commercials from the British and the Italian sub-corpus.

Chapter 6: Analysis of the use of sex advertising in cross-product commercials from the British and the Italian sub-corpus.

Concluding remarks and further studies.

In the three chapters devoted to the analysis, relevant partial conclusions are provided. The final section of concluding remarks and further studies draws these findings together, responds to the main research aims of the work, and suggests further ways to expand and/or integrate this research.

CHAPTER I

TELEVISION ADVERTISING IN THE UK AND ITALY: THE ORIGINS OF A CULTURE-BOUND PRACTICE.

1.1 What Is Advertising?

Defining advertising without appearing repetitive is not an easy task. Over the years, great advances have been made by the mass-media in the conveyance of commercial messages. Marketing and communication pundits have developed increasingly refined techniques, in order to approach audiences made more demanding by the daily media bombardment. Nonetheless, the main aim of commercial advertising seems to have remained unchanged: to present products and services in such a desirable way as to induce prospective customers to purchase them.

In the late age of “secondary orality” (Ong 1982), when electronics has radically changed communication worldwide, selling continues to be a priority for advertising agencies and their customers. Advertising is still regarded as the business of “describing or presenting goods and services publicly with a view to promoting sales” (*Online Oxford English Dictionary*), an activity to “call public attention by emphasizing desirable qualities so as to arouse a desire to buy or patronize” (*Merriam Webster Online*). It does not matter whether the advertised item is a product, a service or a better version of ourselves¹ (Myers 1994): what is important is to sell it. Advertisers can avail themselves of different strategies to pursue this goal. They can suggest motives for purchase or appeal to emotion, humour and mood; they can use many words or rely on a scanty text; they can have the ad repeated insistently or opt for a less frequent release. Every agency makes its decisions according to the thing advertised, the media and the target of the ad. The statistical knowledge of that part of

¹ From this perspective, *advocacy advertising* (advertising used to espouse a point of view about controversial public issues) can also be encompassed by the general definition of advertising given at the beginning of the section.

the audience representing the preferred addressee of the advertising message is a fundamental step in the creation of an effective advertising campaign.

In his popular book *The Hidden Persuaders*, the American journalist and social critic Vance Packard denounced, as early as 1957, the media manipulation of the populace, with the aim of inducing desire for products:

At one of the largest advertising agencies in America psychologists on the staff are probing sample humans in an attempt to find how to identify, and beam messages to, people of high anxiety, body consciousness, hostility, passiveness, and so on (1957: 12).

In Packard's view, advertising industry came to be a need-maker, with the use of subliminal tactics of doubtful morality. However partial and obsolete this theory may appear today – Packard was writing about the post-war American society – it accounts for a historically-determined, long-lasting perception of advertising as a form of influence on and control of naïve captive audiences.

Marshall McLuhan, the Canadian media theorist and father of the notion of “global village”, backed the idea of advertising working at the subconscious level:

Ads are not meant for conscious consumption. They are intended as subliminal pulls for the subconscious in order to exercise a hypnotic spell, especially on sociologists. (1964: 228)

Writing about media in an age when they had just begun to be part of the fabric of people's lives, McLuhan appeared wary of the hidden mechanisms used in advertising in order to reach that ideal condition of “[...] harmony among all human impulses and aspiration and endeavors” (1964: 228). On the other hand, he was also aware of the great creative potential of what he reportedly defined as “[...] the greatest form of art of the 20th century”².

In his text *The Discourse of Advertising*, Guy Cook defines ads as a *genre*, borrowing this notion from John Swales, who describes it as “[...] a class of communicative events that share some set of communicative purposes” (1990: 58). Cook speaks of advertising as a particularly slippery case of genre, for a number of different reasons. Firstly, ads can result from the merging of many other genres,

² Quoted in Andrews, Robert 1987. *The Routledge Dictionary of Quotations*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

ranging from story telling to cinema, from cartoon to joke. Secondly, the purpose of advertising is not always easy to define. Some ads do not offer a real product or service – let us think, for example, of advocacy campaigns on safe driving and healthier eating – and also when they do, “[...] the function which the sender intends the discourse to have may not be the same as the function it actually does have for the receiver.” (2001: 10). In recapitulating on the advertising discourse at the end of his book, Cook writes:

Ads have the typical instability of a relatively new genre. [...] Alluding to their frenetic brevity, Barthes aptly referred to the images of the ads as ‘restless’. This restlessness is not only internal to an individual ad, but also applies to advertising in general, its effect on receivers, and its relations to society and to other genres. (2001: 221-222)

The aim of this study is to analyse *TV advertising* as a form of artistic discourse stemming from the genius and expertise of individuals and teams. It will consider the degree to which advertising is shaped by the culture to which such individuals belong, and by the culture of the intended audience. In the framework of an introduction to the subject treated, section 1.2 and its subsections offer a diachronic overview of TV advertising in the UK and in Italy

1.2. A Short History of Television Advertising

1.2.1 The UK³

Television advertising in the UK began at 8.12 pm on the 22 September 1955, with a commercial for Gibbs S. R. toothpaste⁴ being aired on the ITV channel during the evening chat-show hosted by Jack Jackson. On the same evening, the BBC decided to kill off Grace Archer, one of the main characters in its long-running radio soap-opera *The Archers*, in order to secure the headlines in the following day’s newspapers. At

³ Most of the information about the history of TV advertising in the UK has been retrieved from the website of the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television (<http://www.nationalmediamuseum.org.uk/>)

⁴ The commercial owed its prime placing to chance. The Gibbs advertisement had come first in a lottery drawn with 23 other advertisements, including those for *Guinness, Surf, National Benzole, Brown & Polson Custard* and *Summer County Margarine*.

that time, ITV was available only in London, but the BBC's choice displays the degree of concern raised in its managers by the debut of the new advertising medium on the competing channel.

The appearance of television advertising in Britain prompted diverse critiques: ITV's detractors claimed TV adverts were too American, and would not work with the British, who did not like to have their programmes interrupted.

Commercials were not a completely new experience to Britons: *Harrods* and *The Daily Mail* had been sponsoring some programmes on the early BBC output, and radio commercials from France and Luxembourg were quite popular. Two commissions in the 1930s had also recommended that sponsored programmes should be part of the mix on a BBC television service, but then the war broke out, and they were not included when service resumed in 1946. Nevertheless, the Gibbs SR toothpaste advert was the first to appear in the form of a short break during an evening TV show, thus raising deeper questions concerning the social and moral impact of this farther-reaching form of commercial propaganda. The day after the broadcast of the pioneering toothpaste commercial, Bernard Levin wrote in *The Manchester Guardian*: "I feel neither depraved nor uplifted by what I have seen – certainly the advertising has been entirely innocuous. I have already forgotten the name of the toothpaste".

Early TV commercials were very far from the sophistication characterising modern advertising. They were in black and white, longer than they are today; they made use of harsh lighting and appeared rather stilted. The actors starring in them were exclusively white, and their manners, their ways of speaking, and their behaviour mirrored the values of the dominant middle class. Technically and stylistically, they were very poor: the message was conveyed with exasperating slowness, and each photogram could be virtually used with a caption as a print advert. We could say that the first TV commercials were moving newspaper adverts, partly for the lack of experience in television advertising in Britain, but also as a consequence of the deliberate effort of the British television industry to keep its distance from American television.

The Gibbs SR toothpaste commercial exemplifies most of the characteristics described above. The jerky images featured in sequence are the tube of toothpaste in a cube of ice – a visual metaphor of its “tingling fresh” taste – a bottle containing the active principle of the toothpaste, which helped its users get “white as snow” teeth, and then a close-up of the SR brand name on the toothpaste box, from which the tube came out – as the result of a special effect! – towards the end. The advert was introduced by a tinny sound followed by the immaculate tone of the actor Alex Macintosh, delivering the freshly minted slogan: “It’s tingling fresh. It’s fresh as ice. It’s Gibbs SR toothpaste”.

A new standard ad format, developed quickly in the first years of trialling, was the *presenter commercial*. The presenter – normally a television or theatrical actor the audience was familiar with – advertised the product praising its qualities, if possible with the aid of a scientific chart or demonstration. After that, a voice-over would recapitulate the reasons for which the presenter had chosen that product. The main advantage of this genre was its low production cost, as it was easy to make and required minimal setting. Even so, some presenters happened to confuse shouting with communicating.

Timespots and *admags* were the hybrid results of experiments made halfway between advertisement and editorial.

In *timespots*, advertisers booked the station clock and tied in their products with the time announcement. A timespot for a cigarette brand said: “Time to light a red-and-white”, and other punctual advertisers were Ever-rite watches, Burberry’s and Aspro. Nevertheless, timespots did not have a long life: in December 1960 the *ITA* (*Independent Television Authority*) regarded them as irritating, and put an end to them.

Admags were first introduced to meet the needs of small advertisers who could not afford their own ad slot. They were a type of short drama with a loose plot, during which a number of products were advertised. *Admags* went on for a few more years than timespots (the government outlawed them in 1963), and enjoyed longer-lasting success thanks to *Jim’s Inn*, the most popular and durable of *admags*. Aired on ITV from 1957 to 1963, *Jim’s Inn* was a mini-soap, made of segments of 15 minutes each,

featuring Jim and Maggie Hanley as a couple who ran a warm and friendly village pub in a place called Wembleham. The director was Pat Baker. Jimmy Hanley and Bob Kellett scripted the show, Bob blending information about prices and products with Jimmy's ideas on incidents and gags. "It sounds paradoxical, but without the advertisements it would lose a lot of reality. People do talk, in a village pub, about things like household or gardening gadgets, and how much they paid for them", said Kellett⁵. Though anchored to a greater *realism*, admag as a genre seem to share some similitude with the Italian *Carosello*, in that they blended advertising with entertainment (see section 1.2.2).

Until the 1970s ads in Britain had been telling viewers why they should buy their products. In the 1970s, probably due to a more TV literate and consequently more demanding audience, they started inviting viewers to share in the lifestyle of the people portrayed in the adverts. The product categories also changed over the years: if in the 1950s it was mainly soap powders and foods, and in the 1960s there was virtually no advertising for cars or spirits, the 1970s brought the car manufacturer *Datsun* from Japan. This caused a domino effect, and all other car manufacturers entered the advertising arena⁶. The 1970s were also the years of the *Smash Aliens*⁷, *Hamlet cigars*, *Heineken lager* and they saw the advent of newspaper advertising on television, with *The Sun* and *The Mirror* paving the way. Towards the end of the decade, corporations entered the world of TV advertising, starting with *Imperial Chemical Industries*, which used powerful symbols of progress (e.g. the Concorde) to enhance their image.

In the 1980s advertising changed again. Channel Four and Breakfast TV offered new outlets to advertising, and Thatcherism brought about cultural changes that also touched TV commercials. In these years it was suggested that the BBC should replace its licence fee with advertising, and this period also saw the abolition of the ban on

⁵ <http://www.nationalmediamuseum.org.uk/>

⁶ The absolute absence of car commercials from British television in the 1950s and 1960s had been a consequence of a cartel agreement between *Ford*, *Chrysler*, *Vauxhall* and *British Leyland* not to advertise.

⁷ It was a *Cadbury* commercial for instant mashed potatoes, in which aliens giggled at the idea of primitive earthlings going through a long process of peeling, boiling and smashing potatoes to bits to make their mash. The catchy slogan "For mash get Smash" was one of the most popular in the 1970s, and the commercial has recently been ranked top food ad in a BBC food-poll.

tobacco advertisements and other banished categories (charities, undertakers and churches). As of today, BBC still carries no advertising within the UK⁸, and the ban on tobacco remains in place. Nevertheless, in 1993 the first undertaker's advert was transmitted during an episode of the Scottish soap-opera *You take the High Road*, and since then charities, and even the Church of England, have been advertising on television. The 1980s were also the years of interactive advertising, with commercials involving viewers directly through competitions to win the product advertised (e.g. *Mazda* cars) or catchy story lines having different endings on different channels (e.g. *First Direct* bank).

In the 1990s advertisers pushed out the boundaries of decency with controversial campaigns. *Oddvertising*, a peculiar form of advertising aimed at surprising and confusing the audience, took footing in the publicity scenario during those years. The first one to breach the accepted norms in the 1980s had been John Hegarty with his long-lasting *Levi's* campaign, featuring the unknown model Nick Kamen stripping down to his underwear in a laundrette. The roaring success of this and the other commercials in the series paved the way for other adverts that played – more or less openly – with sex, such as *FCUK*, *Wonderbra*, *Benetton* and *Häagen-Dazs*. The heightened awareness of AIDS, anti-fur campaigns, and environmental causes also seemed to involve the creatives of advertising industry, who denounced or exploited these social issues in their works. In some cases the quest for creativity became so obsessive as to cause the commercial to lose any relevance to the product advertised. The pursuit of health led to the appearance of a vast choice of non-fat, lower-salt, organic and free-range products. Global brands, such as *Nike*, *Gap*, *Levi's*, and *Coca-Cola* continued to flourish and supermodels such as Linda Evangelista, Naomi Campbell, Kate Moss and Cindy Crawford created impossible role-models for the average woman.

Celebrity obsession also seems to characterise advertising in the new millennium, with companies competing to have their products endorsed by famous people. The

⁸ BBC World Service TV carries adverts, as does bbc.com.

rapid advancement of technology offers increasingly new tools for advertisers to enhance their creative potentialities, and cope with an audience made increasingly numb and difficult to stun by the saturation of media stimuli. Television advertising in Britain today could be metaphorically compared to tight-rope walking, a constant search for balance between the attempt to find the most gripping or shocking solutions, and the need to abide by a self regulatory system⁹. This is, perhaps, the most difficult challenge in contemporary British television advertising.

1.2.2 Italy

Unlike in the UK, in Italy the history of television advertising began on state TV, RAI, and its first twenty years coincided with the wholly-Italian phenomenon of *Carosello*. Commercials arrived on Italian television broadcasts in 1957. From the beginning, the main concern of *SIPRA* (*Società Italiana Pubblicità Radiofonica ed Affini*), the statutory licensee for the management of broadcast advertising, was to obey the strict regulations set by the Ministry of Post, which required that advertising did not exceed 5% of the total broadcasting time. The fear was that television advertising could damage the other media that benefited from the sale of advertising spaces. Furthermore, those were the years of the “palinsesto pedagogizzante” (Bettetini 1985), when television was regarded as a mainly educational and pedagogic medium.

The solution was *Carosello*, a daily 10-minute-entertainment show¹⁰ that placed adverts in a theatrical context. Every episode, shot in 35mm in black and white, was introduced by curtains rising with an accompaniment of trumpets and mandolins, and comprised several commercials, each preceded by a short variety show. The average duration of a performance was 135 seconds, and only the last 35 seconds could be used

⁹ Broadcast advertising in Britain has always been regulated by statutory bodies. The latest one, set up by the *Communication Act 2003*, is *Ofcom*, which has its own statutory code of advertising standards and practice. Under the *Communication Act 2003*, Ofcom have contracted out some of their responsibilities to *ASA(B)* (*Advertising Standard Authority Broadcast*), who will investigate and adjudicate on complaints for all forms of broadcast advertising, and *BACC* (*Broadcast Advertising Clearance Centre*), a special body responsible for the pre-viewing and clearance of television advertising. Both bodies belong to the *EASA* (*European Advertising Standards Alliance*), the non-profit organisation, based in Brussels, bringing together thirty advertising Self-Regulatory Organisations (SROs) from Europe and 5 from non-European countries. The Italian *IAP* (*Istituto di Autodisciplina Pubblicitaria*) is also among the members. Further information about *ASA*, *BACC*, *EASA* and *IAP* are available on their respective websites, listed in the bibliography.

¹⁰ The programme was aired on RAI from 8.50 to 9 p.m. every night, except on Good Friday.

for the actual advertising (the so-called *codino*, lit. the *small tail*). Before being aired, every episode had to be approved by *Sacis* (*Società per Azioni Commerciali Iniziative Spettacolo*), which exerted a strict control on advertisers.

The first *Carosello* was transmitted on 2 February 1957, featuring the comic actor Macario in the sketch *Le avventure del Signor Veneranda*. The funny Signor Veneranda ended up having an argument with the ticket-officer of a trade fair, over his refusal to sell him a *way-out ticket* in addition to one for admission. In the end, he showed a bottle of Stock 84 brandy, the perfect solution to recover from the meeting with strange fellows like the ticket-officer, and to make up with the whole world.

Evidently, there was a very loose connection, or no connection at all, between the products advertised and the short performances by which they were preceded. The performances normally drew on common places and popular culture, availing themselves of Italian celebrities and fictitious or animated characters with which spectators were already, or were likely to become, easily familiar. This reassuring format became, in a few years, the Italians' favourite TV program, reaching an audience share of over 19 million people, most of whom were children. *Carosello* was a synonym for TV advertising in Italy for almost twenty years: the last episode was aired by Raiuno on the 1 January 1977, the program being terminated partly owing to its high production costs, and partly following the rapid changes that had taken and were taking place in Italian society.

On the one hand, *Carosello* represented an original and unique hybrid form, halfway between show and commercial promotion, which permitted it to bring advertising into Italian houses through characters, slogans and jingles that have become part of the collective memory and the custom history of the country. On the other hand, the limitations and censorship imposed by Rai and Sipra clipped the creative advertisers' wings, resulting in the backwardness of Italian advertising as compared to that of the English-speaking world. As Gianfranco Livraghi writes in his article "La Sindrome di Carosello":

La Sacis da organizzazione produttiva si trasformò in censore. Aveva potere assoluto di censura preventiva (in realtà ce l'ha ancora, ma la concorrenza sul mercato ha reso le sue

regole molto più flessibili). Dovemmo tutti sviluppare una nuova arte, quella di negoziare con la Sacis. Le regole erano infinite, complicatissime, e in buona parte non scritte. Ogni volta che un prelado, un politico, un giornalista o qualche altra “autorità” criticava qualcosa, nasceva un nuovo divieto.[...] Erano i tempi in cui alla Rai si poteva dire aquila, piccione, canarino, eccetera, ma non “uccello” (“passero”, rigorosamente al maschile). Un giorno bocciarono un comunicato radio, per un succo di frutta, perché non ci permettevano di dire “il buon sapore della natura”. Nel caso di un lassativo, ci vietarono di usare la parola “intestino”, e ci costrinsero a dire “regola l’organismo”: con il rischio, abbastanza reale, che qualcuno comprasse e usasse il prodotto per una funzione diversa da quella cui era destinato.

In the years of the Italian transition from agricultural to industrial country, Carosello was there for ten minutes a day, to ease the troubles of life, by portraying a world that did not exist, at least not anymore. In an article published on the 22 July 1976 in the newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, the popular journalist Enzo Biagi wrote:

Carosello ha educato i nostri figli, è stato, dal lontano 1957, un appuntamento e una pausa nell'angoscia quotidiana. Mostrava un mondo che non esiste, un italiano fantastico, straordinario: alcolizzato e sempre alla ricerca di aperitivi o di qualcosa che lo digestimolasse; puzzone, perennemente bisognoso di deodoranti e detersivi, sempre più bianchi; incapace di distinguere fra la lana vergine e quell'altra, carica di esperienze; divoratore di formaggini e scatolette, e chi sa quali dolori se non ci fossero stati certi confetti, che, proprio all'ora di cena, venivano a ricordare come, su questa terra, tutto passa in fretta.

In the same period as *Carosello* other advertising-extended breaks gradually appeared on Italian television at different times of the day. Programmes like *Intermezzo*, *Gong*, *Tic Tac* did not include any sketches, but only featured the commercial codini. They were the predecessors of adbreaks, which officially arrived on Raiuno when *Spazio F* replaced *Carosello*. Many of the characters of the 20-year-running programme survived as testimonials of the products advertised in the new 30-second commercials, which could soon also benefit from the advent of colour. The legacy of *Carosello* was made evident above all by the huge number of slogans and jingles that crowded Italian TV commercials in the 1980s. Virtually, every TV ad in those years was recognisable for its easy-to-memorise slogan, its *tormentone* (i.e. a sentence repeated over and over as to become an unmistakable mark of the product advertised), or its catchy tune. *Ad hoc* jingles or melodies were a characteristic of Italian TV commercials for a whole decade: only in the late 1980s did advertisers begin to use pre-existing popular songs in their commercials, starting a trend that has continued to the present day.

In the 1990s, made-to-stun slogans and jingles rapidly disappeared from Italian TV advertising. Commercials started to be mastered on digital systems, and *Computer-Aided Design (CAD)* greatly widened the range of refined special effects at the creative designer's disposal. TV ad breaks became similar to short films, rich in images, appeal and chromatic effects, with accompaniment music cleverly blended in.

Today, Italian TV commercials are among the most technically and artistically appraisable parts of television on offer, in part due to the rather low level of general entertainment programs. The rules of a rapidly changing market, where products become obsolete within weeks, have loosened the link between an advert and that being advertised. Commercials still strike audiences for their witty, clever or shocking content, but they have become more ephemeral, in that they are not easily remembered in relation to the brand for which they are made. Apparently, they have ceased to exist as a function of what they advertise: their words and images increasingly seem to have a life of their own.

1.3. Advertising and Culture

The brief overview on the history of British and Italian TV commercials given in section 1.2 shows how close a connection exists between advertising and culture. Indeed, TV ads in the UK and in Italy appear to have developed according to specific patterns related to the cultural specificities of the two countries. It is therefore necessary to define culture, a concept with which, in theory, everybody is familiar, but that proves to be quite unclear when attempts are made to put it in words.

In its 2002 *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*, UNESCO describes culture as “[...] the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, [which] [...] encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs”¹¹.

¹¹ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001271/127160m.pdf>

Evidently, this is a definition including a number of different meanings, but it does not exhaust the many different uses of the word culture.

A well-known anthropological consensus definition is that provided by the Harvard sociologist and anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn (1951: 86), who writes that:

Culture consists in patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values.

Wardhaugh (2006: 221) follows in Kluckhohn's footsteps when he defines culture as "[...] whatever a person must know in order to function in a particular society", and he reports another well-known definition, Goodenough's (1957: 167), who argues that "[...] a society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and to do so in any role that they accept for anyone of themselves".

The most explicit definition of culture in this direction has been given by the Dutch scholar Geert Hofstede, whose framework of "cultural dimensions of nations" I will be using throughout my analysis. Hofstede (2001: 9) treats culture as "[...] the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another". He draws a distinction between external manifestations of culture, which he calls "practices", and the core "values" that shape those practices. A graphical representation of this cultural model is his "onion diagram":

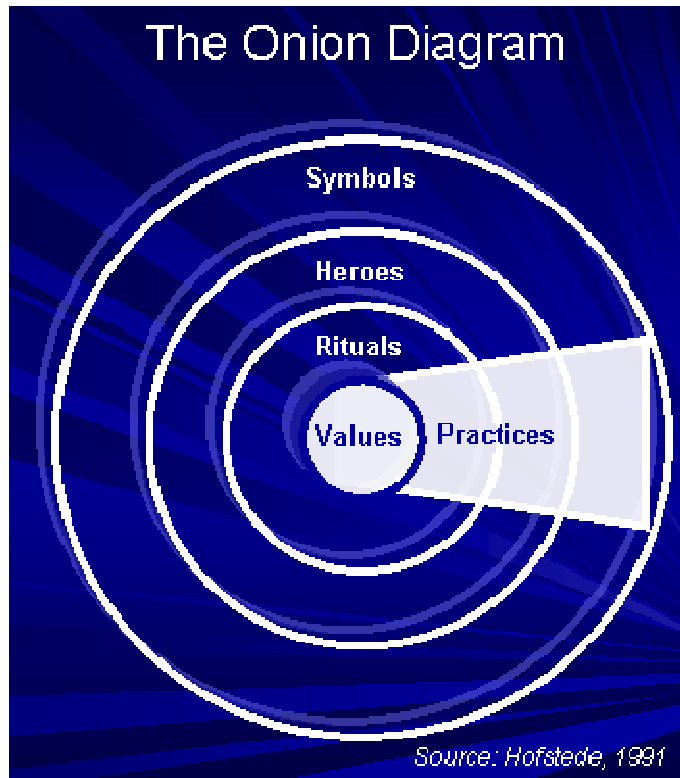


Figure 1.1.1 The “Onion Diagram”: Manifestation of Culture at Different Levels of Depth

“Symbols”, “heroes” and “rituals” – subsumed under the term of “practices” – are the external layers of the onion, that is, they form the visible aspects of culture, which all emanate from a core made of “values”. *Symbols* include “[...] words, gestures, pictures, and objects that carry often complex meanings recognized as such only by those who share the culture” (Hofstede 2001: 10). In fact, Hofstede writes that symbols can change in time, and can be – and are – copied by other cultural groups; nevertheless, their most profound meaning remains known only to those who share the cultural values to which they are related. *Heroes* are persons, dead or alive, real or fictitious, who possess features which are held in great consideration in a society. *Rituals*, finally, are activities “[...] that are technically unnecessary to the achievement of the desired ends, but that within a culture are considered socially essential, keeping the individual bound within the norms of the collectivity” (Hofstede 2001: 10). This is the case with religions, but also with forms of greeting or paying respect.

In other terms, culture is a form of mental programming that makes us insiders within one or more societal groups, and outsiders with respect to all the others. We do

not choose which culture to adopt: cultural values are developed in the first years of our lives¹², and reinforced throughout it. As the anthropologist Clifford Geerts (1973) writes, culture is a set of control mechanisms through which each person regulates their behaviour, and makes it consistent with the expectations of the group to which s/he belongs.

Advertising – apart from its more or less hidden purposes – is a form of communication between a sender and a receiver of a message. This means it makes use of linguistic codes that, especially in the case of broadcast advertising, are both verbal and non-verbal. The relationship between culture and language has been long debated, and a number of different theories have been formulated.

One is the so-called *Whorfian hypothesis*, named after one of its theorists (Sapir and Whorf), according to which “[...] the structure of a language determines the way in which the speakers of that language view the world” (Wardhaugh 2006: 221).

The opposite claim is that culture finds reflection in the language people use. It was in particular Hymes (1966) who investigated “[...] the ways in which cultural patterns can influence language use and determine the functions of language in social life” (Duranti 2001: 15).

A third claim is there is little or no relationship whatsoever between language and culture. For example, linguistic theories of the 1960s (such as those proposed by Noam Chomsky) focused on the innateness of and universality of language. A recent Chomskian approach to this issue is Steven Pinker’s book *The Language Instinct*, in which the author maintains that thought is completely independent of language.

As we have seen above, and as we will further discuss in the following sections, the Hofstedian dimensional model for the analysis of cultures implicitly appears to favour the hypothesis of language illustrating cultural patterns, insofar as verbal and non-verbal communication codes fall within the category of practices, that is, they are external manifestations of cultural values. Different analysis models, approaching

¹² Developmental psychologists believe that values are among the first things children learn. By the age of 10, the value system is firmly acquired and it is rather difficult to change it.

advertising from a marketing and consumer behaviour perspective, have shown that advertising is a cultural artefact.

The Dutch scholar and consultant in cross-cultural communication Marieke De Mooij has remarked (2005: 5) that in advertising “[...] the decision to standardize has more to do with corporate culture than with the culture of markets and nations. Many global advertisers are not market oriented: they are product oriented”. In reality, people worldwide hold different views, which underlie different languages. “In order to build relationships between consumers and brands” – adds De Mooij (2005: 35) – “advertising must reflect people’s values”, that is to say, the values of its addressees. Jeremy Bullmore (2003: 84), former chair at both J. Walter Thompson and the Advertising Association has written:

Do not believe the old saying that good advertising speaks for itself. Good advertising speaks to those for whom it is intended. Much good advertising speaks quite deliberately in code, or uses a secret language, and excludes the rest of us. That’s one of the reasons why it’s good.

The language and paralanguage used in advertising are therefore more than simple words and signs: they become one of the many practices conveying the values of the core. Nevertheless, not always are these values those of the receivers of the message: language being a culturalised item, it may well happen that the ad reflects the cultural values of the adperson, which might be different from those of the prospective target. De Mooij (2005: 8) argues that this is one of the main risks in global advertising: “If there is no shared culture, the response is likely to be different from what is intended and expected”.

Some companies seem to have realised the impact of culture on advertising faster and better than others have. This is the case with HSBC, one of the largest banking groups in the world, whose print and broadcast advertising has pivoted around sensitivity to cultural differences for years. An interesting commercial included in the corpus analysed in this study gives us an idea of the company’s mission. It is set in the popular Perlan revolving restaurant, in Reykjavík (snapshot 1.1). A waitress returns a credit card to a table of Italians, who have just paid the bill. One of the women in the

group signs the receipt, smiling at the girl, while a man in the group puts a few notes on the table, as a tip for the waitress. The embarrassed girl smiles coyly at the man and moves the money away, as if to refuse it. The four customers look at each other in puzzlement (snapshot 1.2): one of them suggests that there must be a problem with the exchange rate, and the first man adds more notes to the pile on the table (snapshot 1.3).



Snapshot 1.1



Snapshot 1.2



Snapshot 1.3

The waitress comes back to the table; she starts clearing it, and once again moves away the money. She leaves and, passing by a colleague, she says something – in Icelandic – to him, who casts a glance at the table of Italians. The customers are increasingly bewildered, but the solution agreed on is to make the tip even more generous! The waitress comes to the table for the third time, looks at the money, then glares at the man, and walks away (snapshot 1.4), while the four keep putting more notes on the table (snapshot 1.5). At this point, a male voice-over tells us in English that across the world people have different attitudes to money, and generally tipping is not the done thing in Iceland. HSBC knows this, and that’s why they can offer different customers different solutions, and be proud of being “the world’s local bank” (snapshot 1.6).



Snapshot 1.4



Snapshot 1.5



Snapshot 1.6

Tipping is a highly culture-bound practice. In Italy you are not expected to tip the serving staff, even if customers do leave a tip to show appreciation for the food and the service. In other countries, like Britain and the USA, failure to do so is regarded as an insult for the employee who served you, and again, in other countries – Iceland for instance – tipping results in an offence to the waiting people. The mixing of different languages in the advert, – the Italian of the customers, the Icelandic of the waitress – which are mutually unintelligible, and likely to be incomprehensible to most of the British audience for which the commercial is destined, conveys the idea of a Babel tower, reinforced by the choice of the venue – the Perlan tower restaurant – that comes to be a visual metaphor of the linguistic and cultural mayhem going on in the ad. In such chaos, HSBC becomes the *deus ex machina*, the cultural mediator who can offer its customers solutions tailored to their specific, cultural needs. The voice-over delivering this message speaks in English – a language the target audience is familiar with, and many non-Britons are likely to be better acquainted with than Italian or Icelandic. The reassuring *local* component of the worldwide bank group is reaffirmed through the oxymoron of the slogan the world's local bank.

An advertising hoarding for HSBC at the Eurostar terminal in Paris in February 2007, plays with symbols and icons of the UK and France (e.g. the Tube symbol for Waterloo station, a French painting of the battle of Austerlitz) and the words *victoire* and *défaite*. Through the use of intertextuality, it links the cross-Channel train to the famous historical battles of Waterloo and Austerlitz, which have very different meanings, in terms of victory and defeat, in French and British culture, and also happen to be the names of two stations in London and Paris. HSBC recognises such different perspectives, just as it does with its customers' diverse demands

Advertising is made of language and language is embedded in culture, therefore advertising is culture. This is the standpoint from which I will observe, compare and discuss differences between British and Italian TV commercials in the next sections of this work.

CHAPTER II

ADVERTISING CULTURES: AIMS OF THE STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

2.1. Advertising: a Culture-Bound Practice

The term *globalisation* is often abused and misused in Western societies. The universalistic perspective that characterises the USA and, to a lesser degree, Europe, leads people to think that the world is *globalising*, in the sense that it is moving towards the levelling of values and habits, that is to say, towards cultural standardisation. Actually, several studies seem to prove this is far from truth.

The theory of “global village” proposed by Marshall McLuhan is often wrongly understood to equate globalisation with the equalisation of cultures. In the introduction to *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1963: 3-5), his pioneering work on the enhancement of the human ability to experience the world brought about by the new electronic media, McLuhan wrote:

After three thousand years of explosion, by means of fragmentary and mechanical technologies, the Western world is imploding. During the mechanical ages we had extended our bodies in space. Today, after more than a century of electronic technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time, as far as our planet is concerned. Rapidly we approach the final phase of the extension of man – the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society, much as we have already extended our senses and our nerves by the various media. [...] As electrically contracted, the globe is no more than a village. Electric speed in bringing all social and political functions together in a sudden implosion has heightened human awareness of responsibility to an intense degree

It is clear from this passage that McLuhan’s notion of “global village” is that of a shrunken dimension resulting from the rapid expansion of electronic media, a genuinely new situation in which people can take part in and commit themselves to a wider range of events and issues happening worldwide, as if distances were abolished. He makes no reference to cultural standardisation, a misinterpretation of “global village” based on the assumption that the increased opportunity for cultures to meet

with each other should end up in the subjugation of the weakest culture by the more dominant one¹³. As Marieke de Mooij writes (2005: 23):

[...] Mc Luhan viewed the electronic media as extensions of human beings. They enhance people's activities; they do not change people. If you assume people are the same everywhere, global media extend homogeneity. If you realize that people are different, extensions reinforce the differences. McLuhan did not include cultural convergence in the concept of the global village. In fact, he said the opposite – that uniqueness and diversity could be fostered under electronic conditions as never before.

Cultural diversity is a fact, and even if some practices and habits seem to be present across the world, this does not imply that the world is converging towards an undifferentiated culture. The American sociologist Alex Inkeles (quoted in De Mooij 2005) has remarked that often convergence at the macro-level – for example, similar GNI/capita – can mask divergence at the micro-level. In other terms, the increasing economic similarity between countries does not mean that they are giving up differences related to their national culture. In discussing what she defines as *post-scarcity societies*, De Mooij (2003: 7-8) writes:

The paradigm of economics is that consumers will maximize their own utility and will prefer low-priced, high quality products to high-priced, added-value brands. This paradigm fits the old scarcity societies where people had to make either/or decisions, for example either washing machine or holidays. In post-scarcity societies, people have more choices that make them less rational in their buying behaviour. When comparing post-scarcity societies that have converged economically, national wealth is no longer a useful variable for explaining consumption differences. The new paradigm is culture [...] Generally speaking the older the product category, the stronger the influence of culture. [...] The wealthier the countries become, the more manifest the influence of culture on consumption. When people possess more or less enough of everything, they will spend their incremental income on what most fits their value pattern.

Different dynamics also underpin similar consumerist behaviour around the world, and effective advertising should appeal to different targets in relevant ways. The aim of this study is to find out whether this happens in terms of linguistic and semiotic communication, which are the two main channels through which the advertising

¹³ Cultural standardisation has often been a synonym for Americanisation. The rise of English as the *lingua franca* of our days, and the closely-related growth of the USA as a global leader in politics, economics and communication are among the structural causes of this frequent association. Moreover, on the one hand, the genuinely American universalistic perspective and, on the other hand, the anti-American propaganda directed against the most visible (and ephemeral) symbols of American power (e.g. Mc Donald's restaurants) have also contributed to the development of this stereotype.

message is conveyed¹⁴. *Television advertising* has been selected as the topic of this study, as it relies on multiple interrelated communicative codes (verbal, visual, acoustic, etc.), which interact with each other to create the final message. More specifically, British and Italian TV commercials have been collected and analysed according to a comparative framework, taking into account linguistic and paralinguistic elements. This analysis of two sub-corpora is intended to see:

- 1) If and to what extent the linguistic and semiotic aspects of a TV commercial interact with each other to convey a message that is relevant to the target culture;
- 2) What different *cultural dimensions* underlie different choices in British and Italian television advertising;

In order to do this, a multi-disciplinary approach has been followed, combining three main instruments of investigation: a) discourse analysis; b) social semiotics; c) dimensions of national culture. The following subsections offer an in-depth introduction to each of the theories used, and seek to explain in which way they have been relevant to the purposes of the study.

2.1.1 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis can be referred to as the study of language in interaction. It encompasses diverse disciplines, including semiotics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and pragmatics, and, in contrast to formal linguistics, it studies not only language beyond the sentence level, but also focuses on naturally occurring language rather than on invented examples.

¹⁴ In his analysis of advertising as discourse, Guy Cook (2001: 4) uses the terms *text* and *context* to classify the constituents of an ad into two main, broad categories. *Text* is used to mean “[...] linguistic forms, temporarily and artificially separated from context for the purposes of analysis”. *Context* is a more varied group including – among other things – music, pictures, paralanguage, intertext, participants and function.

The communicative aspect of language – whether written or spoken – is paramount to discourse analysts. Gillian Brown and George Yule (1983: IX), two of the most prominent personalities in the field of discourse studies, write:

We examine how humans use language to communicate and, in particular, how addressers construct linguistic messages for addressees and how addressees work on linguistic messages in order to interpret them.

This definition calls to mind the communication model first worked out by Ferdinand de Saussure, and often referred to as the *conduit metaphor* (Reddy 1978), for which encoded meanings, resulting from the combination of signifiers and signified, flow like water from one mind to another. Nevertheless, the significant difference between Saussure and the discourse analysts lies in the importance given to context in the construction and interpretation of meaning. As we know, De Saussure distinguished between language as a code (*langue*) and the single utterance (*parole*), maintaining that linguistics should exclusively deal with the former. By contrast, Brown and Yule (1983: 24) write:

We shall be particularly interested in discussing how a recipient might come to comprehend the producer's intended message on a particular occasion, and how the requirements of the particular recipients, in definable circumstances, influence the organisation of the producer's discourse

The main topic of discourse analysis is defined as communication in context, and therefore communicative interaction, which was disregarded in the structuralist perspective, becomes of the utmost importance to the discourse analyst. Michael Stubbs, in his text *Discourse Analysis: the Sociolinguistic Analysis of Natural Language* (1983: 1), insists on the importance of the context in discourse analysis, stating that:

Roughly speaking, it [discourse analysis] refers to attempts to study the organization of language above the sentence or above the clause, and therefore to study larger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges or written texts. It follows that discourse analysis is also concerned with language in use in social contexts, and in particular with interaction or dialogue between speakers.

An outlook that stresses the importance of linguistic context cannot but bring in the idea of communication as a culture-bound practice, and focus on the cultural patterns

that comprise linguistic exchange. In fact, as Stubbs points out (1983: 8), “[...] there is no use of language which is not embedded in culture”. Culture represents the necessary knowledge we must have in order to work in a society, and part of this knowledge is linguistically acquired. Yule (1996: 87) writes:

It is almost inevitable that our background knowledge structure, our schemata for making sense of the world, will be culturally determined. We develop our ‘cultural schemata’ in the contexts of our basic experiences

Discourse analysis is therefore a pragmatic approach to linguistic interaction putting remarkable stress on the language in context. Nevertheless, if we assume that language is a manifestation of culture, it is implicit that what is around language is within culture. On that account, discourse analysis becomes a valuable instrument to investigate the communicative process from a cultural point of view, which is the case with this study.

Intuitively enough, advertising means communicating. Apart from the communication model used to represent it, an advert is the transferral of a message through a channel, via the encoding of the sender and the decoding of the receiver. Such a process is not as straightforward as it may seem, insofar as the two ends of communication are not machines, but people. This means that both the sender and the receiver of the message carry cultural patterns that can be compatible to a greater or lesser extent. It is crucial to understand this point, because the likelihood for an advert to get through is how aware the sender of the message is of the fact that advertising is a culturalised process. Failure to understand this may result in what in technical jargon is defined as *noise*, a term that describes any other external signal that interferes with the reception of the information. In other words, the culture of the sender may impinge on communication, as an external source of interference. Although advertising, and any form of communication, is a two-way process, only the sender has the power to influence it directly, because s/he produces a message for a known audience. The greater or lesser degree of knowledge about the receiver determines the chance of success of the message. The feedback received by the addressee of the message can be

an indicator for the addresser and, as such, exert an indirect influence on communication, but on its own cannot make any changes to it.

In this study, my aim is to use a discourse analysis approach to Italian and English comparable sub-corpora of TV commercials, in order to verify that the texts of the messages respond to the specific communicative needs of the receiving culture, or if the *noise* produced by the sender's culture is so *loud* as to affect communication. Different cultures have different styles of communication, which are expressed linguistically and para-linguistically. This is particularly true of TV ads, which rely on non-verbal language as much as – and sometimes even more than – they do on words. The para-language of an advert may sometimes tell us something different from its verbal language, or reveal details that are left out by words. This is the reason why the analysis conduct here tries to combine the two codes (verbal and non-verbal) used in TV commercials, looking at the way in which they interact to produce a message that is culturally relevant for the receiver to a greater or lesser extent. Images and sounds, like words, have their own grammar, and this is one of the topics of study of social semiotics.

2.1.2 Social Semiotics and Paralinguistic Communication

Roughly speaking, semiotics is “[...] the science of the life of signs in society” (De Saussure, quoted in Hodge, Kress 1988: 1). When we speak of signs, we refer to quite a broad category, including a huge number of items. In fact, signs are everywhere in everyday's life: they can be visuals, sounds, body language and, of course, words.

The discipline of semiotics first developed as a branch of linguistics studying words as signs in the early 20th century. The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure introduced the word *semiologie* in the vocabulary of linguistics, proposing the famous dyadic view of the word as a combination of a *signifiant* – the form of the sign – and a *signifié* – the concept it represents.

In the same period in the USA, the philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce would conduct independent studies on signs, coining the term *semiotics* and proposing a triadic reading of the sign, as made up of *representamen*, the form, *interpretant*, the sense made of the sign, and *object*; the concept¹⁵.

Despite the original distinction between Saussure's structuralist *semiology* and Peirce's pragmatic *semiotics*¹⁶, nowadays the word *semiotics* is used as an umbrella term to refer to the whole field of the study of signs.

Social semiotics is a branch of general semiotics, but it appears to be distinct from it as far as its aims are concerned. As David Chandler points out “[...] social semiotics has moved beyond the [...] concern with internal relations of parts within a self-contained system, seeking to explore the use of signs in specific social situations”¹⁷. Social semiotics analyses semiotic practices, specific to a community or a culture, for the creation of different kinds of texts and meanings within diverse situational and culture-bound contexts. This evidently represents a breach with the Saussurian tradition, which is defined by Hodge and Kress (1988: 18) as an *anti-guide* for social semioticians:

Using Saussure as an anti-guide, we can invert his prohibitions and rewrite them as basic premises for an alternative semiotics (an alternative which is implicit in his work)

Hodge and Kress (1988: 18) add that this alternative semiotic will include the study of a number of components, among which “[...] culture, society and politics [...]” are intrinsic.

Thus, the focus of social semiotics is on how culturally-determined signs are used to build social relationships through everyday interaction. From this viewpoint, all semiotic acts and processes are social acts and processes:

¹⁵ It falls out of the scope of this study to present a more in-depth analysis of the historical development of semiotics. An excellent online resource in this sense is the electronic version of David Chandler's book *Semiotics for Beginners*, accessible at <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/semiotic.html>.

¹⁶ From Saussure's semiological perspective, the value of a sign mainly lies in its relation to the other signs of the finite linguistic system of which it is part. Conversely, Peirce's semiotic approach sees a sign as one link of a virtually infinite interpretative chain, which is generated by the interpretation and re-interpretation of the same sign within different contexts.

¹⁷ <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/semiotic.html>.

What is at issue always in social processes is the definition of social participants, relations, structures, processes, in terms of solidarity or in terms of power. (Hodge, Kress 1988: 122)

The construction of social identities and relationships is carried out through the use of signs which can be verbal but are also – and above all – non verbal. In most Western societies, the prominence of words over images in the construction of social reality has made people more skilful at understanding verbal than non-verbal signs. However, non-verbal language – or para-language – is a powerful source of information, and its value greatly varies across cultures.

In his influential work *Beyond Culture* (first published in 1976), Edward T. Hall makes a distinction between “high-context cultures” and “low-context cultures”, based on the degree of context-use in their communication. In high-context cultures, most of the information is in the context or internalised in the person, and very little is made explicit. In communication, the speaker and his/her interlocutor are supposed to listen not only to each other, but also to rely on long-term and underlying meanings known by both because of their shared cultural background. Conversely, in low-context cultures’ communication, the mass of information is made explicit. Marieke de Mooij (2005: 136) remarks that the distinction between high-context and low-context communication is also a distinction between a mainly visual and a mainly verbal communication:

“In low-context communication, information is in the words; in high-context communication, information is in the visuals, the symbols, and the associations attached to them. [...] In individualistic, low-context cultures, people are more oriented toward the written word, whereas in collectivistic, high-context cultures people are more visually oriented.”

Generally speaking, para-language not only complements the spoken or written message, but often also discloses bits of information left untold in words. It is not a homogeneous category, in so far as it includes images, sounds, body language, proxemics, intonation, accents and many other signs. Nevertheless, all these elements interact with each other and with the verbal code (to a greater or lesser extent depending on cultures) to shape communication.

For convenience's sake, in this work I will subsume the different forms of para-language mentioned above under two main categories: *image* and *sound*. In fact, the several components at work in a TV commercial stimulate most directly the visual and auditory spheres: we understand visuals, body language and interpersonal distance by observing them; similarly, we comprehend a sound, an accent or a particular intonation – and attach specific meanings to them – by listening to them. The following subsections aim to provide a first approach to the *grammar of paralanguage*. Further details and practical applications will be presented in the chapters concerning the analysis of the corpus.

2.1.2.1 Image

In their text *Reading Images: A Grammar of Visual Design* (1996; 2006), Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen suggest a practical approach to the interpretation of images. Visuals, as much as words, have their own semantics and syntax, and, as such, they can be understood through the knowledge of their specific *grammar*:

Just as grammars of language describe how words combine in clauses, sentences and texts, so our visual 'grammar' will describe the way in which depicted people, places and things combine in visual 'statements' of greater or lesser complexity and extension. (1996: 1)

Images, therefore, not only carry single meanings, but also combine to create visual texts able to convey messages of great complexity. Kress and Van Leeuwen compare them to verbal language, and remark that they are culture-bound, in that they say something about the culture in which they are embedded to those who *know the language* of that culture. "Semiotic modes" – they write – [...] are shaped both by the intrinsic characteristics and potentialities of the medium and by the requirements, histories and values of societies and their cultures" (1996: 34). Unfortunately – as stated above – the interpretation of images is not as immediate as that of verbal language. As Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996: 20-21) point out:

[...] in a literate culture the visual means of communication are rational expressions of cultural meanings, amenable to rational accounts and analysis. The problem which we face is that literate cultures have systematically suppressed means of analysis of the visual forms of representation, so that there is not, at the moment, an established theoretical framework within which visual forms of representation can be discussed.

This framework is what they try to supply. Their semiotic approach draws on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, and they distinguish three *metafunctions* in the visual semiotic mode:

- 1) The *ideational metafunction* refers to the ability of a semiotic system to represent the experiential world through a referential system. In this system objects can be represented in a number of different ways, as can the relations among them. For example, vectors can graphically represent two objects involved in a process of interaction, whereas a tree structure can be used when the objects are related in terms of classification.
- 2) The *interpersonal metafunction* refers to the ability of a semiotic system to represent the social relations between the producer of a sign and its receiver/reproducer. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996; 2006) make a distinction between "represented participants" (the people, places and things depicted in the images) and the "interactive participants" (the people who communicate through images). The relations at issue here are, therefore, of three types: a) between represented participants; b) between represented and interactive participants; c) between interactive participants. For example, the gaze of a represented participant can become a sign of the degree of directness established between s/he and an interactive participant, but it also stands for the type of approach (direct or indirect) intended by the interactive participant who produced the sign for the interactive participant who is to receive it. Similarly, size of frame can be used as a sign of social distance, perspective of subjectivity,

horizontal angle of involvement, vertical angle of power, and modality of reality.

- 3) The *textual metafunction* refers to the ability of a semiotic system to create texts “[...] which cohere both internally and with the context in and for which they were produced” (1996: 41). For example, the layout of an image can tell us a lot about the communicative intentions of the producer, about which bits of information are new and what are given, about what pertains to the ideal sphere and what to the real one, about which elements are central and which are marginal. In other terms, the arrangement of images becomes what Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2006) define as a “system of information value”, which is interrelated with two more systems: *salience* and *framing*. *Salience* describes the ability of the picture elements to attract the viewer’s attention to different degrees, depending on their foregrounding or backgrounding, their relative size, contrasts in colour or sharpness and so on. *Framing* is related to the presence or absence of framing elements. It may be explicit or be implied by line breaks in the image. Lack of framing suggests a group identity to the participants, whilst framing unitizes or individuates.

This articulated system of analysis – which approaches images not as single units, but as syntactically meaningful structures (whence the subtitle of the book, *The Grammar of Visual Design*) – has been applied by Kress and Van Leeuwen to both still images and moving pictures, yielding interesting results in both cases.

What I do in this work is to use it to interpret both the visual code of the commercials and the verbal one. A commercial is an integrated text, including words, images and sounds, and every single code contributes to the creation of a message that should be relevant to the culture of the addressee. Images portray and help to build

social relationships that are reminiscent of specific cultural patterns. Like words, images bear the hallmark of culture, and speak to those who belong to that culture.

2.1.2.2 Sound

A TV commercial is self-evidently a multimodal product. In fact, multiple semiotic codes are at work in this specific genre, and the final message conveyed results from the interaction of all of them. In their text *Multimodal Discourse: the Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*, Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen (2001: 2) define a multimodal product as the output of a set of “[...] semiotic principles [which] operate in and across different modes”. They write:

We have defined multimodality as the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, together with the particular way in which these modes are combined [...] (2001: 20)

The term *mode* refers to the “[...] semiotic resources which allow the simultaneous realisation of discourses and types of (inter)action” (2001: 22). Verbal language and images are two modes of TV commercials, and sound is a third, which complements them in the creation of the ultimate message.

Like image, sound has a grammar of its own, which is not easy to interpret for the untrained ear. Nonetheless, the grammar of sound can teach us how to communicate with sounds, and how to interpret the messages other people make with them. In the text *Speech, Music, Sound* (1999), Theo Van Leeuwen outlines this grammar, and also shows how sound acts can contribute to communication as much as words and pictures do. For example, the foregrounding of either music or words in the soundtrack of a film (or a commercial) falls within the notion of *perspective*, which implies the ranking of some elements with respect to others. Similarly, sound can shape social distance, that is to say

[...][it] creates relations of different degrees of formality between what is represented and the [...] listener, such as intimacy ([...] the whispered voice), informality ([...] the relaxed

casual voice), formality ([...] the louder, higher and tense voice which ‘projects’ the message) (Van Leeuwen 1999: 15)

The grammar of sound concerns not only music as a deliberate production of a sound act made up of melody, harmony, tempo, meter, timbre articulation and so on. It also describes human voice, and the ways it is used to produce sound acts to convey specific information. As Van Leeuwen points out:

[...] by ‘sounding American’, Americans present themselves as Americans to others, [...], and wittingly or unwittingly signify what America stands for in the eyes of those others – what this is will of course depend on the context, for example, or whether the ‘others’ are also American or not, and if not, on what they know about Americans and how they feel about them. (1999: 35)

An accent does not only denote a geographical origin, but also brings about a number of culture-bound connotations that the receiver of the sound act attaches to it. Similarly, pitch, intonation, the use of specific vowels or consonants, can carry information that goes far beyond the more superficial message. This is true of every sound act. The melody of a song may express joy as much as the voice pitch could reveal concern or anger; the choice of a specific musical genre can carry class-bound connotations; the use of a loud or quiet tone or a tense or relaxed voice in speech can point to relations of power distance or solidarity.

Finally, like verbal language and visuals, sound also has *modality*. In sound and image, the question of modality is more complicated than in verbal language, owing to the existence of multiple *coding orientations*. Given its centrality to the analysis of the corpus used in this study, the following subsection expands on the meaning of modality and on the cues used to judge it across the different semiotic modes.

2.1.2.3 Modality

The term *modality* originates in linguistics, and, in general terms, is used to refer “[...] to the truth value or credibility of (linguistically realised) statements about the world” (Kress-Van Leeuwen 1996: 160). In the second edition of his influential text *Mood and Modality*, Frank Robert Palmer (2001:1) relates the notion of modality to the

distinction between “Realis” and “Irrealis”. Quoting Mithun (1999:73), Palmer writes that:

The Realis portrays situations as actualised, as having occurred or actually occurring, knowable through direct perception. The Irrealis portrays situations as purely within the realm of thought, knowable only through imagination’.

What we infer from this definition is that the distinction between Realis and Irrealis is more of a distinction between what is asserted and what is not rather than one between what is true and what is untrue. Modality could therefore be described as the degree of commitment of the speaker to the statement s/he is making.

Essentially, two are the main ways in which languages deal grammatically with modality: 1) the *modal system*, based on the use of modal verbs and 2) the *mood*, based on the distinction between indicative and subjunctive. Both may occur within one language: compare, for example, the Italian forms *potrebbe essere troppo tardi* and *può darsi che sia troppo tardi*, both expressing the same idea of possibility (*it may/might be too late*), the former through the use of the modal verb *potere* in the conditional mood, the latter via the phrase *può darsi che* plus the subjunctive. In English, where subjunctive has practically fallen into disuse, modality is set forth through the use of a vast, well-defined array of modal verbs (*may, might, can, could, shall, should, will, would, must, ought to, have to*). So, for example, let us consider the two following sentences:

1) John *will* come tomorrow.

2) John *may* come tomorrow.

On the one hand, the use of the modal verb *will* in the first sentence signals a high degree of commitment of the speaker to the truth of his/her statement. In other words, s/he is sure that John is coming tomorrow, or, to say it in other words, the statement is given *high modality*. On the other hand, the use of the modal verb *may* in the second sentence underlines the mere possibility of John’s coming. Here there is a rather lower degree of commitment of the speaker to the truth value of what he/she is saying, that

is, the statement is given *low modality*. Let us consider the translation into Italian of the two sentences in question:

1) John *verrà* domani.

2) John *potrebbe* venire domani/Può darsi che John *venga* domani.

Here, high modality in sentence one is expressed through the use of future indicative third person singular of the verb *venire* (to come), whereas the low modality in sentence two is conveyed either through the use of the modal verb *potere* (can/may) in the conditional mood or via the use of the present subjunctive, third person singular of the verb *venire*.

However, the polarised system of modal verbs and mood does not exhaust the notion of modality. Different degrees of commitment can be obtained by using reported speech in place of direct speech. So, for example, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) argue that the use of indirect speech is a form of distancing oneself from a statement, thus giving it lower modality. Similarly, modality can be implicit in the semantics of words (e.g. *I think* conveys an idea of lower modality than *I am sure*), or it can be conveyed through the use of adverbs (e.g. *certainly* marks a higher modality than *possibly*).

We have seen that images represent a complementary semiotic mode to language, and as such they also have their own modality. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996: 161) observe:

The concept of modality is equally essential in accounts of visual communication. Visuals can represent people, places and things as though they are real, as though they actually exist in this way, or as though they do not – as though they are imaginings, fantasies, caricatures, etc. And, here too, modality judgements are social, depending on what is considered real (or true, or sacred) in the social group for which the representation is primarily intended. (1996:161)

So different degrees of truth can be attached to images; nevertheless, establishing what is true and what is not is up to the specific social group at whom the images are targeted, and is something done according to the type of *coding orientation* preferred by that group. As Kress and Van Leeuwen write (1996: 170), *coding orientations* are

“[...] sets of abstract principles which inform the way in which texts are coded by specific social groups, or within specific institutional contexts”. They identify four different coding orientations in visuals:

- 1) *Technological coding orientation*, for which the dominant principle is the *effectiveness*. Every element which is useless or redundant for the purpose of effectiveness lowers the modality of the visual;
- 2) *Sensory coding orientation*, for which the ruling principle is that of *pleasure*. For example, in art, colour is a modality raiser, in so far as it enhances the pleasure of the users;
- 3) *Abstract coding orientation*, for which *generalisation* and *essentialism* are the leading principles. For example, in the academic context, the ability to produce works which are grounded in this coding orientation is a marker of high modality;
- 4) *Naturalistic coding orientation*, for which “[...] what is real and what is not is based on the appearance of things, on how much correspondence there is between what we can normally see of an object [...] and what we can see of it in a visual representation[...].” (1996: 163).

Naturalistic coding orientation has been the dominant one in western societies to date: this means that the greater the resemblance of an image to reality, the higher its modality.

Modality markers are cues that permit us to assess the modality of an image. *Colour*¹⁸ is one of them. Its saturation, differentiation and modulation are parameters

¹⁸ In the second edition of *Reading Images* (2006: 231), Kress and Van Leeuwen dedicate a wider section to the use of colour in visual design, and argue that in a multi-modal environment colour can become “[...] a semiotic mode in its own right, along with speech, image, writing, music”. They distinguish two “affordances” in colour, that is to say, two sources of meaning-making: 1) “association” or “provenance”, that is, the association of colour with particular objects or substances, which carry specific symbolic value within given socio-

that grade the modality of an image. Normally speaking, *the more the colour is reduced, the lower the modality*. So for example, a black and white image, a monochromatic one, or one with unmodulated colour have a lower modality than a full colour saturated image, one with a diversified range of colour or one using different shades. Nevertheless, if reducing colour always causes a lowering in modality according to the naturalistic code, increasing it does not always raise modality. Let us imagine colour as a scale: on the one end it is maximally reduced, on the other end fully saturated. The highest point of modality lies somewhere between these two ends, but does not coincide with either. This means that it is possible to increase colour beyond the peak of modality, and that the modality then starts to decrease. Modality has therefore a parabolic trend, and this is also true of the other modality markers: *contextualisation*, i.e. the use of a background; *representation*, i.e. the level of abstraction of the image portrayed; *depth*, i.e. the use of a third dimension; *illumination*, i.e. the use of light; *brightness*, i.e. contrast between illuminated and dark areas.

In the case of sound – as pointed out by Van Leeuwen – it has long been debated “[...] whether it is true that [...] naturalism has been the dominant coding orientation.” (1999: 162). If, on the one hand, there are those who have asserted that naturalism in music should be the rule, on the other hand, there are as many who have maintained that music is not representational, upholding a view of it as “[...] a pure play of forms, a kind of abstract, tonal mathematics.” (1999: 165). The coding orientations seen in the case of image also apply to sound, so it is also evident that a judgement about the truth of a sound act is based on the type of coding orientation singled out. In some cases, music can be used to represent the outside reality; in other cases presentational and representational purposes merge, and “[...] the truth criterion lies in the degree to which a sound event is felt to have an emotive impact” (1999: 182). So, for example, in the case of TV commercials, a melody or a jingle can have a low modality from a naturalistic perspective, and a high modality from a sensory point of view, in so far as

cultural contexts; 2) “distinctive features” of colour, namely, values on a number of different scales (e.g. light, saturation) which take on “[...] a potential to become signifiers” (2006: 233).

it seduces, moves, or amuses the viewer. It is evident that a judgement of truth based on the sensory code relies on personal perception. A sound act that stirs emotions in one person may well be received indifferently by another. We know that sound, by virtue of its own indefiniteness, appeals to our moods more than to our rationality. This makes it rather difficult to interpret the degree of sensory modality of a sound act from an external perspective.

Advertising is a shifty genre because it draws on many other genres and therefore it invokes their coding orientations. For example, a toothpaste advert using a graph showing the benefits of the product over a certain period of time is certainly intended to be read as *high modality*, to convince the view/reader through a scientifically true representation. Similarly, the enhanced sound of crunchy crisps or the fizzing of some soft drink may be exaggerated and flout the naturalistic coding orientation, but it would certainly prove to be quite effective – and therefore *high modality* –from a sensory perspective. These examples are sufficient to understand how multi-faceted the notion of modality can be in advertising, especially in televised commercials, and how relative every remark concerning this aspect of para-language can be. Every single ad should be assessed not only with respect to the genre it draws on (e.g. cinema or animation), but also with respect to the sub-genres (cinema can be historical or comic, animation can be aimed at children or at adults) and their specific purposes (realism is a priority in historical films and may be so in cartoons for adults, but it is not in comic films, nor in children's animation). Last but not least, different cultures could respond differently to different coding orientations. As we can see, on one hand, the risk is of going too far with absolute relativism, which would result in the impossibility of expressing a judgement at all over what we see or hear. On the other hand, we may be tempted to oversimplify a complex discourse like that of television advertising. I believe that a sensible way forwards out of this quagmire is to set some yardsticks, but without rigid adherence to them. We have seen above that the naturalistic coding orientation is the preferred one in Western societies, and certainly the most suitable for *serious advertising*, where the focus should be to appeal to rationality more than to emotionality. Nevertheless, culture may suggest or imply

different solutions, as could different subgenres or different product categories. This analysis, therefore, though considering the naturalistic orientation as the default one, does not rule out the others, which may better suit different contextual purposes. Considering advertising as discourse involves accepting the idea of meaning negotiation, a process in which not one absolute truth, but many relative truths exist, and result from the interaction both between the various participants involved and between their contexts.

2.1.3 Hofstede's Dimensions of National Culture

The third theoretical instrument used in this analysis is derived from sociology. As I have pointed out in 1.3, language can be considered a manifestation of culture, or, to use the terminology of Hofstede (2001), one of its external “practices”. My approach to the modes of TV advertising in the UK and in Italy has shed light on a number of differences, likely to be explained through the different cultural patterns underlying British and Italian societies. After discourse analysis and social semiotics had yielded the data, I needed a methodological tool to frame it culturally, and Geert Hofstede's “theory of the cultural dimensions of nations” has provided it.

Geert Hofstede is a Dutch scholar with an interesting academic background. He graduated from Delft Technical University as a mechanical engineer, and for ten years he worked in the Dutch industry. Studying part-time, he completed a doctorate in social psychology at Groningen University, and in 1965 he joined IBM Europe, where he founded and chaired the Personnel Research Department. He writes (2001: 43):

A concern of managers with employee morale was a characteristic feature of the IBM corporate culture. [...] How could the company maintain good relationships with customers if its people facing these customers were disgruntled? [...] In this concern [...], employee attitude surveys fit as something natural.

By 1970, the international surveys had become an established fact in IBM. In its branch offices all over the world, employees were administered questionnaires aimed at measuring their satisfaction with the working environment. Nevertheless, the

questions were intended to detect differences *within cultures* and not *across cultures*. Surveying individuals for their values omitted what Hofstede (2001) calls the “ecological correlations”, that is to say the relationships between cultures. It was upon this remark, and through the combination of IBM data with other data retrieved from a second research setting, the Swiss IMEDE Business School, that Hofstede decided to extend the *within-group* correlations based on IBM data to a *between-group* comparison across cultures. Hofstede himself explains (2001: 41) the method used in conducting his analysis on a massive amount of data:

The analysis focused on country differences in answers on questions about employee values. [...] In addition to statistical analyses across individuals, an analysis of variance was performed using country, occupation, gender and age as criteria, but most crucial were correlation and factor analyses based on matched employee samples across countries. The initial analysis was limited to 40 countries with more than 50 respondents each. Only those questions were retained for which the country ranking remained stable over time. In a later stage, data from 10 more countries and three multicountry regions were added.

I will not go into further details concerning the data treatment, as this falls within the province of statistics, a discipline that bears no relevance to the scope of this study. However, of great interest are the conclusions to which the data analysis led, which converged into the *theory of dimensions of national cultures*, exposed by Hofstede in his renowned *Culture's Consequences*, first published in 1980, and then again in a second revisited edition in 2001. Basically, he identifies five independent “dimensions of national culture” differences, each of which is rooted in a basic problem with which all societies have to cope, but on which their answers vary. The dimensions are as follows:

1. “Power Distance” (“PDI”), which is related to the different solutions to the basic problems of human inequality;
2. “Uncertainty Avoidance” (“UAI”), which is related to the level of stress in a society in the face of unknown future;

3. “Individualism vs. Collectivism” (“IDV”), which is related to the integration of individuals into primary groups;
4. “Masculinity vs. Femininity” (“MAS”), which is related to the division of emotional roles between men and women;
5. “Long Term vs. Short Term Orientation” (“LTO”), which is related to the choice of focus for people’s effort: the future or the present.

Based on the mean scores for some key items obtained by the 50 countries and three multicountry regions¹⁹ included in his survey, Hofstede computes *national dimension indices*, referenced by the acronyms indicated in brackets at the end of the description of each dimension above. Each index has therefore a range of numerical values that permit the surveyed countries to be ranked in numerical order from the country scoring the highest to that scoring the lowest on the dimension considered.

¹⁹ In the editions of Geert Hofstede's work since 2001, scores are listed for 74 countries and regions, partly based on replications and extensions of the IBM study on different international populations.

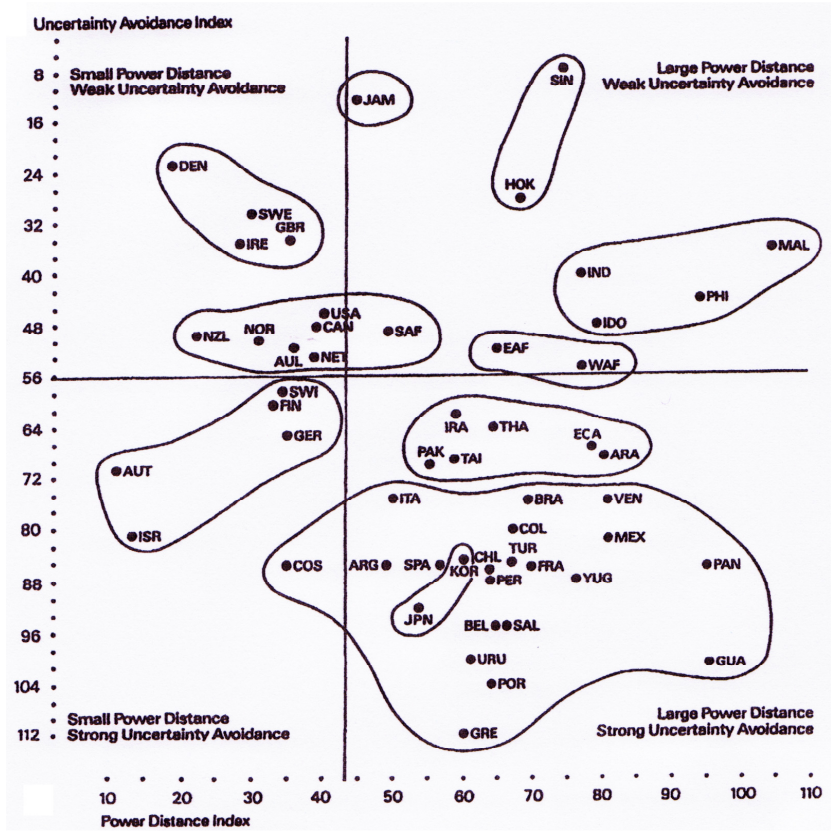


Figure 2.1 A UAI x PDI Plot for 50 Countries and Three Regions (from Hofstede 2001: 152)

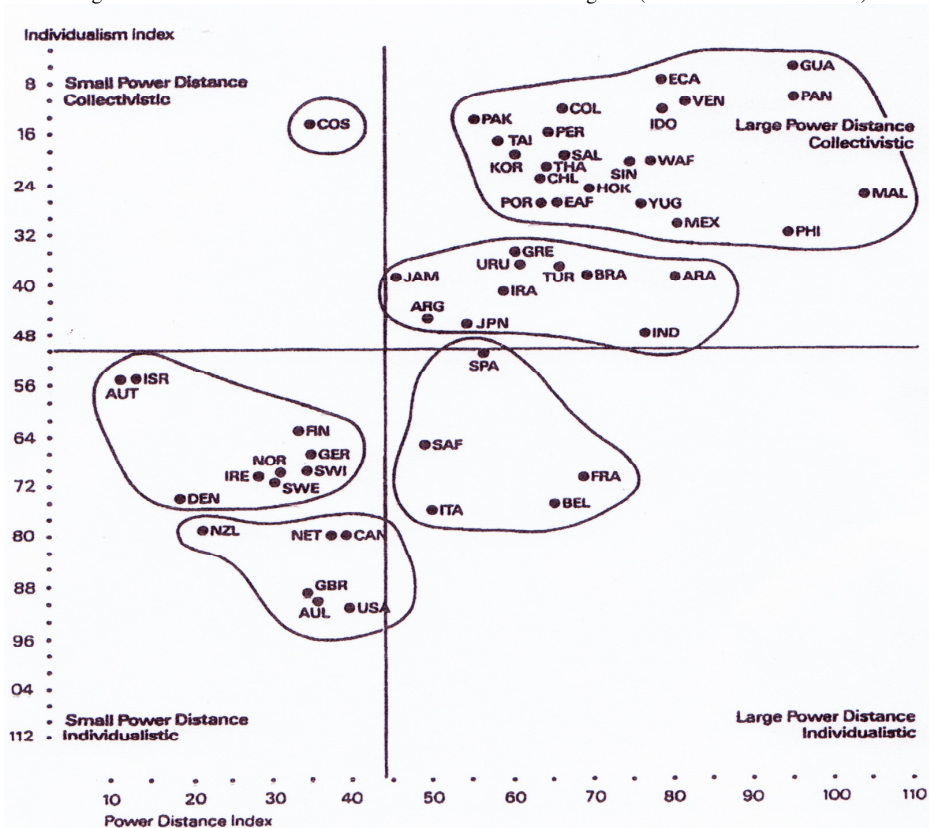


Figure 2.2 An IDV x PDI Plot for 50 Countries and Three Regions (from Hofstede 2001: 217)

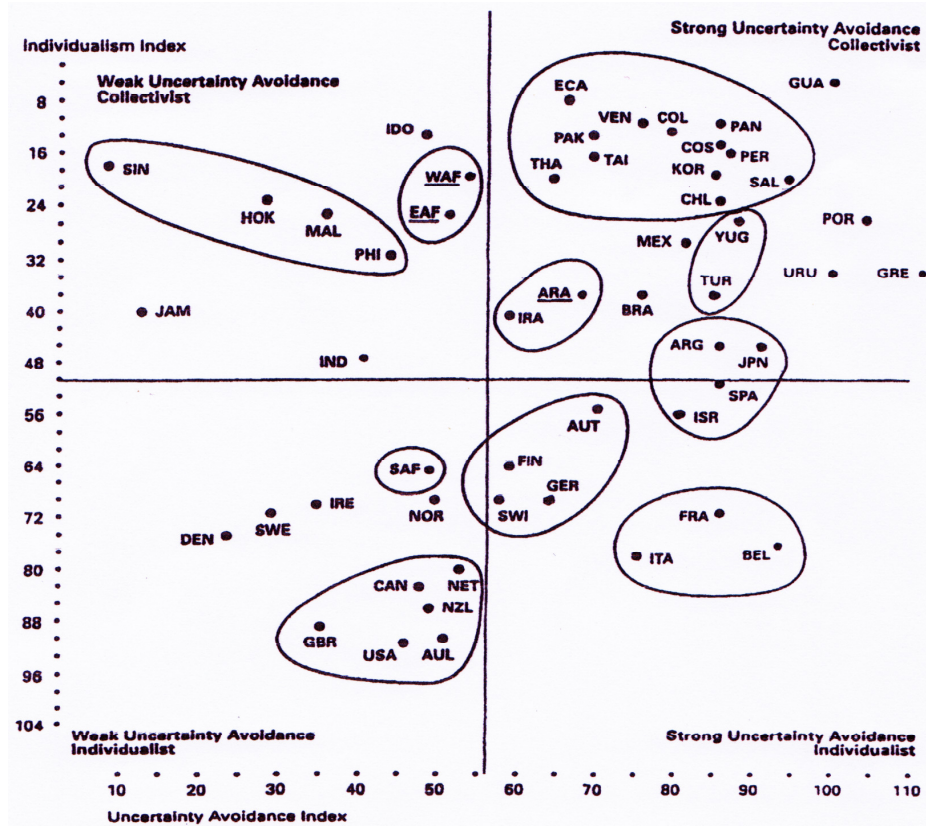


Figure 2.3 An IDV x UAI Plot for 50 Countries and Three Regions (from Hofstede 2001: 249)

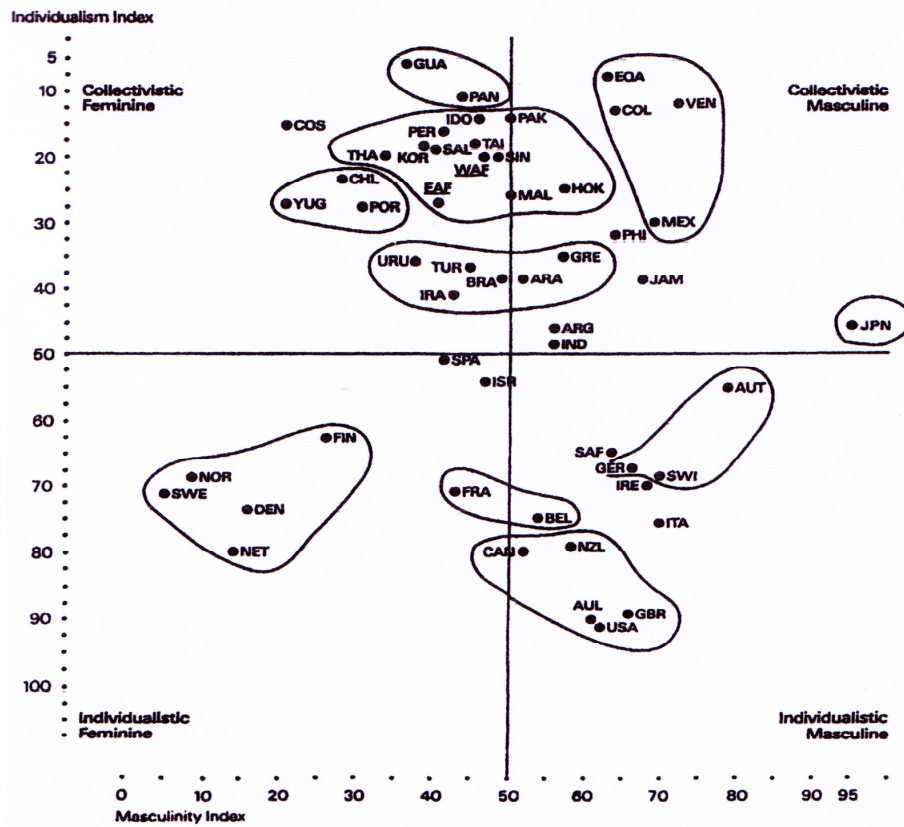


Figure 2.4 An IDV x MAS Plot for 50 Countries and Three Regions (from Hofstede 2001: 294)

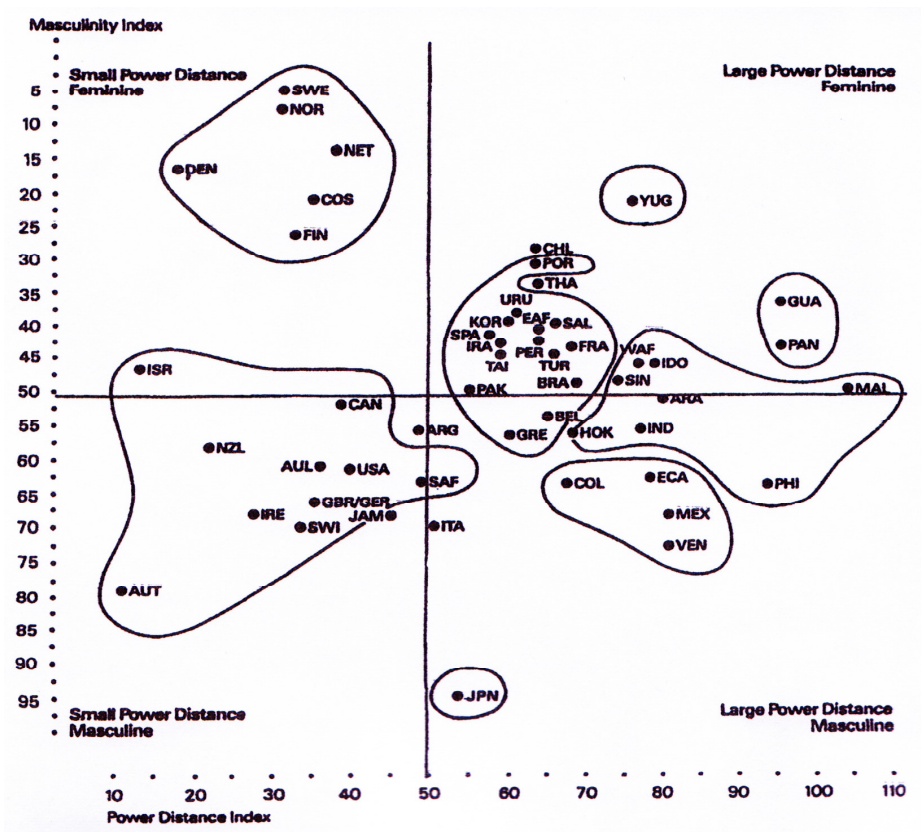


Figure 2.5 A MAS x PDI Plot for 50 Countries and Three Regions (from Hofstede 2001: 299)

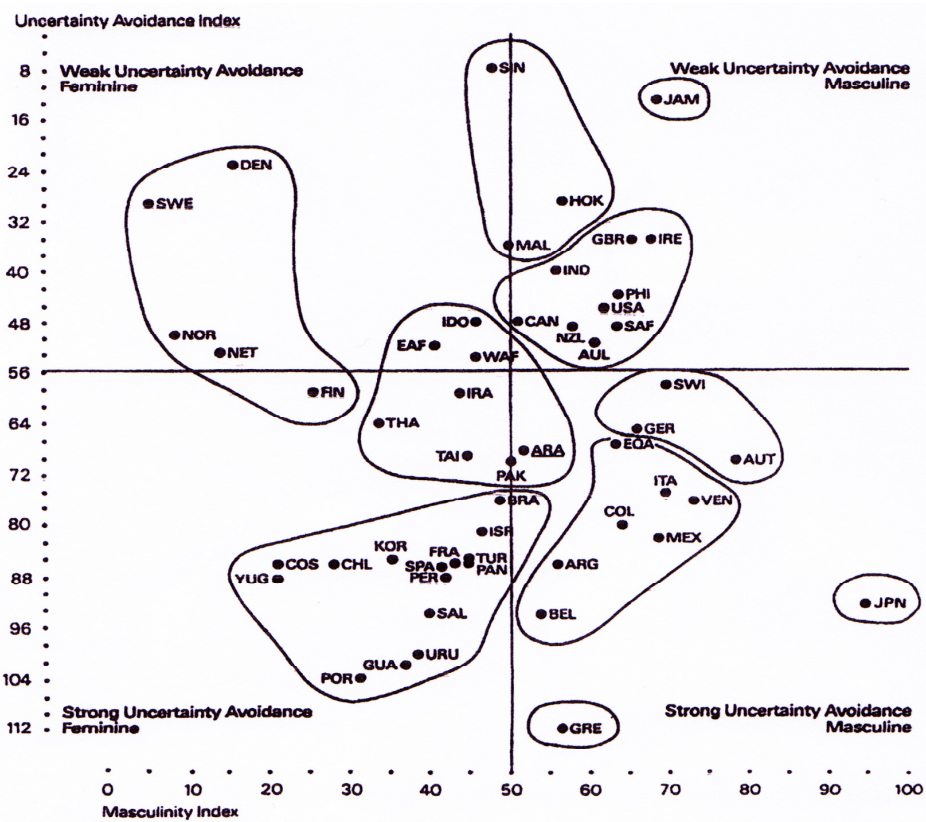


Figure 2.6 A UAI x MAS Plot for 50 Countries and Three Regions (from Hofstede 2001: 334)

Figures 2.1-2.6 above illustrate the graphical method used by Hofstede to assess if a country is on the *low* or *high* side of a cultural dimension. He plots the numerical score obtained by each country on one dimension against the numerical score obtained by the same country on another dimension. All the national scores are marked in a single XY coordinate system, whose centre is the point identified on the Cartesian plane by the numerical values chosen to mark the partition between high and low in the two dimensions plotted. This implies that each quadrant contains groups of countries that fall within the same end (high or low) of the two dimensions considered.

The higher or lower degree to which a dimension is present in a culture translates into the presence of some core values that are distinctive of that specific cultural cluster.

Cultures scoring high on *power distance* are characterised by an uneven distribution of power. Such societies have a marked hierarchical structure, with the few people in power holding privileges and being treated with respect and obsequiousness by their subordinates by virtue of their supposedly greater wisdom and goodness. In cultures scoring low on power distance, by contrast, power is shared by many and is usually not paraded.

The dimension of *uncertainty avoidance* is concerned with the way people deal with the fear of ambiguity in society and uncertainty about the future. All human societies have developed ways of coping with uncertainty (e.g. technology, law, and religion), but their attitudes towards it and the anxiety it causes vary. Cultures with a high level of uncertainty avoidance view what is different or new as potentially dangerous; therefore they resist change, and rely strongly on rules. As a whole, cultures scoring low on the UAI appear to be much more tolerant of change and diversity.

The third dimension of national culture, *individualism* as opposed to *collectivism*, refers to the organisational patterns of different societies as far as the relationship between the individual and the collective is concerned. In some societal communities “[...] individualism is seen as a blessing and as a source of well being” (Hofstede 2001: 209), whereas in others the *in-group* – whether it is family, work relationships, or any other sort of affiliation – prevails, and excessive individualism is regarded as a

possible source of alienation. The distinction between individualism and collectivism has a long tradition in sociology, and has been the topic of several interesting studies, the most popular of which is perhaps Ferdinand Tönnies' distinction between *gemeinschaft* (low individualism) and *gesellschaft* (high individualism).²⁰ Hofstede follows in the footsteps of this tradition, saying that even if the human species is a gregarious one in nature, there are nevertheless differences in the level of gregariousness across cultures.

Masculinity with its opposite pole *femininity*, includes the “[...] implications that biological differences between the sexes should have for the emotional and social roles of the genders” (Hofstede 2001: 279). In feminine societies, the only real difference between men and women is acknowledged to be that women bear children and men beget them. Conversely, masculine cultures recognise some attitudes and roles as more suitable for men than for women, and vice versa. Men are supposed to be more assertive and *tougher* than women, who should take on more homely, *tender* roles. Thus, the degree of femininity or masculinity of a role cannot be considered universal, but variable according to culture.

The *fifth dimension* is independent of the IBM survey, as it was found in the answers of student samples from 23 different countries to the *Chinese Value Survey* (CVS). It is based on Confucian values, opposing persistence and thrift (long-term) to personal stability and respect for tradition (short-term). The CVS was built jointly by Geert Hofstede and Michael Harris Bond, from the Chinese University of Honk Kong, building on the US-designed *Rokeach Value Survey*²¹. The argument was that the American questionnaire had been inevitably biased by its designers' Western minds; and therefore they asked some Chinese colleagues to prepare a new one deliberately biased by the system of Eastern values, and using it they re-analysed the data of a nine-country value study. This peculiar genesis of the fifth dimension has made it the

²⁰ In his main work *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1883), the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies wrote that in *gemeinschaft* (often translated as *community*) there is an orientation towards a *unity of will*, which is predominant over the single individual's interests. Conversely, in *gesellschaft* (often translated as *society*) the larger association is never given more importance than the individual self interest.

²¹ In his influential text *The Nature of Human Values*, the American sociologist Milton Rokeach suggested that few values rule the attitudes and opinions of all people, and that a study of their relative ranking is an effective way to predict a variety of behaviours. The series of experiments that followed to bear out his theory are known as Rokeach Value Survey.

target of different criticisms, especially from the Eastern scholars, who have disputed the correctness of applying Confucian values to the Western world.

Throughout his book, Hofstede uses his five cultural dimensions as patterns to look not only at the *values* and *societal norms* which prove to be correlated with them, but also to shed light on the several key cross-cultural differences that these different values and norms produce in different aspects of everyday life. Through an empirical approach founded on the statistical analysis of a massive amount of data coming from innumerable surveys²², Hofstede proves that cultural dimensions can explain most of our daily individual and social behaviour.

2.1.3.1 Hofstede's Scores for the UK and Italy

Figures 2.1-2.6 in the previous section show substantial differences between the UK and Italy from a Hofstedian perspective. *High MAS is a feature common to both cultures*, but it is also the only similarity we find. *Low PDI and low UAI characterise the UK in contrast to Italy, which high PDI and high UAI, and therefore placed on the opposite end of the cultural spectrum*. As for IDV, figures 2.2-2.4 present both the UK and Italy as highly individualistic, but something has to be said in this respect. Almost exclusively, Hofstede's data showing Italian high IDV were from respondents native to the north of the country. De Mooij (2005) points out that successive studies (acknowledged and agreed on by Hofstede) have shown that Italy is a bi-cultural country in terms of IDV, and that the individualism of the north is counterbalanced by the strong collectivism of the south. She concludes that this results in some aggregate data for IDV which is numerically not very different from that of collectivistic Spain.

The graphs in figure 2.7 below compare in detail the cultural dimension in the UK and Italy:

²² The initial bulk of IBM and IMEDE data is validated through the correlation of the country scores with data from other surveys and with indices measured at the country level.

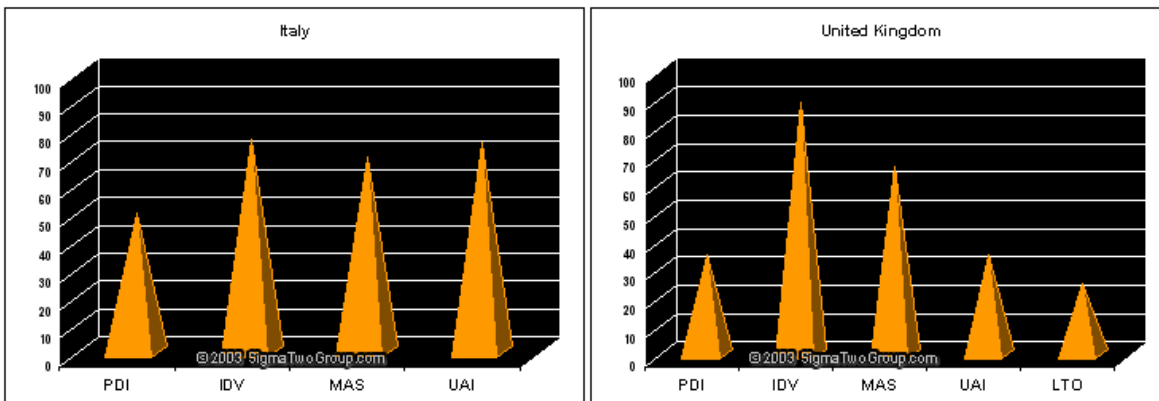


Figure 2.7 Hofstede's score for Italy (left) and the UK (right) (from <http://www.geert-hofstede.com/>.)

The most striking difference appears to lie in uncertainty avoidance, with Italy scoring more than twice as much as the UK (75 vs. 35). The high score of Italy on UAI is typical of predominantly Catholic countries, where the majority of population shows a low tolerance for ambiguity²³. Individualism proves to be higher in the UK (89 vs. 76), even before accounting for Italy's previously discussed aggregate data (which is about 51). It is also interesting to note that individualism is the main correlating dimension in the UK, which Hofstede defines a *Christian* country, in that more than 50% of the population practices a religion other than Catholicism. Data shows that in Christian countries individualism is a paramount value, and people tend to form a higher number of looser ties between each other. Finally, Italy scores higher also on PDI (50 vs. 35) and MAS (70 vs. 66) and, though not displayed by the graph, it also has a higher score for LTO. (34 vs. 25).

I have already explained in chapter one that this study stems from the assumption that advertising can be regarded as a form of cross-genre discourse, which implies communication between the maker of the advert and its target. The sender and the receiver of the advertising message are imbued with culture, but which may be not shared. The addresser/ad maker may create an ad that falls within his/her own cultural framework, but which may not be the same as the prospective audience's (e.g. think of an advertising agency producing an advert for a foreign market). Even if the rule,

²³ The only two countries representing an exception to this rule have proved to be Ireland and the Philippines. This information and all the other reported in this subsection have been retrieved from the ITIM web site at the link <http://www.geert-hofstede.com/index.shtml>.

according to culture-sensitive marketing and consumer behaviour studies, should be that each advert responds to the cultural needs of the culture at which it is aimed, financial reasons may preclude tailoring different ads for different markets, or the ad people may unconsciously let their own culture interfere with the creative process. My purpose here is to interpret linguistic and para-linguistic signs culturally, to find a correlation – if there is one – between the verbal and non verbal choices made in a television commercial and the culture for which the advert has been made (the audience's) or, possibly, the culture *within* which the commercial has been developed (the ad person's). Doing this on two comparable corpora of British and Italian TV commercials, I check not only their cultural relevance to the respective national contexts, but I also have the opportunity to attempt a cultural interpretation of divergent approaches to advertising in the two societies.

2.2 The Corpus

The corpus utilised in this study consists of two comparable sub-corpora of TV commercials collected during 2005. Recordings were made both from British and Italian TV channels, in order to gather samples of ads from the two countries, and to set up a contrastive analysis.

The British recordings were made in different periods of the year: from the 31st January to the 16th February; from the 13th to the 25th March; from the 27th April to the 2nd May; from the 13th July to the 14th August; and from the 23rd October to the 26th December. The recordings were made from the main commercial channels (Channel 4, ITV, ITV2, ITV3, Sky One, Living, Challenge, Five, Gold, UKTV Gold) in different time bands (morning, from 6.50 a.m to 13.10 p.m.; afternoon, from 2.30 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.; evening or *prime time*, from 8 p.m. to 11 p.m.; late evening and night, from 11.30 p.m. to 4 a.m.). In so doing, I have not only covered the whole panorama of commercial television, but also different ad breaks broadcast at different times of the year, and during different programmes in the course of the day. The total footage

amounts to 264 hours and 50 minutes, of which about 20% has proved to be composed of commercials.

A similar technique of collection has been used for the Italian recordings. They were collected from the 22nd to the 30th August; the 1st September to the 7th October; and the 1st to the 31st December, covering different time bands (morning-early afternoon, from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.; afternoon-evening, from 2 p.m. to 8 p.m.; *prime time* and night, from 8 p.m. to 2 a.m.) both on the three State-owned channels (Rai1, Rai2, Rai3) and on Mediaset commercial channels (Canale5, Italia1, Rete4). The total footage has proved to be 108 hours, with an average incidence of advertising breaks calculated around 17%. The reduced presence of ad breaks on Rai channels accounts for the lower mean result with respect to Britain.

In the cross-national and cross-cultural comparison of the two sub-corpora, two main criteria have been considered: ad breaks have ranked according to either the same typology of product or service advertised (e.g. financial service commercials in Britain and Italy) or the same advertising technique adopted (e.g. adverts resorting to sex in Britain and Italy).

A general rule has been to discard the so-called *global brands*. According to the definition provided by Marieke de Mooij (2005:14):

A global brand is one that is available in most countries in the world and shares the same strategic principles, positioning, and marketing in every market throughout the world, although the marketing mix can vary. It has a substantial market share in all countries and comparable brand loyalty (brand franchise). It carries the same brand name or logo.

Brands such as L'Oreal or Coca-Cola have been standardising for a long time, and in most cases reflect the values of the country of origin. They are less likely to be influenced by the culture of the target country, and therefore not suitable for an analysis that aims to show the impact of culture on television commercials²⁴. As it is difficult to set the dividing line between what is and what is not global, the exclusion

²⁴ Actually, localising trends are noticeable also in *global brands'* advertising. De Mooij, writing about Mc Donald's (2005:14), notices that "The arches are universal, but much else is localised, such as its products and most of its communication". Anyway, a study of the localising strategies of mega brands across the world is something that falls out of the scope of this analysis.

of *global brands* has been based on the guidelines supplied by the online version business magazine *Business Week* concerning the 100 top brands in 2006²⁵.

However, the increasingly great attention paid to cross-cultural marketing these days also implies that some large corporations have abandoned the tenet of global marketing, moving in the direction of more *local* approaches to advertising. Examples of such a trend have been found and analysed in this study (e.g. the British *Ford* and *Budweiser* ads studied in chapter VI).

As I have pointed out above, the corpus of adverts collected and viewed for this study has been huge, with about 40 hours of English and 20 hours of Italian commercials. Consequently, selection of part of the corpus has been necessary, in order to make a more in-depth analysis feasible within the space and time constraints of this study. A discourse analysis perspective does not permit work on vast corpora, and Van Dijk (2001: 99) notices that “[...] there is no such a thing as a ‘complete’ discourse analysis”:

[A] ‘full’ analysis of a short passage might take months and fill hundreds of pages. Complete discourse analysis of a large corpus of text or talk, is therefore totally out of the question. [...] Hence [...] we must make choices, and select [particular] structures for closer analysis that are relevant for the study of a social issue.

I have therefore chosen three specific categories for closer inspection: 1) Banking and Financial Products and Services advertising; 2) Supermarket and Convenience Goods Advertising; 3) Sex advertising. The three groups of adverts have been analysed in chapters IV, V and VI respectively. In the introductory section to each chapter, I have detailed the reasons for which that category of adverts has been selected. Then I have proceeded to the actual linguistic and semiotic analysis of the samples. This has always been conducted from a comparative perspective, trying to find similarities and differences between the two sub-corpora, and with an eye to interpreting them in the frameworks provided by their respective cultures.

²⁵ <http://bwnt.businessweek.com/brand/2006/>

CHAPTER III

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION STYLES AND ADVERTISING STYLES ACROSS CULTURES: AN IN-DEPTH APPROACH

3.1 Communication and Advertising

In the previous chapter I defined advertising as a form of communication, between the maker of an ad and its receiver, within a specific cultural context which may, or may not, be a shared one. Like communication, advertising has its own styles, and as in communication these style seem to respond to different cultural schemata. The Dutch expert in cross-cultural communication, Marieke de Mooij (2005: 135), underlines how important it is to international marketing to realise the significance of the link existing between communication and advertising:

If we want to understand how advertising works across cultures, we'll first have to learn how communication works. Styles of communication vary by culture. [...] Is advertising persuasive by nature, or can it have another role in sales process? Understanding how advertising works across cultures is of great importance for international advertisers.

In this chapter I will present the different styles found in advertising, but first I will start with an overview of the different styles possible in interpersonal communication.

3.2 Interpersonal Communication Styles

In their work *Culture and Interpersonal Communication* (1988), William B. Gudykunst and Stella Ting-Toomey have extensively and comprehensively treated the topic of different interpersonal communication styles across cultures.

First of all, they distinguish between *verbal* and *non-verbal styles*, as to whether the focus is on words or on the context within which “[...] *verbal messages can be meaningfully encoded and decoded*” (1988: 117).

3.2.1 Verbal Communication Styles

In verbal communication they identify four different stylistic modes: direct versus indirect style, elaborate versus succinct style, personal versus contextual style, and instrumental versus affective style.

The *direct-indirect style* refers to the extent to which speakers reveal their real intentions through verbal communication. The *direct verbal style* refers to those verbal messages that convey the real wants, needs and desires of the speaker. Conversely, the *indirect style* describes those verbal messages that conceal the speaker's real mind. For example, the use of qualifiers like *certainly* or *absolutely* is a marker of direct style, whereas qualifiers like *maybe* or *probably* point to indirect style.

Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) argue that direction and indirection in communication correlate with Hall's notion of low- and high-context cultures, and Hofstede's dimension of individualism versus collectivism. In fact, they notice that indirect style is more typical of high-context, collectivistic societies, where it serves the purpose of preserving mutual face and the inner harmony of the group, and where things do not need to be said straightforwardly for the in-group members to understand them, by virtue of their shared background. Direct communication, in contrast, is typical of low-context individualistic societies, where it serves the purpose of asserting self-face and self-face concern, and where the effectiveness of communication depends on its explicitness²⁶.

The distinction *elaborate-succinct style* encompasses three stylistic variations: *elaborate style*, *exacting style*, and *succinct style*. *Elaborate style* refers to the use of a rich, expressive language, packed with metaphors and similes. It is typical of moderate-to-high UAI, collectivistic cultures (e.g. Middle Eastern cultures), where the use of a flamboyant language helps negotiate self-face and the face of the interlocutor, thus avoiding a fight. *Exacting style* refers to a precise style, abiding by the Gricean

²⁶ Gudykunst and Ting Toomey (1988) actually regard, and Hofstede (2001) agrees with them, Hall's distinction between low- and high-context as an aspect of individualism versus collectivism. By default, high-context communication fits collectivistic societies, just as low-context communication is suitable to individualistic cultures.

maxim of quantity (“*Do not make your contribution more informative than is required*”), and it is typical of a low-UAI, low-context society, where communication is upfront and task-oriented. Finally, *succinct style* includes the use of understatements, pauses and silence, and it characterises high-UAI, high-context cultures, where pauses and silences are the best way to preserve the in-group’s face and not to offend the interlocutor in public.

Personal-contextual style focuses on personhood versus status. *Personal verbal style* is individual-centred, and it is characterised by certain linguistic devices that enhance the sense of *I*-identity. In *contextual verbal style*, set role relationships are underlined by the use of specific linguistic choices. Members of low-power distance, low-context cultures tend to prefer a personal communication style, whereas high-power distance, high-context cultures seem to use more a contextual communication style.

The *instrumental-affective style* refers to the distinction between goal-oriented and process-oriented communication. The *instrumental verbal style* is sender-oriented, in the sense that the success of communication depends almost exclusively on the speaker. Conversely, in *affective verbal style*, communication depends on the effort of both the speaker and the listener, insofar as the latter has to show “[...] *intuitive sensitivity toward meanings beyond words*” (Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey 1988: 112). Members of individualistic, low-context cultures tend to prefer the instrumental verbal style, whereas the affective style is more typical of collectivistic, high-context cultures.

3.2.2 Non-Verbal Communication Styles

Each verbal message is encoded and decoded within a specific nonverbal context. Tones of voice, but also body language, relative distance between the participants in communication, their tactile interaction, and the like affect the meaning of a verbal message.

Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey's non-verbal communication styles are based on Altman and Gauvain's theory (1981, cited in Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey 1988: 119), according to which each cultural environment reflects the efforts made by its members to cope with two sets of dialectic opposites, namely, the *identity-communality dimension* and the *accessibility-inaccessibility dimension*. The *identity-communality* dimension reflects Hofstede's IDV dimension: individualistic cultures foster non-verbal behaviour which stresses personal identity, whereas collectivistic cultures encourage communal behaviour. The *accessibility-inaccessibility* dimension mirrors PDI and UAI dimensions: in low-power distance, low uncertainty avoidance cultures people can engage in an explicit nonverbal style that appears accessible even to outsiders, whereas in high-power distance, high-uncertainty avoidance cultures, the implicit nonverbal style of the in-group may appear inaccessible to those who do not belong to it.

On the basis of this distinction, Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey identify their four different non-verbal communication styles: *unique-explicit*, *unique-implicit*, *group-explicit*, and *group-implicit*.

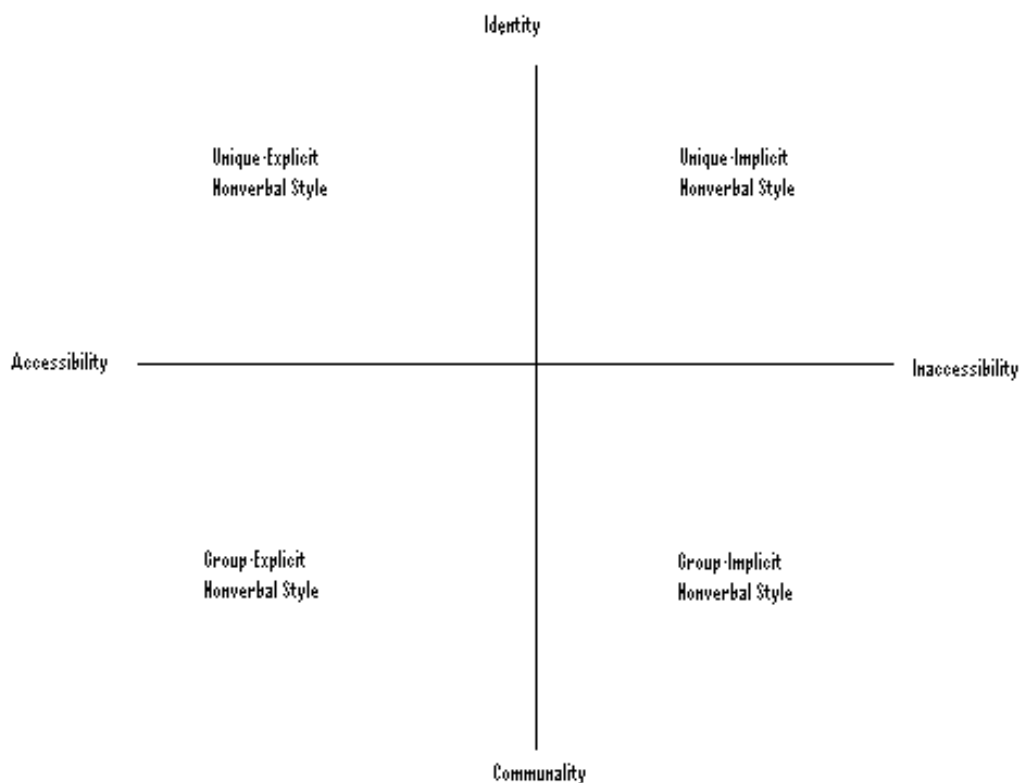


Figure 3.1 Two-Dimensional Grid of Interpersonal Nonverbal Styles (adapted from Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey 1988:119)

Figure 3.1 illustrates the continuum between the two opposites of Altman and Gauvain's dimensions, as well as the correlation existing between them. The *unique-explicit non verbal style*, typical of high-IDV, low-PDI, low-UAI cultures, is the most accessible and individual-oriented; the next is the *unique-implicit non verbal style*, typical of high IDV, high PDI, high UAI societies, which is individual-oriented but less accessible to outsiders. *Group-explicit nonverbal style*, typical of low-IDV, low- to moderate-PDI, and low- to moderate-UAI cultures, is group-oriented but accessible to outsiders; finally, *group-implicit nonverbal style*, typical of low-IDV, high-PDI, and high-UAI cultures, is the most group-oriented and the least accessible from outside.

Nonverbal communication also includes the use of space, the ways of regulating one's privacy, of keeping one's distance in every day's relationships, and of physically interacting with the others. Altman and Gauvain (1981, cited in Gudykunst 1988) have found that the home environment is significantly different in individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Houses in individualistic countries are normally separated from

the outside by front yards, back yards and gardens. In collectivistic cultures, by contrast, houses are integrated within a piazza, a community centre or a neighbourhood dwelling. Similarly, the use of massive wood doors (e.g. in Norway) or of high fences or hedges (e.g. the UK) in some individualistic cultures of northern Europe also points to their stronger need for privacy regulation. Conversely, in collectivistic societies, respect of an individual's privacy is not a major concern, and sometimes the reduced space and the high density (e.g. in most Asian countries) pose physical constraints to the human control over the environment.

Proxemics is a term introduced by Edward Hall in his book “*The Hidden Dimension*” (1969). It refers to the use of interpersonal space, the regulation of intimacy by controlling sensory contact. Hall has observed – and several later scholars (e.g. Engebretson and Fullmer, 1970; La France and Mayo, 1978a; Sussman and Rosenfeld 1982; all cited in Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey 1988: 124-125) have confirmed his theory – that different cultures have different standards of personal space. High-contact cultures are reflective of collectivistic cultures located in warmer parts of the world, while low-contact cultures frequently coincide with individualistic cultures from the cold weather regions. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) have established a relationship between proxemics and Hofstede's dimensions, arguing that low-PDI, low-UAI cultures have fewer rules to regulate personal space than high-PDI, high-UAI cultures, where norms on personal space vary according to the status of and the relationship between the subjects involved in communication. They have also noticed that in high-IDV cultures, breaking personal space norms evokes an aggressive mode of reaction, while in collectivistic cultures the violation of proxemic distance is followed by a withdrawal mode of reaction.

Closely related to proxemics is *haptics*, the discipline that studies touching behaviour. Collectivistic, high-contact cultures – like Arab, Mediterranean, or Latin-American cultures – tend to be more accessible on the touch dimension than individualistic and low-contact collectivistic cultures.

Finally, time management can also be considered as a culturalised component of communication style. Hall (1989) has made a distinction between *Monochronic*, *M-*

Time and Polychronic, P-time, and has noticed they are reflective of different types of cultures. *M-time cultures*, like North European ones, are very tight on schedules, and used to doing one thing at time. *P-time cultures*, like Mediterranean, Arab, Latin-American or Japanese cultures, stress the completion of transactions and bonding with one's interlocutor rather than the observance of pre-fixed schedules. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) observe that individualistic societies with high privacy regulation monitor their time more strictly than collectivistic cultures with low privacy regulation, where time tends to be used more fluidly.

This survey on the verbal and non-verbal aspects of communication is meant to introduce aspects of advertising styles. Like communication styles, advertising styles are culture-bound, and often respond – or should respond – to the cultural background of the target people at whom they are aimed.

3.3 Advertising Styles

As a form of communication in its own right, advertising appears to have styles which mirror, and often overlap with, those of interpersonal communication.

Marieke de Mooij (2005: 139) has identified four different aspects of advertising style which can be said to be culture bound:

1. *Appeal* (including motives and values);
2. *Communication style* (e.g. explicit, implicit, direct, indirect);
3. *Basic advertising form* (e.g., testimonial, drama, entertainment);
4. *Execution* (e.g., how people are dressed).

3.3.1 Appeal

Wells, Burnett and Moriarty (1992: 249) define the *appeal* as “[...] something that makes the products particularly attractive or interesting to the consumer”. The appeal does not necessarily follow the norms of a culture, and sometimes it might even go against it. In this respect, Marieke de Mooij (2005) has spoken of *value paradox* to refer to Hofstede’s distinction (2001: 6) between the *desirable* and the *desired*.

The *desirable* coincides with the norm, with “[...] what people think they ought to desire[...]” (Hofstede 2001:6); the *desired*, by contrast, represents what people want and choose for themselves, that is to say “[...] what people actually desire [...]” (Hofstede 2001: 6). We have seen above (2.1.3) that Hofstede’s theory of cultural dimensions takes into consideration *ecological correlations*, that is to say correlations among cultures, and not among individuals. A culture can be individualistic or collectivistic, but an individual cannot: s/he can fit in the normative cultural dimension of the culture to which s/he belongs, but can also challenge it, supporting the opposite values. This explains why value paradoxes are used in advertising, especially to target particular consumers (e.g. teenagers) who are more likely to go against the constituted rules.

Generally speaking, the appeal used in an advert fits, or should fit, the mainstream culture of the community at which it is aimed, and de Mooij (2005) has argued that correlations exist between Hofstede’s dimensions and different types of appeal used in advertising.

In high-power distance cultures, status-symbols are said to represent a remarkable type of advertising appeal; the use of different generations (fathers and sons) is more frequent, and the concept of independence can refer to the *desired*, but it is not the norm. Conversely, in low-power distance cultures, hierarchical relationships (e.g. between father and son, or boss and employee) often appear subverted, in the sense that old-age does not represent a source of wisdom and respect in its own right. Independence is regarded to be the norm in low-power distance cultures, and the sense of belonging can be used as a value paradox.

In collectivistic cultures, appeals focused on the benefits of the in-group are reported to be more frequent than in individualistic cultures, where the stress is likely to be on the individual benefits and preferences. The opposite pairing of independence-belonging is another way of appealing to individualistic and collectivistic cultures respectively. Allegedly, the use of celebrities varies across cultures. In individualistic cultures, a celebrity is often seen as a successful endorser, someone who has obtained fame and success thanks to his/her exceptional qualities. Conversely, in collectivistic cultures, a celebrity gives a face to the product advertised, but s/he is presented *as one of the group*. For example, de Mooij (2005) has noticed that in one of the most collectivistic societies in the world, Japan, celebrities often are *tarento*, ordinary people who acquire fame by regularly appearing on television rather than for possessing outstanding qualities. Also the use of emotions is reported to vary along the individualism-collectivism axis. In individualistic cultures emotions are normally exploited within the context of an argument (e.g. dirty triggers disgust, and the cleanliness promised by the advert triggers relief); by contrast, in collectivistic cultures and in particular in South European cultures, “[...] *advertising reflects the pure emotional relationship between consumer and brand without the argumentation*” (de Mooij 2005: 146).

In masculine cultures success and the fulfilment of dreams are considered to be common appeals. On the contrary, the focus in feminine cultures would be on caring for others and on smallness, while showing off is not positively seen, and dreams are deemed delusions. Feminine cultures also appear less keen on using celebrities in advertising, and, if they do, they are not presented as successful endorsers – like in masculine cultures – but they tend to belittle their roles as VIPs. Another difference between masculine and feminine cultures de Mooij points out is the gender role differentiation. This seems to be marked very much in masculine cultures, where men’s and women’s roles appear to be neatly distinct. In contrast, it is quite vague in feminine cultures, where it is not uncommon to find commercials showing men wearing an apron and doing housework. Interestingly, despite feminine cultures’ matter-of-fact attitudes about sex, Hofstede (2001: 330) has claimed that a negative

correlation exists between high femininity and the use of sex in the media. Apparently, in feminine cultures sex in advertising is a real taboo, whereas in masculine cultures – which have a more moralistic attitude about sex in real life – sex appears to be quite frequent on television. It seems to me this can be regarded as a typical example of value paradox: sex appeal coincides with the desired in cultures when sex condemnation is the norm.

Purity and cleanliness are listed among the most common appeals in high-uncertainty avoidance cultures. Similarly, the competence of the manufacturer proven through the details given about the products is presented as a better appeal in high-uncertainty avoidance than in low-uncertainty avoidance cultures, where the result is more important. Test and test reports are also considered to be favoured in high-uncertainty avoidance cultures.

Finally, the sense of urgency – verbally obtained, for example, through the use of verbal phrases like *hurry*, *don't wait*, *don't miss on it*, or by adverbs like *now*, and *present* – is a typical appeal in short-term orientation cultures. Conversely, harmony with fellow humans and with nature is a strong appeal in long-term orientation cultures.

3.3.2 Communication Style

Like interpersonal communication, advertising communication also changes across cultures. Marieke de Mooij (2005) has argued that the main differences between *direct-explicit* and *indirect-implicit* style correlates with individualism.

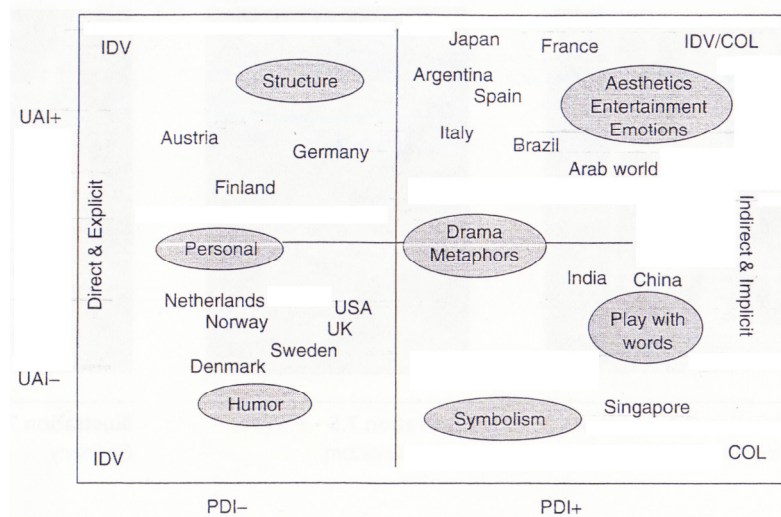


Figure 3.2 Advertising Styles and Cultural Dimensions (from de Mooij 2005: 142)

Figure 3.2 illustrates the correlations de Mooij has noticed between advertising styles and Hofstede's cultural dimensions.

Individualistic cultures scoring low on power distance appear prefer a more *direct style* in advertising, mainly verbal, and with a frequent use of personal pronouns to directly address the audience. Among them, those cultures scoring high on the uncertainty-avoidance index (e.g. Germany) are likely to use a more exact style, with detailed visuals and precise verbal explanations. Individualistic cultures scoring low on uncertainty avoidance (e.g. the UK) are keener on using humour, as they cope better with ambiguity.

Cultures of high to medium individualism scoring high on power distance and collectivistic cultures seem to be characterised by an advertising style that verges on indirectness, with a preference for non-verbal language and indirect approaches to the audience.

Medium-high individualism, high-power distance cultures scoring high on the uncertainty-avoidance index (e.g. France) present a communication style which often appears inaccessible from the outside, by virtue of inter-textual references to other forms of communication (e.g. literature or cinema) or to different advertisements.

Collectivistic, high-power distance cultures scoring high on uncertainty avoidance present an advertising style that stresses *bonding*, that is to say the building of a

relationship between the addresser and the addressee. With reference to the Japanese culture, Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) have written that interpersonal communication aims to reach *haragei*, which is the condition under which each one involved in communication can guess the inner thoughts of the other person. Similarly, de Mooij (2005) has argued that Japanese advertisers' main purpose is to build *amae*, a dependence relationship between the product and the consumer, and she has hypothesized that this strategy may well apply also to other collectivistic cultures²⁷.

Italy, as a high-power distance, high-uncertainty avoidance country, falls within the group of indirect-implicit advertising style. However, its bi-cultural situation as far as IDV dimension is concerned (individualistic in the north, collectivistic in the south, aggregate score not far from that of collectivistic Spain) may position its style halfway between the inaccessible and the bonding.

Finally, the advertising style of high-power distance, collectivistic cultures scoring low on uncertainty avoidance is characterised by a heavy use of symbolism (which relates to their collectivism) and a direct style (the consequence of their low-uncertainty avoidance). So the Chinese advertising style, for example, appears vividly symbolic, but the audience is addressed in a more direct way than in Japan.

3.3.3 Forms of Advertising and Execution

Each advertising appeal is turned into an actual advertising message, and is presented to the consumer in a specific form. The way in which the appeal is actualised is the *execution* of the advert, and it can result in different *basic advertising forms*. Advertising forms and execution styles are culture-bound, insofar as each of them seems to work better in one culture rather than another.

²⁷ In marketing, a basic difference is made between *high-and low-involvement products*. *High-involvement products* (e.g. cars) normally induce the prospective buyer to first learn about them, then to form an attitude, and finally to take an action. This sequence is summarised as *learn-feel-do*. By contrast, *low-involvement products* (e.g. soap) trigger a process which is of the type *learn-do-feel*. The international advertising scholar Gordon E. Miracle (cited in De Mooij 2005: 150) has suggested that a third option is possible, and actually normative, in Japanese advertising, namely, *feel-do-learn*. On the basis of this study, Marieke de Mooij (2005) has argued that the *feel-do-learn* sequence might actually be a trait of consumer behaviour in most collectivistic cultures.

Wells, Burnett and Moriarty (1992) have suggested a basic distinction between two advertising forms, *drama* and *lecture*. *Drama* is indirect, because the characters in the advert interact with each other, but do not address the audience directly; *lecture* is direct, in that the characters in the advert address the audience directly through the screen.

de Mooij (2005) has proposed a more comprehensive classification based on the model provided by Giep Franzen. She has adapted it to the analysis of TV commercials from eleven different cultures, and **has suggested** seven basic advertising forms, each encompassing a different number of subcategories. The table below summarises De Mooij's model:

<i>Basic Form</i>	<i>Subcategories</i>
1. Announcement	1.1. Pure display 1.2 Product message 1.3 Corporate presentation, documentary
2. Association Transfer	2.1 Lifestyle 2.2. Metaphor 2.3 Metonymy 2.4 Celebrity transfer
3. Lesson	3.1 Presenter 3.2 Testimonial / endorsement 3.3 Demonstration 3.4 Comparison 3.5 "How to"
4. Drama	4.1 Slice of life 4.2 Problem-solution 4.3 Vignettes 4.4. Theatre
5. Entertainment	5.1 Humour 5.2 Play or act around product
6. Imagination	6.1 Cartoons 6.2 Film properties in action 6.3 Other unrealistic acts
7. Special effects	7.1 Product in action, animation 7.2 Film, video techniques, artistic stimuli

Table 3.1 Seven basic advertising forms (adapted from de Mooij 2005: 193)

Announcements consist in the presentation of facts without the presence of endorsers. They can simply display the product, or information can be provided about the product by one or more voice-over(s). Corporate presentation is the typical form chosen by corporate companies to advertise their products or services. According to de Mooij, all three subcategories are relatively culture-free, even if individualistic, low-context cultures are likely to prefer more verbal information than collectivistic low-context cultures, which are more visual-oriented.

Association transfer is the combination of the product advertised with something or someone whose characteristics are transferred onto the product. Most frequently the association can be made with a particular lifestyle (e.g. young), with a metaphor (e.g. a car being compared to a bull), with a metonymy (e.g. a fruit turning into a pot of jam) or with a celebrity. Every type of association here is said to be culture bound: a masculine, individualistic culture will prefer metaphors of success and winning celebrities as endorsers, metonymy will be favoured in high-context cultures for its indirectness, lifestyles underlining social status will be better received in high-power distance cultures, and so on.

Lessons are an advertising form addressing the audience directly. They present facts and arguments through the use of presenters or voice-overs. Understandably, this form is considered to be more typical of individualistic, low-context cultures. Some lessons can have a presenter, who will play a more or less dominant role depending on the greater or lesser degree of masculinity of the target culture, and will show more or less expertise depending on the uncertainty avoidance or uncertainty tolerance of the audience. High-power distance cultures will attach more importance to the age and the status of a presenter than low-power distance ones.

A presenter can *endorse* a product expressing opinions about it, or can be its *testimonial*, by stating that s/he uses it. In masculine societies the presenter is more often a celebrity, which is not the case of feminine society, where s/he is more likely to be anonymous. In masculine high-uncertainty avoidance cultures, presenters are high-profile, and show great expertise about the product. De Mooij (2005) observes that, in

demonstrations, the amount of details given by the presenter about the product also depends on the degree of uncertainty avoidance of the target culture.

Another form of lesson is *comparison* with other brands, a subcategory which is said to be strongly culture-bound. Cultures combining masculinity with individualism (e.g. the USA and the UK) find it very viable, whereas it is not well accepted in feminine and collectivistic cultures, because it is too aggressive, and because it causes the competitor to lose face, something which might eventually backfire.

Finally, a last form of lesson is that of *illustrating how the product works*.

Drama is an indirect form of advertising, based on interplay between two or more people. The audience are not directly addressed, but are supposed to observe other people interacting and draw their own conclusions. Though developed in the USA, on the basis of the soap-opera genre, by virtue of its indirectness drama is quite apt for high-context cultures. Marieke de Mooij (2005) has noticed that its various subcategories are spread across diverse cultures, although with different execution styles. So, for example, the *slice of life* can portray seniors advising juniors in high-power distance cultures, but the other way round is apparently true of low-power distance cultures. Reportedly, characters will be shown alone or in group depending on the individualistic or collectivistic nature of the target audience, and the exploitation of emotions will be task-oriented in individualistic cultures and relationship-oriented in collectivistic ones. In high-uncertainty avoidance cultures characters will be better-groomed than in low-uncertainty avoidance ones, and again the social context will be indoors in North European individualistic cultures, and outdoors in South European collectivistic cultures. Other subcategories encompassed in the drama form are problem-solution, vignettes, with patches of images often accompanied by a voice-over or a jingle, and theatre, with exaggerated acting, often portraying not true-to-life stories.

Entertainment is the opposite of lesson, as it is aimed at entertaining people rather than lecturing them. As such, it is a more indirect form of advertising, and should be more frequent in collectivistic cultures. However, like lesson, entertainment stretches across cultures with different execution styles.

Humour is found in all cultures, although it is more common in low-uncertainty avoidance ones. Apparently, uncertainty avoidance can also explain different forms of humour used across cultures. In a comparative study on humour in the USA and in the UK, Weinberger and Spotts (1989) distinguished six categories (*pun, understatement, joke, ludicrous, satire and irony*), and found that in the higher-uncertainty avoidance USA the ludicrous is more frequent, whereas satire is preferred in the lower-power distance UK. Marieke de Mooij (2005) has reported other studies that have found that one of the forms of humour which is more likely to work across cultures is *incongruity*. All other forms of non-humorous entertainment are included in the subcategory called *play or act around the product*, where the storyline is developed around the product.

Imagination includes cartoon and all those film techniques used to depict non-realistic events. Allegedly, they are used for commercials targeted at kids, or to avoid too literal an interpretation of what is represented.

A category similar to the previous one seems to be *special effects*, encompassing all sort of artistic resources offered by modern technologies (e.g. animation, camera effects, video techniques, tunes, etc). This form is said to travel well across cultures, but apparently it is better received in art-oriented South European cultures.

In the first three chapters of this study I have defined the methods and goals of my research, and I have tried to show how advertising can be approached from a cultural perspective. The next chapters will focus on the actual corpus collected for the purpose of this work, with different categories of commercials from the British and Italian sub-corpora being analysed and compared.

CHAPTER IV

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY: ADVERTISING BANKING AND FINANCIAL PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

4.1. Preliminary remarks

In the category named *Banking and Financial Products and Services* (henceforth, BFPS) I have included all those commercials which are related to money management. The commercials selected are therefore those advertising banks, building societies, loan companies, financial advisors and credit card issuers. Obviously, this class spans the diverse products and/or services these companies can offer, namely, savings accounts, personal loans, mortgages, car loans, credit cards, debit cards, investment solutions and so on.

Notably, the British sub-corpus offered a wider variety of BFPS commercials than the Italian counterpart:

BANKING AND FINANCIAL PRODUCTS AND SERVICES	
<i>BRITISH SUB-CORPUS</i>	<i>ITALIAN SUB-CORPUS</i>
Abbey loans	American Express
Alliance and Leicester car loans	Banca Mediolanum carta Riflex
Alliance and Leicester personal loans	Banca Mediolanum conto Riflex
American Express	Banca San Paolo (general, Christmas)
APS Mortgages	Banca San Paolo imprese
Barclays bank	Banca San Paolo presiti
Barclays credit card	Capitalia
Capital One credit card	Credial
Debt Free Direct debt advisor	Equilon.it
Egg credit card	Fi.gen.pa
Eggmoney (pre-paid card)	Forus Finanziamenti
Eggdeal account	Mastercard
First Class mortgages	

BANKING AND FINANCIAL PRODUCTS AND SERVICES	
<i>BRITISH SUB-CORPUS</i>	<i>ITALIAN SUB-CORPUS</i>
First Direct.com e-savings account	
First Plus loans	
Greenhill Finance loans	
Halifax mortgages	
Halifax credit card	
HSBC bank	
ING Direct savings account	
Lloyds TSB Note for Note programme	
Lloyds TSB mortgages	
Loans.co.uk	
Lombard Direct loans	
Mint credit card	
Mastercard	
Morgan Stanley credit card	
Nationwide mortgages	
Natwest (general)	
Natwest students' rail card	
Natwest mortgages	
Natwest credit card	
Norton Finance loans	
Ocean Finance loans and mortgages	
Picture Loans	
Premium Bonds	
Regency Mortgages	
Sky credit card	
Tesco loans	
Tesco credit card	
Yescarcredit car loans	
TOTAL 41	TOTAL 12

Table 4.1 Financial and banking companies advertised in the British and Italian sub-corpora

Table 1 shows all the BFPS advertised at least once in the two sub-corpora. It does not account for different versions of a commercial used to advertise the same product, nor

for repetitions of the same commercial. The British samples (41) outnumber the Italian (12) by nearly four times.

All the UK channels covered in the research have yielded examples of BFPS commercials. These have proved to be most varied in the summer recordings (twenty-two different BFPS advertised in the period July-August 2005), whereas the array narrowed in the winter recordings (only three different BFPS in the period January-February 2005).

On the Italian side, the greatest variety of commercials was found in the autumn recordings (ten different BFPS advertised in October and December), when compared with summer (only three different BFPS in August). As expected, the privately owned Mediaset channels have proved to host most of the commercials in question; only two out of the eleven BFPS have been advertised on the State-owned Rai channels.

These preliminary quantitative remarks upon the two sub-corpora seem to suggest some culture-bound practices and habits. The much larger array of BFPS in the British TV advertising undoubtedly hints at a greater demand for them in Britain than in Italy. This hypothesis is corroborated by figures, which show that Britons have the highest per capita personal debt in Europe. An article published on BBC web site on the 26 September 2006 read:

If you discount mortgages we owe around £3,000 each, according to the latest figures from business research group Datamonitor. That's double most of the Continent. 100,000 under 24's are having to pay off at least £5,000 on their cards. Researchers say a lot of it is down to our buy now, pay later attitude.²⁸

Culturally speaking, the *buy now, pay later* attitude might be regarded as being much more typical of low-UAI societies, like Britain, rather than high-UAI ones, such as Italy. To buy on credit, to take out a mortgage or to get a loan implies being prepared to optimistically cope with a range of future uncertainties (e.g. the change in interest rates or a change in one's personal financial situation), and with the stress that these can cause. Therefore, this practice might fit low-UAI Britain much better, than an uncertainty-averse country like Italy.

²⁸ http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio1/news/newsbeat/060927_debt.shtml

The IDV dimension could also provide a possible explanation. In a country like Italy, whose north-south aggregate IDV score seems to verge on collectivism, it is much more common to go to parents or other family members to borrow money than to banks. Obviously, other non-cultural variables are to be considered, like the relative difficulties encountered by Italians, especially younger ones, in accessing a capital or mortgage market that is far more restricted than in the UK.²⁹

By international standards Italy is considered to be a country with a higher-saving rate than the UK³⁰. This means that a greater proportion of Italians are savers than Britons. This might be a further reason for BFPS commercials to be less common on Italian television. Normally, the most suitable explanation for this difference should be rooted in a remarkable divergence of the LTO indices of the two countries, but the LTO scores for Britain and Italy are not very different (25 and 34 respectively). UAI could therefore be considered a significant variable to explain this attitude: savings would be a kind of safety net to fall on in high-UAI Italy, without having to cope with the uncertainties inherent in a loan.

The hypotheses suggested above reflect the attempt to give a cultural interpretation to the wide, quantitative gap existing between the BFPS commercials in the two sub-corpora. Nonetheless, they are by no means exhaustive, as a socio-economic analysis of this topic falls out of the scope of this research.

In the following section, I will focus on the linguistic aspects of the BFPS commercials, to identify the extent to which words, pictures and their combination can tell us about the culture(s) of the producer and the receiver of the message.

²⁹ <http://www.niesr.ac.uk/pubs/DPS/dp278.pdf>

³⁰ <http://www.niesr.ac.uk/pubs/DPS/dp278.pdf>

4.2 The Analysis

4.2.1 The Language of Fame: Celebrity Endorsement in BFPS Commercials

In sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.3, I showed that the use of celebrities as product endorsers or testimonials in the advertising of masculine and individualistic cultures responds to the need for success and personal fulfilment in these societies. A winning, famous presenter can support a product by virtue of his/her high status, which endows him/her with particular charisma in the mind of the audience. In modern capitalistic societies, financial prosperity and public visibility are a measure of success. Wealth and fame are often considered tangible status symbols, and therefore tycoons and VIPs become suitable endorsers for products which tickle the audiences' desire for success.

BFPS advertising directly deals with money management, and presenters give advice on how to save or invest money in a wise and profitable way. In this context, celebrities can be entitled to lecture the audience for having expertise in the field considered; they can be magnates, who have proved to be long-sighted and skilled at multiplying their assets; or they could be VIPs, whose credibility derives from simple popularity. The actual typology of endorser and the execution preferred for a commercial vary according to different cultural schemata.

Howard Brown is an employee of the Halifax bank, who has garnered fame starring in the company's commercials since 2000. In the sample considered here, endorsement is combined with special effects, and an animated version of Howard Brown lectures viewers on the advantageous rates of Halifax mortgages. The initial setting is that of a television studio. A typical news jingle introduces the bulletin about Halifax mortgage (snapshot 4.1), with a well defined "UK's number 1 choice for mortgages" appearing on the notice in the background (snapshot 4.2).

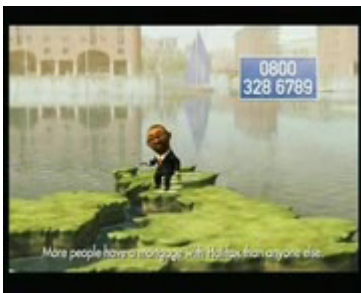


Snapshot 4.1

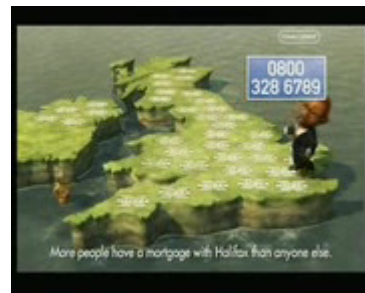


Snapshot 4.2

Newscaster-Howard announces that “mortgage news is just in” and gives the floor to his double, presenter-Howard. The camera cuts to a high-angle image of presenter-Howard, walking along a reduced-scale model of the British Isles (snapshots 4.3-4.4). He informs the audience that: “Halifax is offering special rights and is also the UK’s number1 choice for mortgages”.

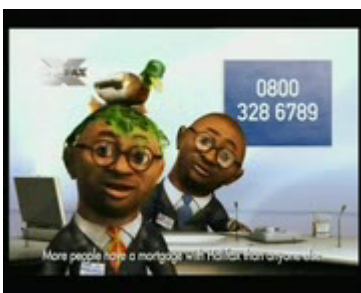


Snapshot 4.3



Snapshot 4.4

Then he loses his balance, and splashes into the Channel. Back in the studio, newscaster-Howard asks: “But how can people find out if they can save money on their mortgage?” The soaked presenter-Howard steps into the studio, with a duck and seaweed sitting on his head (snapshot 4.5), and gives the Halifax phone number to call to receive all the information.



Snapshot 4.5



Snapshot 4.6

Halifax mortgages are defined as “UK’s number 1 choice for mortgages”, which, as the small print explains, means that “More people have a mortgage with Halifax than anyone else”. The focus on the bank’s primacy in terms of favourable rates proves to be a pointer to the masculine-oriented value of *personal success*. As Hofstede (2001: 297) points out, in low-UAI, high-MAS cultures “[...] achievement tends to be defined in terms of ego boosting, wealth and recognition”. Making the financially sound choice presented in this advert could enhance the viewer’s wealth and, as a consequence, their success.

The two-pronged conversational structure of the commercial (newscaster-Howard and presenter-Howard interacting with each other, and both interacting with the audience at home) provides information which is closely relevant to the purpose of the ad, namely, to inform the audience that Halifax is number 1 for mortgages in the UK, and that it is prepared to offer advantageous options to all those who will call the given number. Neither extra-frills, nor more in-depth details are provided: the exact style of communication is that typical of an individualistic, low-uncertainty avoidance society.

The pictures present Halifax as an established company, whose name is a guarantee. In their chapter on the meaning of composition and multimodal texts, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996;2006) have argued that in Western multimodal texts the left is the side of “the already Given”, “the Known”, whereas the right is the side of “the New”. If we look snapshots 4.1, 4.2, 4.5 and 4.6, we can see that the Halifax logo and brand name always appear on the left-hand side, whereas the information regarding the mortgage (“UK’s number 1 choice”, phone number) always are on the right-hand side (snapshots 4.2, 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5). Halifax is the long-established tradition that offers new solutions.

Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996: 187-188) have noticed that the information value of left and right is true also of English language:

A similar structure exists in English language, in the information structure of the clause [...] and it is realized by intonation. Intonation creates two peaks of salience within each ‘tone group’, one at the beginning of the group and another, the major one (the ‘tonic’ in Halliday’s terminology) as the culmination of the New, at the end.

Let us take presenter-Howard's first line of speech:

Halifax is offering special *rates*, and is also the UK number 1 *choice*, for *mortgages*.

The italics indicate the “peaks of salience” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996; 2006). As we can see, the New in presenter-Howard's words is represented by *rates*, *choice*, and *mortgages*. We could therefore say that a correspondence exists between images and words in signalling and highlighting what is the New.

The marked Black Country accent of presenter-Howard (particularly evident in the pronunciation of the word *rates*, pronounced [raɪts] instead of [reɪts]) contributes to foreground the peaks of salience, but might also serve a function of *inclusion*. In a country like the UK, where regional accents seem to have a stronger social connotation than, for example, in Italy, the use of a strong Birmingham accent in the presenter-Howard might be used to bridge the power distance gap resulting from being lectured by a corporate man. In other words, the institutional role of Howard Brown as a Halifax man would be downplayed by his accent, far from refined, and not so different from that of the ordinary fellows you can meet in a pub. The use of animated characters instead of real ones, along with some other features which lower the modality of the commercial from a naturalistic encoding perspective (e.g. the speaking duck which *steals* presenter-Howard's last line), also work together to create irony that minimises Howard Brown's role.

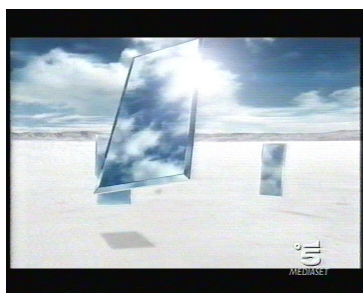
A similar choice with a bank insider as an endorser is found in the commercial for Banca Mediolanum, from the Italian sub-corpus:



Snapshot 4.7



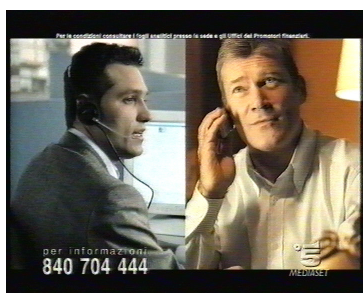
Snapshot 4.8



Snapshot 4.9



Snapshot 4.10



Snapshot 4.11



Snapshot 4.12

The presenter here is not a simple employee, but the tycoon Ennio Doris, founder and chief executive of Mediolanum Spa, a large fund management and insurance company. In endorsing the Banca Mediolanum current account, he says:

Il tuo conto corrente *ti* rispecchia davvero? *Guarda* Riflex di Banca Mediolanum. E' comodo, lo *usi* quando e come *v vuoi* e *ti* costa da 0 a massimo 5 euro al mese. *Ti* serve contante? *Hai* oltre 15.000 sportelli convenzionati e i bancomat di tutte le banche italiane gratuiti.

In the transcription, I have italicised the second person singular pronouns (*ti*), possessive adjectives (*tuo*) and verbs (*guarda*, *usi*, *v vuoi*, *hai*) used to address the audience. Cook (2001: 158-159) has pointed out that the ubiquitous use of *you* found in advertising can be explained through what he calls its “double exophora”³¹, that is, the capability of this personal pronoun to refer to someone in the pictures and to the receivers of the advertising message at the same time. In Italian, the use of *tu* carries an extra connotation of informality, as opposed to the formal pronoun *lei*, which is unknown to the English language. Applying these observations to the Mediolanum commercial, we could argue that the *tu* address serves a double purpose: 1) it refers, simultaneously, to the audience sitting at home and to Signor Mandelli, the

³¹ In general discourse, a pronoun is defined *exophoric* when it refers to someone or something outside the text, as opposed to the adjective *endophoric* to refer to a noun phrase within the text.

prototypical customer represented in the advert (Snapshots 4.10, 4.11); 2) it marks a *verbal personal address*, which is individual-centred, as opposed to a *verbal context address*, which is status-centred. Nevertheless, the analysis of the visuals seems to tell a rather different story.

In describing representation and interaction, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996: 119) have defined “represented participants” as all “[...] the people, the things and the places depicted in images [...]”, and “interactive participants” as “[...] the people who communicate with each other **through** images, the producers and viewers of images [...]”. In the case of a TV commercial, every character depicted on the screen is a represented participant, while the audience sitting at home and the makers of the commercial are the interactive participants.

With the basic advertising form of *lesson* (which appears to be very frequent in BFPS advertising), the difference between represented and interactive participants can become less clear-cut or completely blurred. Indeed, the endorser can be a corporate person who speaks directly to the audience, and, similarly, the audience can be depicted on the screen in the role of testimonial. This is the case with Banca Mediolanum commercial. Ennio Doris is both the CE of the bank (interactive participant) and the endorser in the commercial (represented participant); Signor Mandelli is the testimonial (represented participant) and *should* be the prospective viewer/customer (interactive participant) at the same time. The use of the conditional depends on the fact that Signor Mandelli does not seem to represent the vast audience which the verbal *tu* address could encompass.

The picture of the mirror dissolving into the picture of Signor Mandelli (snapshots 4.9-4.10) is a visual metaphor meant to suggest that he is the archetype of every customer who finds himself reflected in the Banca Mediolanum current account. Nonetheless, the elegant house interior (snapshot 4.10), where he is shown speaking on the phone with a consultant of the bank, actually mirrors the high status of its owner. The choice of the billionaire Doris to deliver the advertising message is matched by that of the affluent Signor Mandelli. The successful CE tells the audience

about one of the products of his bank, and then the camera *crabs*³² right, and his picture dissolves into that of Signor Mandelli in his luxurious house. There are no cuts between the first four snapshots (4.7-4.10), and this fact stresses a sense of continuity between Doris and Mandelli: having an account with Banca Mediolanum is a sign of high status, a type of appeal successful in high-power distance countries like Italy.

But can every other spectator achieve Signor Mandelli's high status by joining Banca Mediolanum? Other non-verbal features seem to suggest this is not the case. Let us look at the setting from which Doris delivers his message: he is standing on a white, sandy surface, under a blue sky scattered with white clouds, and mirrors float in the air around him (Snapshots 4.7-4.9). The increased brightness and the presence of mirrors lower the modality of the picture, and make it look somewhat unreal and ethereal. Doris seems to address the audience from his world, which is separated from the real world outside.

In Kress and Van Leeuwen's perspective (1996: 121-146), the "gaze of the represented participant(s)", their "size of frame" and the "horizontal angle" formed by their frontal plane and that of the image viewers account for "type of address", "social distance" and "involvement" respectively. When represented participants look at the interactive ones, vectors formed by representative participants' eyelines connect them to the viewers, and this visual configuration has two related functions: 1) to address the viewers directly; 2) to *demand* something of them. A gaze that is not directed at the viewer indicates a non-direct form of addressing, and *offers* something rather than demanding it³³. Similarly, size of frame (i.e. the size of the picture portraying the represented participants) stands for the social distance between represented and interactive participants. We have seen in 3.2.2 that Hall (1969) has argued that in interpersonal relationships, a number of invisible boundaries exist, which only certain people are allowed to cross. Similar restrictions are also found in graphic

³² *To crab* is a verb used in the language of TV- and film-makers to refer to the sideways movement of the camera. An extremely useful resource to get acquainted with the specialised vocabulary of TV- and film-production has proved to be the *Grammar' of Television and Film* by Daniel Chandler, consulted at <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/short/gramtv.html>. I refer to it for any doubts about or need for further details concerning the technical terms used throughout this work.

³³ It is important not to confuse *direct style in verbal communication* with *direct gaze in visual communication*. While *verbal direct style* indicates explicitness and correlates with the degree of individualism (see 3.2.1), *direct gaze*, especially in combination with other features (e.g. the high-status of the gazer), can designate order or imposition, thus becoming a function of power distance.

representation and camera techniques to refer to social distance: so a long-shot of represented participants will imply a greater social distance between them and their interactive participants than a middle-shot (implying a social relationship) or a close up (implying an intimate or personal relationship). Finally, horizontal angle is “[...] a function of the relation between the frontal plane of the image-producer³⁴ and the frontal plane of the represented participants” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996: 141). The two planes can be parallel, or they can form an angle which is different from zero. In the first case the image is frontal, in the second case it is oblique, and the degree of difference between frontal and oblique angle corresponds to the difference between involvement and detachment of the image producer with the represented participants.

Going back to our commercial, we can see that in snapshots 4.7-4.12 Doris’ gaze is on the audience, and the camera shows a preference for mid- and long-shots and an oblique-horizontal angle. Direct address is combined with social/impersonal distance and a low degree of involvement between the addresser and the viewers. Doris looks at the audience and gives advice in a verbal personal style, but he does so from the height of his status and expertise, which is acceptable in high-power distance societies. If we consider snapshots 4.10 and 4.11, we can see that Signor Mandelli is also depicted from an oblique horizontal angle. In other terms, Doris and Mandelli appear to belong to the same world, that of high status, from which the majority of the other viewers – the interactive participants sitting at home – seem to be excluded. It is interesting to note that the most relevant information to the current account (“da 0 a Massimo 5 euro al mese”, “15.000 sportelli convenzionati e i bancomat di tutte le banche italiane gratuiti”) is matched by a shot of a headless customer (snapshot 4.12). The standard customer, who might be concerned about costs and services, is unidentified, whereas the premium customer, the one who shares status with the bank, is meticulously defined.

³⁴ Obviously, the frontal plane of the image-producer is also that of the viewer.



Snapshot 4.13



Snapshot 4.14



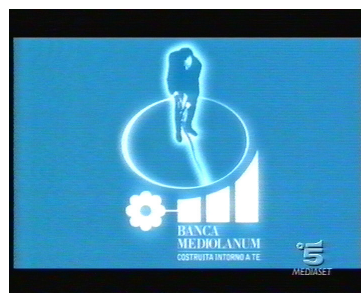
Snapshot 4.15



Snapshot 4.16



Snapshot 4.17



Snapshot 4.18

In the second half of the advert, the social distance between the world of the Doris-Mandelli couple and the world of the standard spectators becomes even more evident, both at a verbal and a visual level. “Entra in Banca Mediolanum” says Doris looking at the camera that offers his only close-up throughout the commercial (snapshot 4.13). Then Signor Mandelli comes out of one of the mirrors, entering Doris’s world, and the two shake hands while the camera shows a profile long-medium shot of them (snapshot 4.14). “Signor Mandelli, benvenuto nella mia banca” says Doris, with Signor Mandelli sitting in an armchair and replying: “La sua banca? Ma è costruita intorno a me”, while he sits in a red armchair, framed from an oblique angle (snapshot 4.15). Had Signor Mandelli been included in the *tu* address used by Doris at the beginning, it would be awkward to explain why now the two men shift to the formal *lei* (*Signor Mandelli, la sua banca*). The change to a formal verbal register confirms

what had been suggested by the pictures: Doris and Mandelli (and, of course, all those viewers sharing Mandelli's status symbols) are in a world which is separated from that of the mainstream viewers: the world of finance and high-status separated from the ordinary world with ordinary people, who need be advised – and possibly patronised – by experts in financial matters, and are attracted by promises of economic and social advancement.

In the light of this description, the very long shot of Doris and Mandelli being surrounded by mirrors (snapshot 4.16) takes on a meaning of seclusion rather than one of inclusion: Banca Mediolanum is built around Doris and Mandelli and their world, which is increasingly separated from the audience's world. The last two snapshots (4.17-4.18) appear to form an oxymoronic pattern with the verbal slogan: Doris traces a circle on the sand around himself, and the picture turns into Banca Mediolanum logo, while a voice-over – apparently Doris's – concludes "Banca Mediolanum: costruita intorno a te". The central collocation of the logo in the last snapshot seems to confirm the centrality of the institutional element to the advertising discourse of the company. In fact, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996: 206) have observed that "Centre" and "Margin" represent two of the dimensions around which visual composition can be structured, and that:

For something to be presented as Centre means that it is presented as the nucleus of the information on which all the other elements are in some sense subservient. The Margins are these ancillary, dependent elements.

Banca Mediolanum's influential use of visual devices in order to convey an idea of elitism becomes more evident if we look at the alternatives selected during the production of a similar message. The Forus Finanziamenti commercial presents a similar structure: a presenter who endorses the loans offered by the company, looking into the camera and addressing the audience with the informal personal pronoun *tu*:



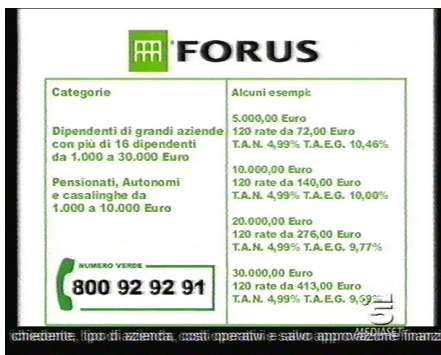
Snapshot 4.19

“Chiama il numero verde 800 92 92 91...”



Snapshot 4.20

“...e prendi un appuntamento in uno dei nostri uffici. Con Forus tu potrai richiedere un finanziamento personalizzato per realizzare qualsiasi tua esigenza.”



Snapshot 4.21

“Ad esempio, 5.000 euro tu li potrai restituire con 120 rate da 72 euro, oppure 20.000 euro tu li potrai restituire con 120 rate da 276 euro, in un periodo di tempo che va da 1 a 10 anni...”



Snapshot 4.22

“... e tutto questo chiamando il numero verde 800 92 92 91.”

As in the Banca Mediolanum commercial, the centrality of the company is undisputed: Forus is presented as the *Centre* of the advertising discourse (snapshot 4.19), the *New* (snapshot 4.20) and also the *Ideal* (snapshot 4.21).

In his analysis on western advertising, Myers (1994) has pointed out that many adverts exploit the vertical axis: what is placed in the top part is normally the promise, what is in the lower part is the fact. With respect to the same issue, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996: 193-194) have argued that:

If, in a visual composition, some of the constituent elements are placed in the upper part, and other different elements in the lower part of the picture space or page, then *what has been placed on the top is presented as the Ideal, what has been placed at the bottom as the Real. For something to be ideal means that it is presented as the idealized or generalized essence of the information, hence also as its, ostensibly, most salient part. The Real is then opposed to this* in that it presents more specific information [...], more ‘down-to-earth’ information [...], or more practical information [...](italics added).

Nevertheless, unlike Doris, the endorser of Forus is not a famous magnate and is collocated in the same world as the interactive participants. The size of frame increases from a medium shot (snapshot 4.20) to a close-up (snapshot 4.22); his horizontal plane is parallel to that of the viewer, and his gaze at the camera. Under these circumstances, the use of the *tu* address (*prendi un appuntamento, tu potrai richiedere, tua esigenza, tu li potrai restituire*) appears directed to bridging the gap between the company and the audience. Let us observe, in particular, the two phrases:

- 1) *tu* potrai richiedere un finanziamento personalizzato;
- 2) *tu* li potrai restituire.

In the transcription, I have underlined the pronoun *tu* in these two instances, to signal that its presence appears rather unusual. In Italian, a personal pronoun subject preceding a verb in a finite mode is normally omitted. In fact, the particular morphology of the language permits, in these cases, to infer the subject from the person ending of the verb. So, for example, in the verb phrase *mang-i*, the *-i* ending indicates that the only possible subject is *tu*, thus making its explicit repetition redundant. This implies that the overt indication of the subject gives rise to what, in linguistic terms, is defined as a *marked form*. The notion of *markedness* was first developed in Prague school phonology (Lyons 1993), but was subsequently extended to morphology and syntax. A marked form is a non-basic or less natural form, whereas

an unmarked form is a basic, default form. In Italian the *subject-explicit-repetition* marked form is used in cases in which one wants to put greater emphasis on the subject. So, for example, the marked phrase *tu mangi* (usually pronounced with a rising pitch on *tu*) is different from the unmarked *mangi*, insofar as the former implies that the one who is eating is you, as opposed to anyone else who might or might not be indicated in the rest of the sentence.

If we consider the use of the pronoun ‘tu’ in phrases 1) and 2) above, we must conclude that it either signals a redundancy or expresses a marked form. The former hypothesis might be supported by the fact that the *tu* is not made salient through a rise in the pitch; the latter by the fact that advertising is costly and not a single detail is redundant or random. I believe that the use of *tu* here is a marked form that serves the purpose of enhancing the inclusive strength of the commercial appeal. The repeated *tu* addresses all viewers without distinction but, at the same time, can make each viewer feel as if s/he were being addressed individually.

The presence of celebrity businessmen in BFPS advertising does not necessarily imply a status-oriented approach. An example is the British commercial for Premium Bonds³⁵, endorsed by Sir Alan Sugar, the British businessman founder of the electronics company *Amstrad*, and the presenter of the BBC series *The Apprentice*.



Snapshot 4.23



Snapshot 4.24

³⁵ A *premium bond* is a bond issued by the British government, with the promise to buy it back, at any time, for the original price. The government pays interest on the bond but, instead of the interest being paid into individual accounts, it is paid into a prize fund, from which a monthly lottery distributes tax-free prizes, or *premiums*, to selected bond-holders whose numbers are drawn.

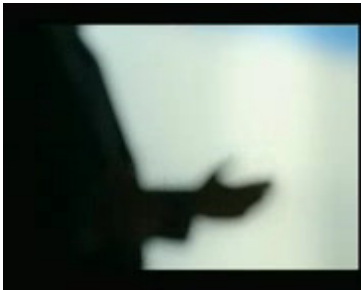
The commercial opens with the images of a horse race, a sport which is inextricably associated with high-status³⁶ and with gambling. Immediately afterwards, the camera offers a close up of Sir Sugar, who says:

I like winners, but I'm no gambler

His words connote the masculine cultural schemata underlying the advert, for which victory and success are important achievements. The disjunctive conjunction *but* links the first clause (*I like winners*) to the second one (*I am no gambler*). Here Sir Sugar is implying that victory requires financial wisdom, and is distinct from taking a gamble. He explicitly states his distance from betting, which might also imply detaching himself from the other connotation of horse racing, that of high status or elitism. Then he adds:

That's why I like Premium Bonds

The use of the conjunction *that's why* establishes a direct connection between winners and Premium Bonds. Premium Bonds are the bonds for winners like Sir Sugar, for people who do not gamble with their assets.



Snapshot 4.25



Snapshot 4.26

The use of Sir Sugar's profile shadow, in snapshot 4.25, is used just before the verbal correlation between winners and Premium Bonds is made. This picture, which is evidently reminiscent of the films of another knighted celebrity, Sir Alfred Hitchcock, is arguably used to create suspense before Premium Bonds are introduced into the discourse. Through the use of intertextuality (Kristeva 1986), i.e. the reference of one

³⁶In the UK, horse racing is traditionally referred to as *the sport of kings*. The country hosts the world's most famous race meeting, Royal Ascot, which is attended by the Royal Family.

text (in this case, the advert) to another text (in this case, Hitchcock's films), this image creates a sense of expectation that is similar to the pause in verbal language between the first sentence (*I like winners, but I'm no gambler*) and the second (*That's why I like Premium Bonds*). Then the camera cuts to Sir Sugar's close-up (snapshot 4.26), and he starts describing Premium Bonds:

Now, there's two one-million pound prizes every month, plus, there's still over a million other cash prizes. They're tax free, no risk; you can always have your money back. I believe in them.



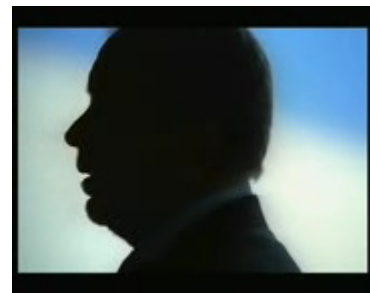
Snapshot 4.27



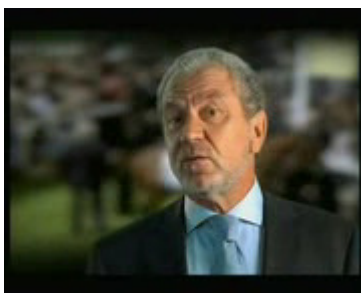
Snapshot 4.28



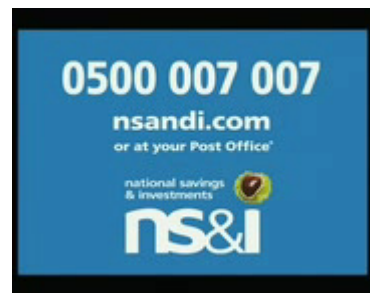
Snapshot 4.29



Snapshot 4.30



Snapshot 4.31



Snapshot 4.32

The size of frame changes across the advert (medium close-up in snapshot 4.26, medium shot in snapshot 4.27, close-up in snapshot 4.29), but the gaze stays on the audience, and the horizontal plane of Sir Sugar remains parallel to that of the viewer. This signals the audience is allowed into the world described, the world of winners.

The two close-ups are carefully used in combination with Sir Sugar's words about the safety (*They're tax free, no risk*) and trustworthiness (*I believe in them*) of Premium Bonds, which facilitates an increase in empathy while reassuring the audience. The insistence on the risk-free nature of Premium Bonds would seem to be an appeal more suitable for uncertainty-avoidant audiences, and rather unusual in low-UAI Britain. Indeed, Hofstede (2001: 1961) has pointed out that low-UAI cultures show a greater "[...] willingness to take unknown risks". I think this could be regarded as an example of value paradox (see 3.3.1): in a society where mortgages, re-mortgages, loans and risky investments are the norm, the commercial tries to appeal to people by stressing what everyone should like for themselves in an ideal world, a safe, profitable small saving.

Towards the end of the commercial, the strategy of intertextuality discussed above is used again in the same way. Sir Sugar Says:

That's why my fee... for this ad is going to Great Ormond Street

The verbal pause indicated by the dots in the transcription is paralleled by snapshot 4.30, showing a Hitchcock-like profile. This draws more attention and admiration to Sir Sugar, the winning and wise businessman who is also a benefactor, donating his fee to a famous children's hospital.

Loans.co.uk commercial avails itself of the presence of Phil Tufnell, a former English cricketer and, since 2003, a TV personality, after taking part in the show *I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here!* He is not a classical endorser, on the contrary, he confesses to be absolutely ignorant of loans:

Loans, I know *nothing* about loans. Though, what I do know is you should talk to specialists, like Rachel at Loans.co.uk.

The word *loans* is topicalised by positioning it at the beginning of the sentence: the audience is immediately informed of what the advert is about. On the other hand, Tufnell admits to knowing nothing about loans, and his statement is reinforced both by the stress put on the word *nothing* (italicised in the transcription), and by the assonance between 'know' and 'nothing'. The celebrity here is not an expert endorser: Tufnell is

famous, but about loans he knows nothing, like probably most of the audience at home. The purpose is to make his endorsement appear uninterested, a recommendation by a friend, and the pictures have exactly the same function:



Snapshot 4.33



Snapshot 4.34

The extreme close-ups given in snapshots 4.33-4.34, with Tufnell looking in the camera, match his verbal language with the purpose of establishing a direct, peer-to-peer relationship with spectators. Nevertheless, Tufnell affirms he knows something – and his knowledge is reinforced by the use of the *do* in the affirmative clause – that is to say, that the audience should talk to the specialists from Loans.co.uk before taking out a loan (*Though, what I do know is you should talk to specialists*). Tufnell is, by his own admission, ignorant of loans, but he claims the authority to advise an audience which may well know more than him about loans, and he tells them what they should be doing. Why? The only certain difference between Tufnell and the audience is that he is famous. In a masculine society, fame has a strong appeal in advertising, but is this appeal so strong as to lend credibility to someone who has admitted to having no specialist knowledge? It seems to me that here the status of celebrity is used as a power marker more than as masculine-oriented appeal. This appears much more evident if we compare Sir Sugar's language in the Premium Bonds commercial with that of Tufnell in Loans .co.uk ad:

- 1) *I* like winners, but *I*'m no gambler. That's why *I* like Premium Bonds.
- 2) Loans, *I* know nothing about loans. *Though, what I do know is you should talk to specialists.*

I have italicised the subjects of the three clauses making up the two periods considered. Borrowing the notion of communicative functions of language proposed by Roman Jakobson (1960), we could say that Sir Sugar's language is focused on the *emotive function*³⁷, because the use of the subject *I* in all three clauses (*I like winners, I'm no gambler, I like Premium Bonds*) makes his views clear on the topic of his own discourse. Also Tufnell's language initially seems to prioritise the emotive function as well (*I know nothing about loans, I do know*), but then it steers towards the *conative function*, by telling the addressees of his message what they should do (*you should talk to specialists*). Evidently, he could have been consistent, and could have said: "*I do know I should talk to a specialist*", but by an explicit choice he changes the focus of his discourse. He is not saying what he would do if he needed a loan, but he is patronising his audience, not by virtue of his greater knowledge of loans, but by virtue of his status as a celebrity.

The introduction of Rachel, an employee of Loans.co.uk, gives a face to the company, but its customers are not even given a name in the dialogue that follows between Rachel (R) and Phil Tufnell (P):

R: Hi Phil. That customer had been declined a loan in the past, and wanted to put his credit cards and bank loans into one loan with easy repayments. He thought that he was getting married, so, in all, he wanted to borrow 15.000 pounds.

P: Could you help him?

R: Yes. We do our best to find the most appropriate loan for thousands of customers every month.

P: It's sorted then.

R: Absolutely. And he gets a five-month break before he has to start making repayments.

P: Happy days!

³⁷ Roman Jakobson (1896-1982) proposed that language has six different functions, each oriented towards one specific element of communication: 1) *Emotive function*, oriented towards the addresser; 2) *Conative function*, oriented towards the addressee; 3) *Referential function*, oriented towards the context; 4) *Phatic function*, oriented towards the channel of communication; 5) *Metalingual function*, oriented towards the code; 6) *Poetic function*, oriented towards the message for its own sake. Guy Cook (2001: 134) writes that Jakobson's functions are very significant in the study of advertising, and in particular he focuses on the poetic function. "When this function is dominant" –he writes – "each linguistic unit is effective not only for its semantic and pragmatic meaning but also for the pattern it makes –or breaks –in its informal relationships (of grammar and sound) to other units" I have considered this particular use of the poetic function in the Italian Baci chocolates ad, analysed in chapter V of this study.

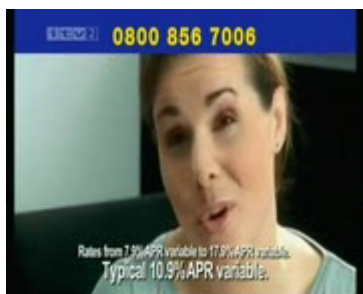
While the represented participants have a name (Phil, Rachel) and a face, the interactive participant is referred to as simply “that customer”. The use of the deictic *that* signals that Rachel is speaking about the person she has just finished talking to over the phone, but he is not referred to with a first name. The focus is on the company, as is also shown by the fact that the pronoun *we*, to refer to Loans.co.uk, is used by Rachel in combination with the superlative adjective *best* and the determiner *most* (“We do our best to find the most appropriate loan”).



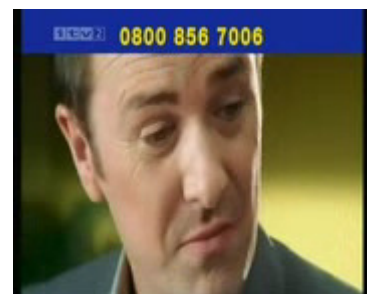
Snapshot 4.35



Snapshot 4.36



Snapshot 4.37



Snapshot 4.38



Snapshot 4.39



Snapshot 4.40



Snapshot 4.41



Snapshot 4.42

Also the images (Snapshots 4.35-4.41) seem to tell a different story: if we exclude snapshot 4.37, Rachel is always portrayed in medium-shots from an oblique angle, while Phil, though still appearing in close-ups, no longer looks in the camera, and the horizontal angle from which he is framed is also oblique. The audience's world is presented as distinct from that of the company, which just aims to a business relationship with its prospective customers, but also also from that of the endorser Tufnell. Through the combination of close-ups and oblique horizontal angle, he is presented as someone who purports to be a friend but actually belongs, or feels he belongs, to a different world, the sort of person who gives advice on how to take out a loan, but would not follow that advice himself.

In conclusion, the masculine-oriented use of celebrities in BFPS commercials also seems to involve the issue of power relationships between the addressers and the addressees of an advertising message. At the linguistic level, personal pronouns and prosodic features are used to create power connotations, whereas visually this purpose is achieved through the mutual representation and the interaction of actors and viewers. As we have seen, the verbal and visual semiotic modes do not always carry the same message: images are often used to convey messages which are left out from the verbal language.

4.2.2 BFPSs and Comparative Advertising

Comparative advertising is a specific form of sales promotion, where there is specific mention or presentation of competing brand(s) and a comparison is made or implied. Until the late 1990s, comparative advertising was illegal in most European countries. This situation ended on 6 October 1997 with the Directive 97/55/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council that declared that “[...] *comparative advertising, when it compares material, relevant, verifiable and representative features and is not*

*misleading, may be a legitimate means of informing consumers of their advantage[...]*³⁸.

From a cross-cultural marketing perspective, we have seen above (see 3.3.3) that *comparison* is a sub-category of the basic advertising form of *lesson*, and it is particularly appealing in societies combining masculinity with individualism.

As far as BFPS commercials are concerned, my Italian sub-corpus has yielded no examples of comparative advertising. As I will show in greater detail in the next sections of this chapter, this absence might be explained through the fact that the main focus of most Italian BFPS commercials does not seem to be the competitiveness of rates. The English sub-corpus has provided several examples, which are analysed below.

The Alliance & Leicester car loan commercial combines the comparison technique and the association transfer. A young, bold man recklessly reverses his old car into a courtyard, banging the bumper against the wall, and the woman sitting next to him – supposedly his partner – looks at him with resignation. (Snapshots 4.43-4.44). A female voice-over brands him “*One Jack-the Lad*” an informal term to refer to “*a conspicuously, self-assured, carefree and often brash young man*” (*Online Oxford English Dictionary*).



Snapshot 4.43



Snapshot 4.44

Then the plus-shaped logo of the company flies into the sky and turns into the rate offered on car loans (snapshot 4.45). The female voice-over continues: “*plus... one unbelievably low-loan rate of just 6.4% equals one very, very careful owner*”. The

³⁸http://eur-lex.europa.eu/smartapi/cgi/sga_doc?smartapi!celexapi!prod!CELEXnumdoc&lg=EN&numdoc=31997L0055&model=guichett

camera shows a brand-new orange car, carefully driven out of a parking space by the same Jack the Lad of the beginning, now better groomed and wiser (Snapshot 4.46).



Snapshot 4.45



Snapshot 4.46

The use of a female voice-over presents the commercial from a woman's perspective: a woman – who may well be the girl in the commercial – is telling other women that Alliance and Leicester's advantageous car loan rates have the potential to change even the brash lad into a careful man. The stress placed on the word *plus* in the voice-over – graphically matched by a plus-shaped logo – and the use of bright orange in snapshots 4.45-4.46 – Alliance and Leicester's corporate colour – mark the change in lifestyle, as well as drawing attention to the company.

The second half of the advert is more pronouncedly comparative. The voice-over says: "With a loan rate that leaves RBS, HSBC, Barclay's and Halifax standing". The camera crabs right showing parked cars, with names of other banks and the loan rates they offer – higher than those offered by Alliance and Leicester – printed on their windscreens (Snapshots 4.47-4.49).



Snapshot 4.47



Snapshot 4.48



Snapshot 4.49



Snapshot 4.50

So Alliance and Leicester gets its customers on the move with its loan rates, but leaves its competitors on the sidelines. The use of the idiom *to leave somebody standing*, which means to be much better than others, appears particular felicitous. In fact, the present participle *standing* combines with the images of the parked cars into a pun, with the other cars remaining unsold because of the high rates of the other banks. Under these circumstances, Alliance and Leicester can be defined as “A *real plus*” (snapshot 4.50).

In their commercial for personal loans, Alliance and Leicester focus exclusively on comparison. The presenter compares the low 5.9% loan-rate by Alliance and Leicester with the higher ones offered by Barclay’s, Natwest, and HSBC (snapshots 4.51-4.56).



Snapshot 4.51



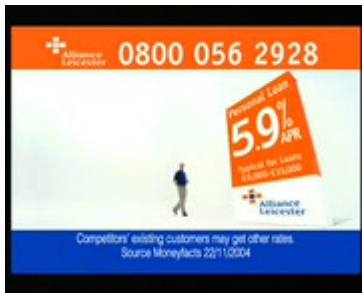
Snapshot 4.52



Snapshot 4.53



Snapshot 4.54



Snapshot 4.55



Snapshot 4.56

Let us have a look at what the presenter says:

If you're looking for a low-rate personal loan, A&L have set their rate at. Wait for it? 5.9%. Now, that's low, lower than Barclays, lower than Natwest, lower than... HSBC. If you've borrowed seven and half thousand pounds over five years, just look at what you could save". "Call A&L today on free phone 0800 056 2928. 5.9%. Now, that really is low.

The adjective *low* (and its comparative form) is the key-word. Less apparent is the fact that whereas the presentation of Alliance and Leicester's low rate is mostly in verbal nature, the higher rates it is compared with are exclusively visual. Barclays, Natwest and HSBC's rates are never defined as *high*, but they are shown as such metaphorically, through the use of the high graph-like columns on which they are printed (Snapshots 4.51-4.54). In low-context British society the spoken word is prioritised with respect to images and the data which is most relevant to the company advertised is verbal, whereas the information about competitors is mostly visual. At the end, non-verbal language is also used for Alliance and Leicester: the man moves from left (snapshot 4.55) to right (snapshot 4.56), from the Given to the New, from the domain of high loan rates to that of Alliance and Leicester, and he has to duck to fit into the camera that is zooming in on Alliance and Leicester low column used as a symbol of the low rate. Nevertheless, even now verbal language is used (*5.9%. Now, that really is low*) to avoid any possible misunderstanding.

Let us also observe that, for most of the advert, the size of the presenter is much reduced as compared to screen and the other elements in it. The purpose of the commercial is not to establish a personal relationship between the represented and the interactive participants, but to present facts through words and graphs, which appeal more to individualistic, task-oriented societies. The coding orientation used here is the

technological one, for which effectiveness is the priority, and any redundant element – including the presence of the presenter – reduces modality.

In conclusion, data and facts appear to be the priority in the BFPS comparative commercials found in the British sub-corpus. Verbal language is preferred to non-verbal modes for the conveyance of the relevant pieces of information, while images are more often used to denote and connote competitors.

4.2.3 A Matter of Style: Tropes and Schemes in BFPS Commercials

In classic rhetoric, the tropes and schemes fall under the canon of style, and they are collectively referred to as *figures of speech*. A *trope* is a word, phrase or image used in a way not intended by its normal signification; a *scheme* is a change in the standard word order, for the sake of effectiveness or beauty of expression. Advertising makes a great use of both verbal and visual stylistic devices. We have seen (3.3.3) that De Mooij (2005) has argued that the types of figures of speech used and their frequency vary across cultures. On the basis of my corpus analysis, I would also add that *the way* a specific figure of speech is used in advertising is culture-bound; namely, the same rhetorical device can be used in adverts across different cultures, but the execution will be different.

Metaphor is one of the most common tropes in language, and it is often used as an umbrella term to refer to many other figures of speech. In their influential work “*Metaphors We Live By*” (1980: 5), Lakoff and Johnson have written that “[...] *the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another*”. In semiotic terms, we might say with Daniel Chandler that a metaphor “[...] *involves one signified acting as a signifier referring to a different signified*”³⁹ The reader or the viewer is therefore called to make an imaginative leap to re-establish a connection between the literal and figurative levels of language. From the analysis of my British BFPS commercials presenting instances of metaphors, I would say that this

³⁹ <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem07.html>

leap often appears to be ‘assisted’. In fact, the verbal language frequently resorts to *similes*, which could be described as “[...] a form of metaphor in which the figurative status of the comparison is made explicit through the use of the word ‘as’ or ‘like’”⁴⁰, or to other devices that overtly point to the figurative nature of the discourse. Furthermore, a homologous relationship seems to exist between words and pictures, insofar as the latter visually depict the metaphors described verbally. In this way, the spoken language is illustrated by images, and, at the same time, it performs an explanatory function with regard to them, dissipating any doubt due to the use of visual metaphors.

In the Norton Finance commercial, the hassle of managing different financial services is metaphorically compared to walking a tight rope holding a number of boxes (Snapshots 4.57-4.60):



Snapshot 4.57



Snapshot 4.58



Snapshot 4.59



Snapshot 4.60

Verbal language translates into words what images show via a metaphor:

Do you find it a balancing act managing all these credit cards, store cards, bank loans, hire purchase, and other outgoings? Do you feel *as though you are walking a tight rope*, and may fall off at any time?

⁴⁰ <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem07.html>

I have used italics to highlight the two clauses under analysis. The first metaphor, *a balancing act*, is preceded by the verb phrase *Do you find*. Arguably, this has two main implications. Firstly, the use of a direct question implies a direct address to the viewer, because it requires someone to answer (Myers 1994). This means that the spectators are invited to consider what is being asked not in abstract terms, but in relation to their real lives. Secondly, the use of the verb *to find*, to mean “*to perceive on inspection or consideration*” (*Online Oxford English Dictionary*), makes it clear that managing credit cards, banks loans and other outgoings is not a *de facto* balancing act, but just feels like it. The second metaphor, *walking a tight rope*, is actually made into a simile through the use of the adverbial phrase *as though*. Viewers are provided with the link between the literal and figurative interpretation of the images: taking out a loan has nothing to do with walking a tight rope, but feels *as if* one were doing it. Verbal language clarifies verbal language’s own obscure parts and anchors the visuals. In turn, visuals illustrate verbal language throughout the commercial, as shown below:



Snapshot 4.61

“Well, a service Norton Finance can offer a *safety net*...



Snapshot 4.62

“...allowing you *to make a fresh start* by helping you to replace all your existing credit with one loan.”



Snapshot 4.63

“For example, instead of all those separate outgoings to numerous other companies, you could simply have *only one loan to deal with*. So ring now, our service is quick and it’s easy to apply. Don’t forget *with only one loan you’ll find it much easier to manage*.”



Snapshot 4.64



Snapshot 4.65

“Call us now. You can borrow any amount from 1,000 to 100,000 pounds for any purpose. *So if you are home don’t slip up...*”



Snapshot 4.66



Snapshot 4.67



Snapshot 4.68

“... call Norton Finance now on 0800 043 1030. Lines are open 24 hours a day.”

The *safety net* (snapshot 4.61) is the help given by Norton Finance *to replace all your existing debts with one loan*, thus permitting you *to make a fresh start* (snapshot 4.62). With one loan the *balancing act* becomes easier, like walking a tight rope holding just one box (snapshot 4.63) instead of plenty (snapshots 4.57-4.60). Verbal language even infiltrates visuals: in snapshot 4.59, each of the boxes carried by the man is identified with the name of the financial service it stands for (*credit cards, store cards, banks loans, hire purchase*), whereas in snapshots 4.63-4.67, the only box held by the man is marked with the brand name Norton.

The scrupulous care put in clarifying metaphors appears motivated within the specific cultural context of the UK. In a country where the default verbal style is direct and exact, and visual communication is univocal and explicit, exceedingly iconic language and/or complex visuals that bear no clear relationship to the product advertised are less immediate, and they might be perceived as annoying by viewers and thus neglected. Advertising is expensive, and no detail used in a commercial is perceived by ad people as superfluous. The use of illustrative metaphorical visuals paralleled by self-explicatory, descriptive spoken words here serves a double purpose: 1) it establishes a synergy between the verbal and visual modes, producing a clear, coherent message, whose effectiveness is enhanced; 2) it permits the delivery a relevant message in a playful, non institutional way, lowering the naturalistic visual modality, and portraying the management of different financial services as a circus number.

The metaphor of tight rope walking is also an interesting choice from another perspective. Norton Finance does not offer viewers a wider, safer path to walk on, but only a safety net and a chance to resume walking a tight rope with fewer things to

balance and a lesser risk of falling. By retaining the metaphor of tight rope walking Norton is promising to minimise, but not to completely remove the risks implicit in a loan. From a low-uncertainty avoidance perspective, risks fall within “[...] the uncertainty inherent in life [which] is relatively easily accepted and each day is taken as it comes.” (Hofstede 2001: 161). The appeal used here is therefore opposite to that observed in the Premium Bonds commercial (4.2.1)

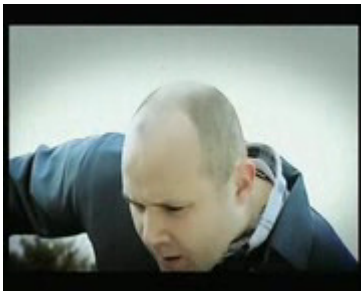
A similar metaphorical structure is found in the commercial for Greenhill Finance (snapshots 4.69-4.78):



Snapshot 4.69



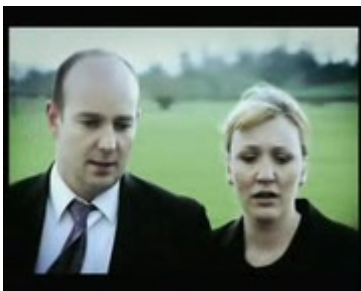
Snapshot 4.70



Snapshot 4.71



Snapshot 4.72



Snapshot 4.73



Snapshot 4.74



Snapshot 4.75



Snapshot 4.76

Here the attempt to obtain a loan is compared to the effort made by the represented participants to find their way, after getting lost in the middle of nowhere, under a foreboding sky (snapshots 4.69-4.76):

Annoying, isn't it? You're trying to *find a way to raise some money*, but *every path you take seems blocked*. Maybe it's your employment status, or possibly your low-credit rating. Or maybe just that you are retired.

As in the Norton Finance commercial, the verbal metaphor *to find a way* is immediately disambiguated by the following clause *to raise some money*. The second metaphor, *every path you take seems blocked*, is explained through visuals: the people depicted on the screen find their way barred by a fence, on which a notice is attached describing the reasons for which they cannot be granted a loan (self employed, low credit rating, retired, snapshots 4.72,4.74,4.76). It is made clear that the blocked path stands for the inaccessibility of a loan, due to the employment status, the low-credit rating, or just the fact that the people depicted are retired.



Snapshot 4.77



Snapshot 4.78

The second part of the advert presents the solution: Greenhill Finance, in the form of a finger-shaped sign (Snapshot 4.77), points the way to the represented participants:

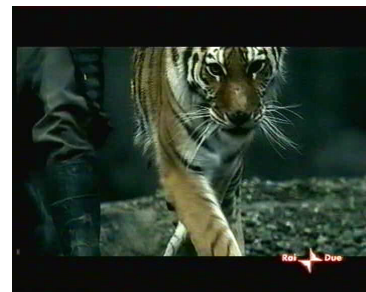
Whatever your circumstances, Greenhill Finance may be able to *point the way*. All Greenhill Finance ask is that you're a home owner, looking to borrow between £3,000 and £500, 000. Your loan can be for any purpose and repaid over a period of time to suit you. You may even want to consolidate your existing debts. There are no interviews and no sales person will call. So for that any-purpose-home-owner loan or re-mortgage see how Greenhill Finance can *show you the way*. Call Greenhill Finance now on 0800 916 4141, or apply online at greenhillfinance.co.uk.

The only metaphor present here is the one of *the way* (italicised in the transcription): the bulk of the language is informative of the terms and conditions of Greenhill Finance's offer. In the last snapshot (4.78), the logo of the company appears in a cleared sky, as the sun. Greenhill is like the light indicating the way to people gone astray in their search for a loan. Three quarters of the screen is taken up by a green hill, which is a manifest visual metaphor of the company's name. In its turn, the brand name Greenhill comes to be an example of what Bollettieri Bosinelli (1988) defines a *brand name metaphor*.

The straightforwardness of the metaphoric language of the British BFPS commercials becomes even more striking if we consider the complexity of the Capitalia commercial from the Italian sub-corpus.



Snapshot 4.79



Snapshot 4.80



Snapshot 4.81



Snapshot 4.82



Snapshot 4.83



Snapshot 4.84

In a barren land two formations of soldiers are ready to launch their offensive (snapshot 4.79-4.84)



Snapshot 4.85



Snapshot 4.86

They shout fiercely, and start running towards each other, while the camera cuts to long shots and aerial views of the two groups of soldiers (snapshots 4.85-4.86)



Snapshot 4.87



Snapshot 4.88



Snapshot 4.89



Snapshot 4.90



Snapshot 4.91



Snapshot 4.92



Snapshot 4.93



Snapshot 4.94

Just before engaging in the battle, the soldiers stop and look up. The pitch-dark sky starts clearing up, and the song *Let the Sunshine In*, from the 1970-hippie musical *Hair*, starts playing in the background. The soldiers start dancing to the music, and a male voice-over says: “*Tutto può cambiare. Basta immaginarlo*”. Then, the sun breaks in from behind the clouds and turns into the Capitalia logo, while the male voice-over concludes: “*Capitalia. Cambia tutto*”(snapshots 4.87-4.94).

The situation depicted has no relation whatsoever with banking; in fact, it is impossible to tell what the product advertised is until the very end of the commercial. Through the use of intertextuality (Kristeva 1986), the commercial seems to be informed by previous historical films (e.g. *Braveheart*), and also the editing technique cutting, with sudden change of shots, seems to be typical of the genre. The coding orientation seems to be the sensory one: the slow-motion actions of the represented participants, and the monochromatism, verging on a dark green hue, both appeal to the viewers’ emotional and perceptive spheres, and aim to trigger pathos in them. The purpose is not to focus on banking, but to portray an epic situation, and have the interactive participants feel involved. In this context, the Capitalia banking group is introduced through the metaphor of the sun. As the sun that breaks through the leaden sky to quench the blood-thirst of the warmongering soldiers, Capitalia banking group

arrives to change the rules in the world of banking services. The sun turning into the logo in snapshot 4.94 seems to reinforce this hypothesis.

The scant verbal language and the soundtrack are also part of the metaphoric discourse built upon images. The slogan says: “*Tutto può cambiare. Basta immaginarlo*”, that is, *Everything can change. You just need to imagine it*. The situation portrayed, with the two armies putting down their weapons and dancing in harmony, is referred to as dreamlike, and Capitalia is associated with this dream. In the slogan, *Capitalia. Cambia tutto*, the use of the verb *cambia*, which can be both transitive and intransitive, makes two different interpretations possible: *Capitalia changes everything* or *Everything changes with Capitalia*, that is, you can change things by choosing Capitalia.

The soundtrack *Let the Sunshine In* also has a double function: for those who understand English, it relates to the image of the sun breaking through the clouds, i.e. to the metaphor of Capitalia; for those who know the musical and associate it to the hippie culture, it carries a connotation of peace and love, the same peace and love which seems to fall onto the soldiers, the change for the better introduced by Capitalia into the world of banking services. Evidently, the full comprehension of the commercial involves so many semiotic resources and requires the knowledge of so many different references on part of the viewer that the approach is utterly indirect and only addressed to a limited audience. This commercial cannot be generally considered culture-bound: it is a sectarian one, aiming at very narrow discourse community, possibly mirroring a restricted commercial target. Thus, inaccessibility becomes exclusion for some categories of people, and a synonym for high power distance. This interpretation is supported by the vertical structure and the framing of the last picture, where Capitalia’s logo and brand name figure in the upper part of the screen. The banking group is collocated in the Ideal world and, therefore, given greater salience. Let us also notice that a clear dividing line separates the sky from the land where the soldiers are standing. Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996: 183) observe that:

The presence or absence of framing devices (realized by elements which create dividing lines, or by actual frame lines) disconnects or connects elements of the image, signifying that they belong or do not belong together in some sense.

The world of Capitalia is the world of light and possible change, but it is detached from the world of those who benefit from this change. In other terms, Capitalia is the top-down solution, the Ideal that rushes to the help of the Real, although the two domains remain clearly distinct from each other.

In the English BFPS samples, metaphors are used in a relevant and functional way, and possible visual metaphors are left inactive when they are not fundamental to the message delivery. A basic example is that offered by the commercial for the e-savings account by First Direct, a telephone- and internet-based commercial bank belonging to the HSBC group.



Snapshot 4.95



Snapshot 4.96



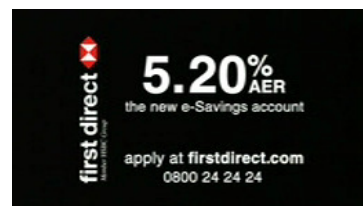
Snapshot 4.97



Snapshot 4.98



Snapshot 4.99



Snapshot 4.100

The camera cuts to a sequence of images showing clocks displaying the time 5:20 (Snapshots 4.95-4.100), while a male voice-over says: “*At First Direct.com you get an interest rate of 5.2 % with the new e-savings account*”. The voice-over supplies the viewers with immediate *anchorage* to correctly interpret the images. The concept of *anchorage* was developed by Roland Barthes, who wrote that verbal elements can

serve to *anchor* the preferred reading of a polysemic image, or, to say it in his words, “[...]to fix the floating chain of signifieds”(1977:39). Nevertheless, the voice-over does not activate the metaphor of *time as money*, which may be suggested by the visuals.

Metonymy is another common *topos* in advertising: it implies substituting a word or a phrase denoting an object, action, institution, etc. with a word or phrase denoting a property or something associated with it. An example in the British BFPS sub-corpus is offered by the Abbey National commercial (snapshots 4.101-4.108):



Snapshot 4.101



Snapshot 4.102



Snapshot 4.103



Snapshot 4.104



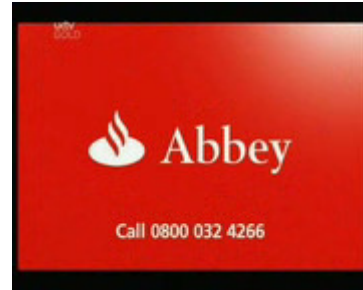
Snapshot 4.105



Snapshot 4.106



Snapshot 4.107



Snapshot 4.108

An Abbey *loan goes a long way*, however you spend it. And now our rates have gone down, it's even more affordable. So if you have something special to pay for, or you want to pay off what you owe elsewhere, call us for a decision in minutes. Our rate offer ends on the 31st of August So call now on 0800 032 4266. Abbey. More *ideas for your money*

In the transcription I have italicised the two phrases in which metonymy is used. The idiom *to go a long way* – to mean *to be successful* – is attributed to Abbey loans. In fact, it metonymically refers to one who takes out a loan with Abbey, whose achievements are represented – once again through the use of metonymies – in the visuals commented on by the voice-over.

An Abbey loan can turn into the trip of your dreams (snapshots 4.101-4.102), spare money for refurbishing your house (4.103-4.104), a new car (4.105-4.106) or whatever else you want, by just giving them a ring, while comfortably sitting in your favourite armchair (snapshot 4.107). Let us notice that the unifying element of all the situations described is the red colour (red suitcase, red paint, red garage, red armchair), which metonymically draws attention to Abbey, as it is the corporate colour. Evidently, both the verbal and the non-verbal language appear to focus not on how to obtain a loan, but rather on what to do with a loan which is presented as already granted. Abbey does not lend money; it provides inspiration and assistance in achieving your goals. Personal success and spirit of enterprise are the main appeals of the Abbey commercial, two elements which are highly valued in individualistic, masculine societies.

A similar metonymical structure is also found in the Italian commercials for Equilon and Fi.gen.pa., two loan companies. In the first one, the use of visual metonymy is accompanied by the use of puns and humour in verbal language.



Snapshot 4.109



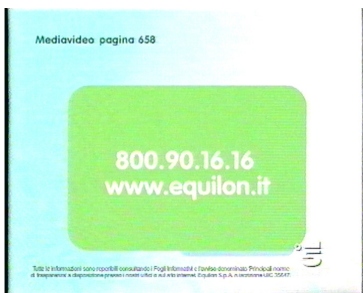
Snapshot 4.110



Snapshot 4.111



Snapshot 4.112



Snapshot 4.113



Snapshot 4.114



Snapshot 4.115



Snapshot 4.116

The commercial falls within the problem-solution subcategory. A man is struggling with his old Vespa, which appears to have broken down (snapshots 4.109-4.110). In the background, a funny jingle sung by *Elio e Le Storie Tese*, a band famous for their satirical songs, says: “*Come vorrei fare un giro assieme a te*” (literally, *I wish I could ride you*), giving the situation quite a humorous undertone⁴¹. The man tries to fix his

⁴¹ The verb phrase *fare un giro insieme a te* is actually a double entendre: it can be a humorous, slightly vulgar expression to mean to have a sexual intercourse with a person. The visuals disambiguate the verbal language showing a bike and activating only the literal meaning of the

Vespa (snapshot 4.111), but he eventually surrenders, sitting in distress next to it. Then a female voice-over says:

Qualcosa che va per il verso giusto c'è. Per un prestito chiama l'800 90 16 16, oppure vai su Equilon.it. Avrai un preventivo gratuito. Equilon. Ti prestiamo attenzione

I have italicised the phrases relevant to the linguistic analysis. First of all, it is to be noticed the use of *hyperbole*, a trope consisting in an exaggerated statement. In fact, the sentence *qualcosa che va per il verso giusto c'è* (lit. *There is something that goes the right way*) implies that everything is going wrong, although the only wrong thing shown in the pictures is the broken down Vespa. The statement is also reinforced by the use of *anastrophe*, a rhetorical scheme in which the normal order of words in a sentence is changed for emphatic effect. In standard language, the verb phrase *c'è* would be at the beginning of the sentence, whereas here it is displaced to the end, thus emphasising the fact that at least one thing is right. In other words, the use of this first sentence is to exaggerate the problem, in order to foreground the solution presented next, which is an Equilon loan. Noticeably, there is no mention of other *serious* reasons that may lie behind a loan (e.g. debts, or the purchase of a house): the only identified problem is the breakdown of a commodity product, a Vespa. Both the verbal language and the visuals describing the loan are quite generic: the phone number to call (*per un prestito chiama l'800 90 16 16*, snapshot 4.113), the web site to visit (*oppure vai su equilon.it*, snapshots 4.113-4.114), the fact that Equilon offers a free rough estimate (*avrà un preventivo gratuito*, snapshot 4.114). Similarly, there is no direct mention of money being lent, the slogan is *ti prestiamo attenzione* (snapshot 4.115), in which the verb *prestare* (= to lend) is used figuratively, to mean *we pay attention to you*. Obviously, the context in which the verb is used (the commercial for a loan company) suggests to a native (and attentive) Italian speaker that a *pun* is being used, and an indirect reference is being made to the literal meaning of the verb *prestare* and to the function of Equilon. The solution presented in the last snapshot (4.116) is not paralleled by verbal language, and applies to the only problem shown,

phrase. Nonetheless, the slang meaning of the phrase is clear to a native viewer, and contributes to the creation of the humorous undertone of the advert.

that of the broken down Vespa: the man looking distressed at the beginning is now smiling, on board his brand-new moped, supposedly one bought thanks to an Equilon loan. The figures of speech, irony and the catchphrase *ti prestiamo attenzione* serve three different purposes: 1) they permit the dissembling of the corporate, self-referential discourse, which is indirectly conveyed through the central collocation of the logo (snapshot 4.115), and through the double meaning of the first person plural of the verb *prestare*⁴²; 2) it avoids raising the levels of stress of the high-UAI Italian audience, presenting a loan as a simple answer to quite a trivial problem (a broken down Vespa that needs replacing); 3) it tries to establish an emotional bond with the audience that goes beyond money lending: what is being offered in the slogan is attention rather than money, a type of appeal which works well in collectivistic societies (Hofstede 2001).



Snapshot 4.117



Snapshot 4.118

In the Fi.gen.pa. commercial, two young couples are sitting at the table in a bar (snapshot 4.117), and one of the two men is busy showing off a series of alleged recent achievements (snapshot 4.118):

Finalmente ho comprato casa...un bellissimo appartamento...e...e...ti ho detto della macchina nuova? Ce la consegnano martedì, due giorni prima di partire. Lo sapevi, io e Anna ...andiamo in vacanza.

At this point, the other man smiles (snapshot 4.119), and asks: “Ah, anche voi?”, implying that he is also going on holiday. Then, the first man realises he cannot carry on making up stories, and shaking his head starts crying and shouts: “Nooooo” (snapshot 4.120).

⁴² The use of personal pronouns to convey ideas of power distance is thoroughly analysed in 4.2.6



Snapshot 119



Snapshot 120

As the problem is identified, the solution arrives: the second man takes out a pocket a Fi.gen.pa. card, and puts it on the table for his friend (snapshots 4.121-4.122).



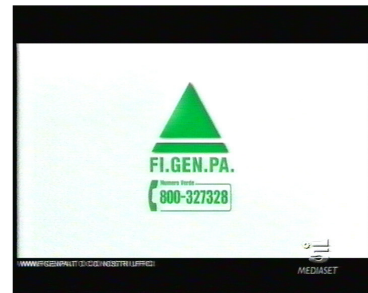
Snapshot 4.121



Snapshot 4.122



Snapshot 4.123



Snapshot 4.124

Background music starts, as the first man looks at the card and appears to have cheered up, and a male voice-over says:

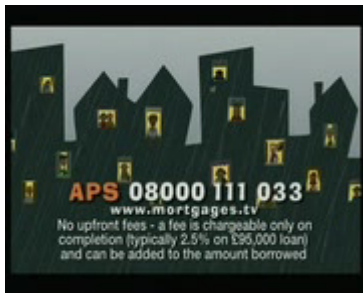
Su con la vita! Vuoi veramente realizzare i tuoi sogni? Scegli un prestito affidabile e trasparente, da 3.000 a 50.000, restituibili comodamente da 2 a 10 anni. Chiama l'800 327228, realizza i tuoi sogni. Con Fi.gen.pa è possibile.

On the whole, the commercial is influenced by the all-Italian experience of *Carosello*. Firstly, the structure appears clearly split into two parts, where the first one is a sketch without any immediate relation to the service advertised. Secondly, the man inventing stories appears to be a typical example of *macchietta*, a caricature more than a real

character, and quite frequently found in the Italian *Carosello*. His anxious way of speaking, characterised by clumsy pauses (indicated in the transcription by dots) between his run-on sentences, his plump and slightly old-fashioned aspect, and his quirks (e.g. the tongue sticking out when speaking, see snapshot 4.118), all build up the caricature. His partner, pulling funny faces showing surprise or resignation at her man's lies, also contributes to the overall irony of the situation depicted.

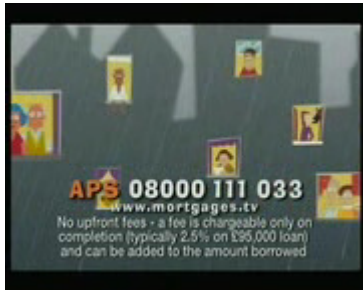
The loan is not referred to directly during the Fi.gen.pa. commercial, but through the use of cause-effect metonymy. In the first part, there is no mention at all of the loan, but only of the nice things one could do with the spare money available from it: buying a house (“Finalmente ho comprato casa...un bellissimo appartamento...”) or a new car (“...ti ho detto della macchina nuova? Ce la consegnano martedì”), and going on holiday (“Lo sapevi, io e Anna andiamo in vacanza”). In the second part, after the problem has been identified (i.e., the lack of money) and the solution provided (a Fi.gen.pa. loan), a voice-over recommends to call Fi.gen.pa not to borrow money, but to fulfil one's dreams (“Su con la vita! Vuoi veramente realizzare i tuoi sogni?, Realizza i tuoi sogni. Con Fi.gen.pa. è possibile”). The *double exophora* (Cook 2001) of the pronoun *you* is used to address both the represented participant and the interactive participants by exhorting them to cheer up and make their dreams come true with Fi.gen.pa. Noticeably, the only times the loan is actually named (“Scegli un prestito”), it is followed by two reassuring qualifying adjectives (“affidabile e trasparente”), and by an adverb (“comodamente”) that tend to present it as utterly reliable and comfortably repayable. As in the Equilon advert, the safety of the loan is evidently deemed a powerful appeal.

The *rhyme* can be defined as a linguistic scheme characterised by the consonance of the terminal sounds of two or more words or metrical lines. The APS Mortgages commercial resorts to a formula combining visuals which resemble a cartoon with spoken words that are inserted into the rhythmic structure of the nonsense rhyme and the narrative framework of the tale:



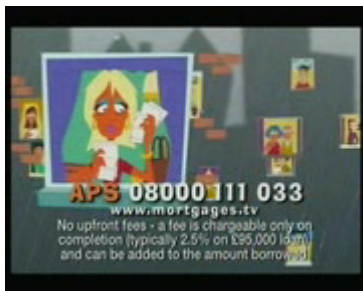
Snapshot 4.197

Look at all the people
just like you and me



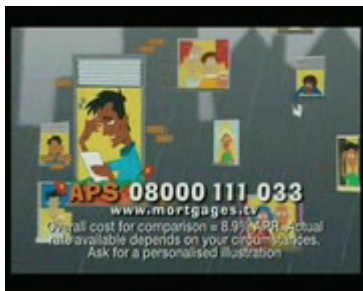
Snapshot 4.198

struggling with a heap of debt
wishing they were free.



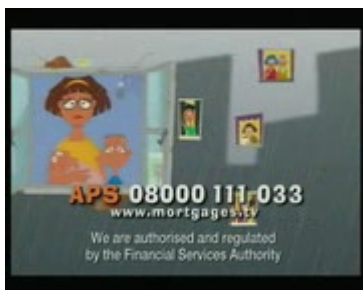
Snapshot 4.199

There's Miss Burton
she's always by the tills



Snapshot 4.200

Poor Mr. Thompson
look at him sob
he took out a car loan
then lost his job.



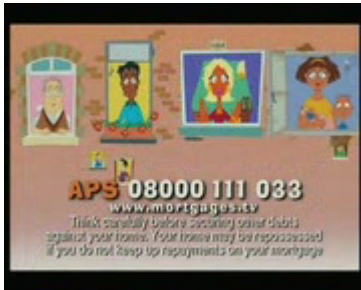
Snapshot 4.201

Here's Mrs. Robinson
she's feeling so glum
with a messy divorce
and no proof of income.



Snapshot 4.202

Then is George
loans all over the place
and all those repayments



Snapshot 4.203

But don't be so gloomy
it's not all a mess
we're here to help



Snapshot 4.204

Just pick up the phone
is all you have to do
and we could arrange



Snapshot 4.205

Here seven days a week
we're here today
taking care of your troubles



Snapshot 4.206

Moving you forwards
full steam ahead



Snapshot 4.207

so you can sleep easy
when you go to bed.

As in a storybook, images and text complement each other: Barthes (1977) has used the term *relay* to define this type of complementariness between verbal and visual language. At the beginning of this rhymed urban tale told by a female voice-over, we see the grey outline of a city under a rainy sky, where people fight with debts, bills to pay and mortgage arrears. Like every tale, also this one builds up to a climax through repetition; then the hero arrives, in the person of APS, the *deus ex machina* who solves the problems of Miss Burton, Mr. Thompson, Mrs. Robinson, and George. The sky clears up, matched by the improved mood of the characters in the tale. The happy ending is reached; everyone can go to bed and sleep under a serene sky, to wake up to find that APS is there to help them move forwards.

APS's choice to present a relevant message in the form of a rhymed tale fulfils the British audience's need for exact, task-oriented communication, and, at the same time, appeals to its curiosity for whatever is different and deviant with respect to the norm. Hofstede (2001: 160-161) has pointed out that low-UAI cultures appear "[...] less resistant to changes" and more open to new experiences, insofar as they consider what is different as curious and worth experiencing⁴³. Furthermore, the recourse to a lower naturalistic modality in visuals softens the very corporate perspective of the commercial, conveyed through the insistent use of *we* in the second part of the advert ("we're here to help", "we're called APS", "we could rearrange a mortgage for you", "we're here today taking care of your troubles")⁴⁴.

⁴³ With reference to the relation between uncertainty tolerance and the suspension of disbelief, De Mooij (2005) has noticed that it is not surprising if works like *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan* and the saga of *Harry Potter* have been written by British writers. In fact, low-UAI creates particularly favourable conditions for the development of a vivid imagination.

⁴⁴ For personal pronouns and power distance see 4.2.6

In conclusion, figures of speech have proved to be widely used in both the sub-corpora analysed in this study, although in different ways.

In the English samples, both verbal and visual metaphors are consistently anchored through explanatory verbal language, thus assuring a full comprehension of the message on part of the general audience. Conversely, in the Italian commercial metaphors appear more frequent at the visual level, and they can be so complex as to hinder the comprehension of the message or restrict it to specific groups of viewers.

Metonymy seems to be used in a more similar way across the two cultures, to refer to the positive effects of the loans rather than to the effort of taking it out.

Schemes, such as rhymes, are used in English ads combining a product-relevant core with a playful structure, a combination that appears suitable for uncertainty tolerant audiences.

4.2.4 Humour and BFPS Advertising

Humour is widely used in advertising. In a study on the impact of humour on advertising, Weinberger and Gulas (1992) showed that humour attracts attention, does not harm comprehension, and enhances likability, thus proving to be a powerful device for promoting products. On the other hand, they have observed that audience factors (e.g. gender, age and ethnic group) affect humour response, and this relates to De Mooij's statement (2005) that humour does not travel well. As we have seen above (3.3.3), she has argued that humour is present in all cultures, but it is more common in individualistic, uncertainty-tolerant ones. The analysis of the BFPS commercials from the British and Italian sub-corpus has shown that different forms of humour are used in the two cultures. Whereas the UK samples show a preference for satire and ludicrousness, the Italian commercials resort more often to the joke. In both cases, humour seems to serve the same purpose to reduce power distance between the BFPS advertised and the audience.

Barclays's commercials make use of humour to stress the bank's incessant efforts directed towards new solutions.

In the first sample, a young employee goes to his superior to show him the invention he has devised: a debit card that turns invisible (snapshots 4.125-4.130).



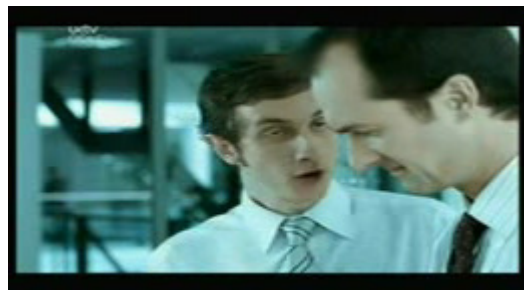
Snapshot 4.125



Snapshot 4.126



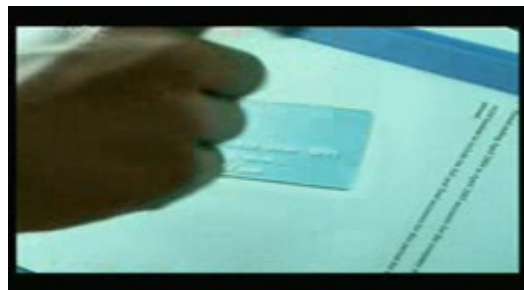
Snapshot 4.127



Snapshot 4.128



Snapshot 4.129



Snapshot 4.130

“It’s a debit card...that turns...invisible” – he says hesitantly –“It’s virtually theft-proof”. The superior is stunned. “It’s fantastic, you’re a genius, you’re a genius!” he screams, and they embrace, giggling and hopping (snapshots 4.131-4.132):



Snapshot 4.131

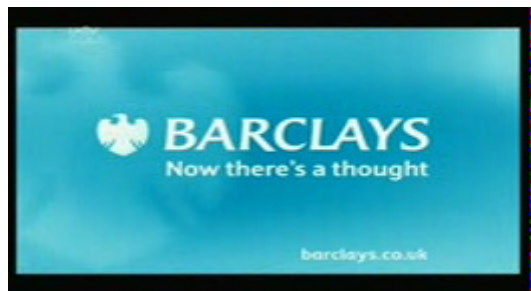


Snapshot 4.132

In so doing, they hit the table on which the invisible card was, and make it fall off. They both look down at the floor, and their smiles freeze on their faces as they realize the theft-proof invisible card is also invisible if you accidentally drop it! (snapshot 4.133). Then a male voice-over goes: “At Barclay’s we’re always looking for new ways to protect you from fraud. Barclays: now there’s a thought”, with stress being put on the verb phrase *there’s*, while the logo and the slogan show on the screen (snapshot 4.134).



Snapshot 4.133



Snapshot 4.134

Both visuals and language are very self-referential: the represented participants are Barclays’s employees, and the storyline revolves around the *geniality* of the young man who has invented an invisible card. On the other hand, the situation is ludicrous: the invisible card is accidentally dropped and becomes impossible to find. The use of humour counterbalances the self-indulgence of the language: not always are the new solutions sought by Barclays really effective, so the final slogan “*Now there’s a thought*” appears to have quite an ironic meaning, and to imply exactly the opposite of what it reads.

Interestingly, the ludicrous effect in the Barclay’s commercial above is also obtained through the portrayal of haptic-proxemic solutions (the two men hugging

each other tight) which are unacceptable in real life in low-contact British society. The unmodulated colour of the commercial, focusing on light blue, helps to lower the naturalistic modality of the commercial, together with the improbable solution of the invisible card. The choice of the hue is not random: blue has a low-power-distance connotation (Hodge, Kress 1988), but light blue is also the company's corporate colour.

In summary, the choice of an entertaining humorous sketch appears to mitigate the self-referential nature of the commercial, which is focused more on the bank than on the customers.

In the second sample, the thought process of one Barclay's employee becomes so far-reaching as to become irrelevant, with his invention of "a self-perpetuating energy ball which cleans without detergents or chemicals"! (snapshot 4.135-4.137)



Snapshot 4.135



Snapshot 4.136



Snapshot 4.137



Snapshot 4.138



Snapshot 4.139



Snapshot 4.140

The boss, who had been talking with another employee about her idea of boosting efficiency by encouraging employees to take a break together at lunch time, looks quite perplexed (snapshot 4.138) and says, hesitantly: “So...not much use...for banking...” The young man has to agree on the “the stuff at lunch-time tingly” being more relevant. An embarrassed silence falls, until the *inventor* suggests: “Anyone fancy a curry?”, and everybody agrees and gets moving, relieved. The situation here appears very culture-bound. In a masculine, low-uncertainty avoidance society, the young male employee assertively presents his bizarre invention to compete with his female colleague proposal. The irrelevance of his gadget in task-oriented society is embarrassing, but in a low-power distance society the boss carefully considers his response. The dots in his line (“So...not much use...for banking”) represent his hesitant pauses, aimed to show the inappropriateness of the self-perpetuating ball in a banking context, but without sounding bossy. The young man understands the message, and he takes everyone out of the embarrassment he has created by proposing a curry. On the whole, this sample, like the previous one, uses humour to play down the centrality of Barclays to the advertising discourse.

Humour is also used in the Italian commercial for SanPaolo Banco di Napoli. The represented participant is Barbara Portolano (snapshots 4.141-4.145), an employee from the Naples branch of the bank, and she is interviewed by voices-over that are those of *Gialappa's Band*, a popular trio of commentators of satirical programmes in Italy.



Snapshot 4.141



Snapshot 4.142



Snapshot 4.143



Snapshot 4.144



Snapshot 4.145

The humour, exclusively verbal, arises from the incongruity between the jocular questions of the trio (T) and the answers of the presenter-endorser (P):

T: (*Whistle at the girl*) Ah però, e lei chi è?

P: (*Smiling*) Barbara Portolano

T: E dove sfilava?

P: Al San Paolo e vivo a Napoli.

T: Oh, io avrei bisogno di un prestito.

P: Ah, il credito personale ti dà il prestito anche in 48 ore e puoi restituirlo con calma.

T: Veramente volevamo la sua maglietta in prestito.

P: (*Laughs*)

Voice-Over: San Paolo. Meno banca, più Barbara.

The situation appears quintessentially Italian. The trio's tone is that typical of the so-called *pappagallo*, the brash Italian man who makes advances towards girls in the street. Barbara poses in front of the camera like a model (snapshot 4.108), and they ask her: "*Dove sfila?*", that is to say, *where are your catwalk parades?* The question is irrelevant to the product advertised, but not to the way Barbara is portrayed. She plays along with trio, but her answer is relevant to her real job, that of a bank employee at SanPaolo Banco di Napoli. Then, the trio seem to ask relevant questions, saying they need a loan (*Ah, io avrei bisogno di un prestito*), but after Barbara has explained some conditions of San Paolo's loans, the pun on the word *prestito* is revealed, because they explain that what they really want to borrow is her top! The girl laughs, and while the camera focuses on her close-up a new voice-over delivers the slogan, *San Paolo. Meno banca, piu' Barbara*. The commercial exploits the Italian stereotype of the macho, the Don Juan who does not miss an occasion to hit on good-looking women. Hofstede (2001: 309, 312) observes that machismo is a typical characteristic of masculine cultures, and even if it is stronger in Latin America, it is also found in Mediterranean countries. In a masculine culture like the Italian one, the sketch presented in the San Paolo commercial slots into the quite common sub-category utilizing the female body as an object for the male gaze.⁴⁵

Apart from this, the commercial appears to be quite unusual in the context of Italian culture. The institutional discourse is played down and almost ridiculed by the trio teasing the employee Barbara, which suggests the exploitation of the *value paradox* by the advertisers of the value paradox. In a high-PDI reality, where the societal norm is that "powerful people should try to look as powerful as possible" (Hofstede 2001: 98), SanPaolo Banco Di Napoli adopts an opposite appeal, minimising the role of the bank through the use of humour. Let us notice, though, that unlike the Barclay's

⁴⁵ In an article dated 13 July 2007, the Financial Times has stigmatised the typically Italian "[...]incongruous use of women in advertising and on television.", defining it archaic and wondering how much it shows about Italian society and Italian women in particular (article accessed at <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/7d479772-2f56-11dc-b9b7-0000779fd2ac.html> on the 17 July 2007). From the perspective of this study, this criticism spurs an interesting question: if machismo is a feature of masculine societies, why is there such a huge difference in the use of the female body in British and Italian cultures, two societies which are both masculine and have both experienced feminist movements? I think a possible answer has to be found in the difference in individualism between the two countries. In the UK the primary correlating Hofstede's dimension is individualism, with individual rights being paramount in the society (see also http://www.cyborlink.com/besite/united_kingdom.htm). Each individual is entitled to respect as such, without gender issues being involved.

commercials, here the expertise of the bank is not questioned. Barbara's discourse remains relevant to banking throughout the advert, avoiding ambiguity. The novelty of the ad lies in the approach of the bank to its audience, which is very informal, as confirmed by the slogan *SanPaolo. Meno Banca, più Barbara*. San Paolo is differentiating itself from the banking world by diminishing its institutional role and enhancing its human side. Being less of a bank is presented as a positive feature, probably based on the belief that the intended audience has a generally negative perception of banks. Banca San Paolo is not a faceless entity, it has the friendly face of Barbara, and that is its advantage. As we have argued, in a culture that can be said to verge on collectivism, establishing a bond with the audience is more important than presenting flowcharts and numbers.

Images greatly contribute to this: Barbara's smiley face is shown from a frontal perspective, looking at us, and in the end the camera lingers on an extra-close-up of her face (snapshot4.112). Banca San Paolo is addressing its audience directly; it is trying to reduce social distance, and to invite viewers to identify with Barbara, who, though being a San Paolo employee, is dissociated from the bank by the slogan "Meno banca, piu' Barbara".

Barbara's Neapolitan accent, I would argue, also serves the purpose of divesting San Paolo of its official clothes, and reducing social distance. Indeed, the Neapolitan accent is nationally associated with the stereotype of the friendly, easy-going Neapolitan character.⁴⁶ At the same time, it indirectly draws attention to the bank, established in 2003 after the banking group San Paolo IMI S.p.a. had taken over Banco di Napoli.

The approach is the same also in the commercial advertising SanPaolo Banco di Napoli's consulting services, where the endorser is a Neapolitan male employee, Domenico Caliendo, and the slogan "San Paolo. Meno banca, più Domenico" (snapshots 4.146-4.150).

⁴⁶ It is interesting to compare this feature with the strong Lombard accent of Ennio Doris in the Mediolanum commercial, which seems more suitable to connote a corporate culture.



Snapshot 4.146



Snapshot 4.147



Snapshot 4.148



Snapshot 4.149



Snapshot 4.150

Nevertheless, if we look at the last snapshot (4.150) we notice two remarkable differences with respect to the last shot of the commercial with Barbara (4.145): 1) the camera lingers on a long shot of Domenico; 2) the brand name appears on the right-hand side of the screen. It seems that in the commercial addressed to companies, the banking group wants to restore the social distance typical of a business relationship, and to foreground itself rather than its human resources as the New, by putting its logo on the right.

In the Christmas version (snapshots 4.151-4.155), a number of employees wish a merry Christmas to the audience striking up *Silent Night*, while a voice-over adapts the slogan to the season (“Meno banca, più auguri a tutti”). Here the logo appears at the bottom of the screen (snapshot 4.155), thus involving what Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996: 193) define as “the information value of top and bottom” (see 4.2.1).



Snapshot 151



Snapshot 152



Snapshot 153



Snapshot 154



Snapshot 155

Here, the banking group is presented as the *Real* and the less salient part of the visuals. In a commercial aimed at wishing Merry Christmas to the audience, the purpose is to create an emotional bond, thus the singing people take up the most of the *Ideal*, more-salient, upper part of the screen.

In conclusion, a basic distinction in the use of humour seems to emerge from the analysis of the BFPS adverts in the sub-corpora.

In the English samples, laughter is provoked by *ludicrousness* that directly involves the institutional subject. The dedication of the employees of Barclays is ridiculed in that it goes so far as to give rise to gimmicky solutions that are irrelevant to banking. An advertising formula based on banks poking fun at themselves is viable in low-PDI uncertainty-tolerant cultures, but might be not well received in culturally different contexts.

This is the case with the Italian commercials. In the SanPaolo ads, the employees Barbara and Domenico are the target of the *jokes* made by the irreverent trio. Nonetheless, they are laughed at as private personas rather than as representatives of the banking group. The fact they are identified through their first names not only enhances the bonding with the interactive participants, but also makes their being teased a private matter that does not involve the SanPaolo group. Personal and professional dimensions in the ad are kept distinct: Barbara and Domenico can be made fun of, but the reliability of the bank is not at stake in a high-PDI uncertainty avoidance society.

4.2.5 Special Effect and BFPS Commercials

Generally speaking, special effects in advertising permit the advertiser to show the product in action (De Mooij 2005). Computer Aided Design (CAD) has hugely enhanced the creative possibilities for advertising practitioners, and nowadays virtually everything, from a potato to a sodium molecule, can speak for itself in an advert.

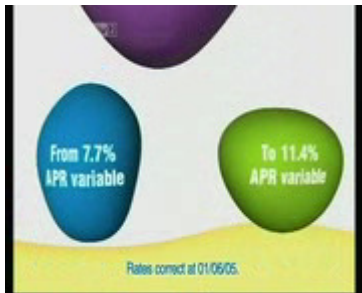
In the specific case of BFPS commercials, the Italian sub-corpus presents no instances of commercials using special effects. Conversely, the English sub-corpus offers three cases, which appear to follow a single characteristic pattern. In fact, all three combine special effects with the lesson format, and in all three special effects aim to present the service/product as handy and user-friendly.



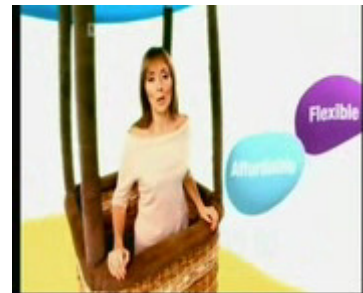
Snapshot 4.156



Snapshot 4.157



Snapshot 4.158



Snapshot 4.159



Snapshot 4.160



Snapshot 4.161

In the First Plus commercial (snapshots 4.156-4.161), digitally designed, coloured balloons float on the screen and carry relevant information (snapshots 4.157-4.160), while the presenter says:

By calling First Plus on 0800 479 80 80, that *flexible, affordable loan* is within your reach. You **can borrow anything** from 5,000 pounds to 100,000 pounds, and **enjoy a competitive rate**. It's *easy*, a First Plus loan **can set you free** from *annoying credit*, and **help you** on your way to a *brighter future*. And as long as you're a home owner, the *friendly people at First Plus* **can help** even if you've no equity. So **call them** today on 0800 479 80 80. First Plus. Because **life is for living**

In the transcription, I have italicised the adjective phrases, and put the verb phrases in boldface. This helps highlight the main message in the text: borrowing money is annoying, but friendly people at First Plus can set you free from this hassle, and help you take out a flexible, affordable loan to enjoy life. Noticeably, the concept of *friendliness* shown here appears different from that found in some of the Italian BFPS commercials. The Italian companies purported to be *friends* more than *user-friendly product/service providers*. For example, Equilon claimed to pay attention to us, and San Paolo had the reassuring face of Barbara and Domenico (see 4.2.3 and 4.2.4). In the First Plus commercial, friendliness means easy accessibility to a “flexible, affordable loan”. The main appeal here is to the hedonism of the high-IDV British society, the desire to “[...] live with wholesome, carefree enjoyment (Hofstede 2001:

224), as suggested by the slogan “life is for living”. *Lightness* seems to be the thread of the advert, metaphorically represented by the balloons and the hot-air balloon in which the presenter flies away. First Plus is the company that relieves the hassle of obtaining credit, and makes life easier.



Snapshot 4.162



Snapshot 4.163



Snapshot 4.164

In the Lombard Direct commercial (snapshots 4.162-4.164), special effects take over from a human presence, and the presenter is an animated phone which addresses the audience saying:

Hello! When you want a personal loan, you can just go to your bank. But why not see if it's easier, faster, and cheaper to call Lombard Direct on 0800 215000? Your rate is based on your circumstances and loan amount. Our typical rate is just 6.4% APR. For an unsecured personal loan of up to 25,000 pounds call Lombard Direct on 08002 15000 or apply online at LombardDirect.com.

The way to get a loan with Lombard Direct is defined as “easier, faster and cheaper” than going to a bank, so here the focus is also on the hassle-free service being offered. Furthermore, the decrease in modality through the use of an animated phone permits the delivery of a relevant message without imposing the presence of a corporate presenter on the audience.

The Tesco Loans commercial (snapshots 4.165-4.169) combines special effects with irony. The concern of taking out a mortgage is replaced here by that of a supermarket trolley, which, after finding out that Tesco has started doing loans, fears that it will be made redundant together with its colleagues!



Snapshot 4.165



Snapshot 4.166



Snapshot 4.167



Snapshot 4.168



Snapshot 4.169

“We’re finished, it’s all over” – says the trolley in snapshot 4.167, on arriving out of breath and breaking the news that “They’re doing loans! Think about it: a loan is just a couple of forms, you don’t need a trolley to carry a couple of forms!” One of the other trolleys in Snapshots 4.166 tries to reassure it: “Come on, who’s going to get a loan from a supermarket?” and the other one says “At 6.5% typical APR?” implying through its intonation that probably many people will. The message is that Tesco loan rates are very advantageous, but Tesco is not speaking about itself, it is being spoken about by its trolleys, which are afraid that Tesco will stop its main business as a supermarket.

In conclusion, the special effects in the samples analysed in this section appear to combine with a verbal language meant to highlight the hassle-free nature of the product/service advertised. Such an objective is pursued either through the use of

relevant adjectives and verbs with a strongly positive semantic scope (e.g. free, easy, competitive, enjoy, help) or through irony intended to ridicule concerns over the item advertised.

4.2.6. Between Power Distance and Self-Assertion: Personal Pronouns in BFPS Advertising

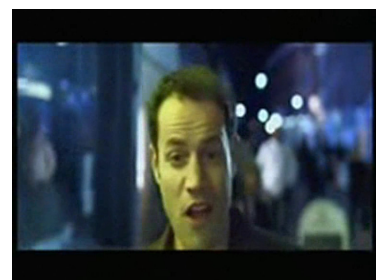
The use of pronouns is one of the most distinctive features of advertising. Ads use all three persons, each of which expresses a particular point of view about oneself and about one's relationship with others. In the case of BFPS commercials, personal pronouns appear to express mainly ideas of self-assertion and/or power distance. This feature is more frequently noticed in the British than in the Italian sub-corpus, possibly as a consequence of the necessity to express the subject in English and the tendency to omit it in Italian.

In the Natwest commercial for banking services, a young man compares a range of efficient services with the shortcomings of his unnamed bank (snapshots 4.170-4.175):

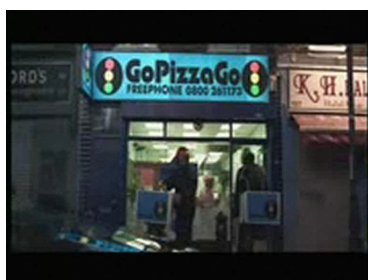
My shop? It's round the clock. My bank? Clocked off. My take-away? It's delivered. My branch number? Taken away. My barber? A person. My bank? A robot.



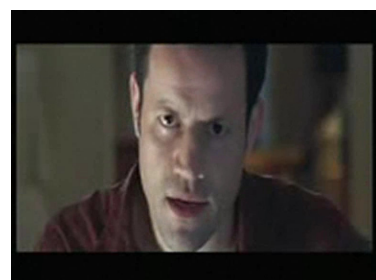
Snapshot 4.170



Snapshot 4.171



Snapshot 4.172



Snapshot 4.173



Snapshot 4.174



Snapshot 4.175

Evidently, the advert is very I-oriented, with the possessive adjective *my* (italicised in the transcription) modifying every noun. The comparison here is not between banks, but between the presenter's bank on one side, and his shop, his take-away pizzeria and his barber's on the other. Everything revolves around the *I*-subject of the commercial. Verbally, the advert relies on the polysemy of the colloquialisms used by the young man, ("shop round the clock" / "bank clocked off"; "takeaway delivered / branch number taken away"), but also on the use of alliteration ("barber a person" / "bank a robot"), to establish a contrast between efficiency and inefficiency. The main aim is not to provide facts, but to raise identification in the audience. The frequent close-ups of the presenter (snapshots 4.171, 4.173 and 4.175) are meant to reduce the gap between him and the interactive participants, who are supposed to share his *I*-identity. I want to point out that there is not an idea of group being conveyed here. The presenter is not endorsing a product/service on behalf of the company or acting as a testimonial on behalf of a group of users. He is speaking about himself as an individual, and the viewer is called to identify with him as such.

The increasing tempo of the jingle accompanying the commercial marks the dividing line between the first and the second half of it:



Snapshot 4.176



Snapshot 4.177



Snapshot 4.178



Snapshot 4.179

The second half is fact-based: billboards with the Natwest logo on them (snapshots 4.176-4.178) show information that is relevant to the bank (“Phones answered 24/7”, “Direct line to your branch”, “More people in branch”) and indirectly respond to the complaints of the man in the first half. In the closure of the commercial (snapshot 4.179) a back view of the man walking into Natwest bank is shown. Whereas in the first half (snapshot 4.170) he walked towards us, now he’s turning his back to us and saying: “My patience? Exhausted. My bank? Switched”. Also here, he is not endorsing Natwest (which is referred to only via the visuals), but he is making a personal decision, which may or may not be shared by the audience he leaves behind. Triggering identification is no longer needed: the choice of “another way” offered by the Natwest’s slogan (4.179) is an individual one, to be made on the basis of facts.

The highly individualistic appeal of Natwest commercials is confirmed by the other two samples found in the British sub-corpus, that for Natwest’s Student’s Railcard (1), and the one for Natwest mortgages(2):

(1) (Student-presenter speaks about his unnamed bank): “My bank has done extensive research into today’s student profile and ...” (Cuts to one of the unnamed bank managers, who speaks mocking what he believes to be today’s student jargon): “Me and my posse have been laying down some ripping sounds, which you can ... mash up”. [...] (Cuts back to student presenter): “My bank is offering a free CD” [...].

(2) (*Man at the funfair with his family*): “My bank gave me a great mortgage deal two years ago. It started low, but it has shot up. And they think I can’t move because it’s too much hassle. My bank is having a laugh”. (*Voice-over representing Natwest*): “There is another way. If your mortgage deal with Halifax, Abbey or Cheltenham & Gloucester is ending, talk to Natwest. We’ll lower your new monthly repayments or give you a hundred pounds. We’ll also give you a decision in minutes. No wonder we’ve been voted best bank for mortgages on record 11 times”

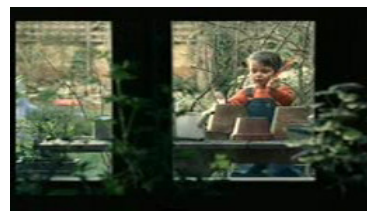
In the transcription, I have italicised the personal pronouns and adjectives. Evidently, the first person pronouns (“I”, “me”, “we”) and adjectives (“my”) are the most recurrent, with *I* conveying an individual identity and *we* what I would define a *corporate identity*. From a social semiotics perspective, the use of a *corporate we* suggests power distance and social solidarity.

In their work *Social Semiotics* (1988: 126), Hodge and Kress have argued that “[...] the first person singular pronoun is appropriate to express solidarity, while the first person plural pronoun is appropriate to express distance, of power, gender, or age.” The use of the *corporate we* in the Natwest advert is therefore a marker of power distance between the bank and its users, a feature that appears to clash with the general low-power distance of the UK measured by Hofstede’s PDI dimension.

The same *corporate we* is found in the commercial for the *Note for Note Programme*⁴⁷ by Lloyds TSB (snapshots 4.180-4.190).



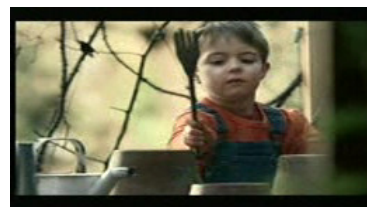
Snapshot 4.180



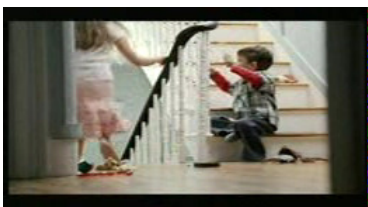
Snapshot 4.181



Snapshot 4.182



Snapshot 4.183

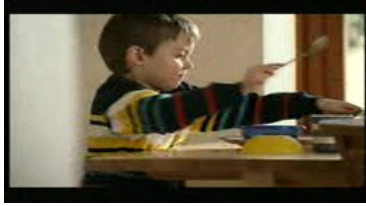


Snapshot 4.184



Snapshot 4.185

⁴⁷ A 2005-government-endorsed initiative, aimed at stimulating more interest among the nation's young people by introducing them to music subsidised by the scheme. To generate funds for the programme, Lloyds invited its personal current account customers to round down the pennies in their accounts once a month. The Bank committed itself to match these customer donations to the tune of £10 million over the next three years.



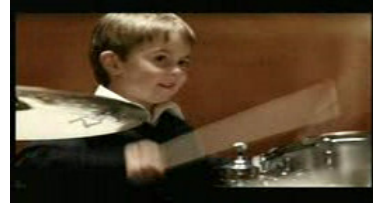
Snapshot 4.186



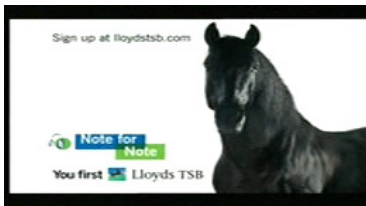
Snapshot 4.187



Snapshot 4.188



Snapshot 4.189



Snapshot 4.190

In describing how the *Note for Note* scheme works, a female voice-over says: “*You* donate *your* spare pennies from *your* account each month, and *we*’ll donate to Note-for-Note, music-for-schools programme. Just one of the ways *we*’re working to put *you* first”.

In the transcription I have again italicised personal pronouns and adjectives. If we look at the excerpt from a *Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)* perspective (Fairclough 2003), we can say that *you* referring to the customer and *we* referring to the bank are the two *social actors* in the *processes* described, that is, the two living participants involved in the clauses that make up the commercial text. In the last sentence (“Just one of the ways *we*’re working to put *you* first”) *we* and *you* are in a relationship whereby the former is the initiator of the action affecting the latter. In terms of CDA, we can say that here *we* represents the *Actor* (with a capital A) of the *material process* described (i.e. the action of working to put *you* first), whereas *you* is the *Beneficiary* of the same process. This implies that while *we*, the bank, have an active role, *you*, the customer, has a passive role in the text considered.

Now, Fairclough (2003: 2) has noted that “[...] language is an irreducible part of social life, dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life”, and it

constructs and is constructed by social relations. In his definition, *discourse* is a way of constituting knowledge about a particular topic at a historical moment through language in speech and text or images and sounds, or representations in postures, movements and structures which shape or are shaped by institutions, situations and structures .

From this perspective, the syntactic relationship between two or more social actors in a text becomes indicative of their mutual relationship in the world. In the Lloyds TSB commercial, presenting *you* as the Beneficiary of the material process of which *we* is the Actor is the same as asserting the social superiority of the bank over its customers, and is an expression power distance. Thus, the use of the slogan, “Put you first”, which might appear to play down the corporate attitude of the advert, in fact reinforces it, as do the visuals.

Vignettes are used here: individual sketches without continuity in the action. Looking at the first ten snapshots (4.180-4.189), we can notice that the frontal plane of the represented participant (the young boy) almost always diverges from that of the camera, and we have seen above (4.2.1) that a horizontal angle different from zero indicates detachment from whom or what is portrayed. Here the *you*-customer is depicted as the only represented participant, but his world is detached from that of the maker of the pictures, the *we*-bank. The last snapshot (4.190) seems to confirm the position I have taken here: the full-frontal picture of the horse logo of Lloyds bank suggests as much of a corporate perspective as the use of the personal pronoun *we*.

How linguistic choices in commercials can convey a customer-oriented or corporate-oriented attitude is more evident if we look at the possible alternatives to the use of what I have defined as the *corporate we*. An example is offered by a HSBC commercial analysed below (snapshot 4.191-4.200)



Snapshot 191



Snapshot 192

A male voice-over says:

Many Chinese believe the number 8 brings prosperity, that's why in Hong Kong people would pay millions of dollars for a number plate. At HSBC we also believe that 8 can bring you prosperity, because now you can earn 8% on regular saving. 8% on your savings, a great reason to bank with HSBC

In the transcription, I have italicised the phrases relevant to the analysis. The first pronoun we come across here is *they*: the voice-over speaks about the many Chinese who believe that eight is a lucky number, and of the people of Hong Kong, prepared to spend millions for a number plate. Both Myers (1994: 87) and Cook (2001: 157) have observed that *they* is often used to refer to the “[...] great undistinguished mass that fails to use the product” and is therefore “observed conspiratorially by ‘you’ and ‘I [...]’”. In the HSBC commercial, the first sentence would seem to suggest that the voice-over is distancing himself, and the bank on behalf of which he speaks, from Chinese superstitious misconceptions surrounding the number 8. Nevertheless, the second sentence tells us this is not the case: the voice-over says that *also* people at HSBC believe that 8 is a prosperous number (“At HSBC we also believe that 8 can bring you prosperity”), thus creating a bridge between *we* and *they*.

The *we* used here to refer to HSBC is associated with the verb *believe*: in terms of CDA (Fairclough 2003), we could say that HSBC is presented as the *Experiencer* (initiator) of a *Phenomenon* (the action of thinking) within the context of a *mental process* (“we believe that 8 can bring you prosperity”). In the case of Natwest mortgages and Lloyds TSB, *we* represented the Actor of a material process (the actions of lowering monthly repayments, of giving a decision in minutes, of helping find a mortgage, and of donating to the *Note-for-Note* programme) affecting more or

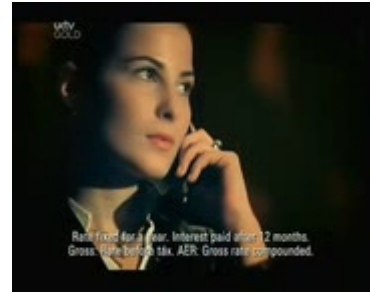
less directly a *Beneficiary* (the *you* standing for the customer). In the material processes described in HSBC (“to earn 8% on regular saving” and “to bank with HSBC”), either the Actor is the customer (“*you* can earn 8% on regular savings”), or it is unexpressed /impersonal (“8% on your savings, a great reason to bank with HSBC”). The process initiated by HSBC is mental, not material, that is to say it does not directly affect customers. The voice-over is simply stating that at HSBC people share a belief with the millenary Chinese culture, namely, that the number eight can bring you prosperity. Noticeably, the subject of the action of *bringing prosperity* is a number, an abstract entity that cannot be a social actor. Furthermore, the modal *can* is used to modify the verb *bring*: number 8 will bring you prosperity provided you want it to. Thus, the use of *we* in the HSBC commercial cannot be defined corporate.

Similarly, the images also appear customer oriented: the Asian man, representing the worldwide clientele of this culture-sensitive banking group⁴⁸, is the most frequently framed, always from a frontal angle (snapshots 4.193, 4.195, 4.197 and 4.198) and most often in close ups (snapshots 4.195 and 4.198). This calls for the audience to identify with him, a winner who appeals to a high-MAS culture, and also shows the bank as close to its customers. It is noticeable that the only presence of the bank throughout the commercial might be the beautiful woman speaking on the mobile phone and looking away from the camera. HSBC’s approach appears to be indirect and soft-selling, quite different from the fact-based, task-oriented Anglo-Saxon model. Also the final snapshot (4.200) displays a small logo of the company in the bottom-right corner, and is dominated by the central position of the number 8, preceded by the verb “earn” and followed by the percentage sign.

⁴⁸ The use of an Asian participant is also reminiscent of the origins of the bank, first established in Honk Kong (HSBC stands for The Honk Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation).



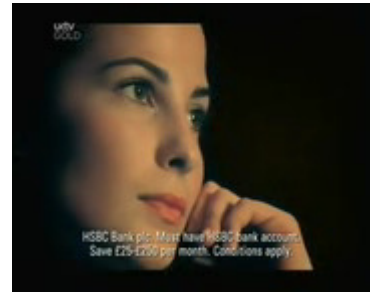
Snapshot 4.193



Snapshot 4.194



Snapshot 4.195



Snapshot 4.196



Snapshot 4.197



Snapshot 4.198



Snapshot 4.199



Snapshot 4.200

HSBC's indirect style is even more evident in the samples advertising the web site yourpointofview.com, which is basically a blog maintained by HSBC where users are invited to post opinions about varied topics, most of the time not related to banking:

yourpointofview.com

We at HSBC, the world's local bank, strongly believe in the potential of difference. In a world of increasing sameness, we believe it's important to value different points of view and there should be somewhere everyone can air these views and see the views of others.

Log in → Register →

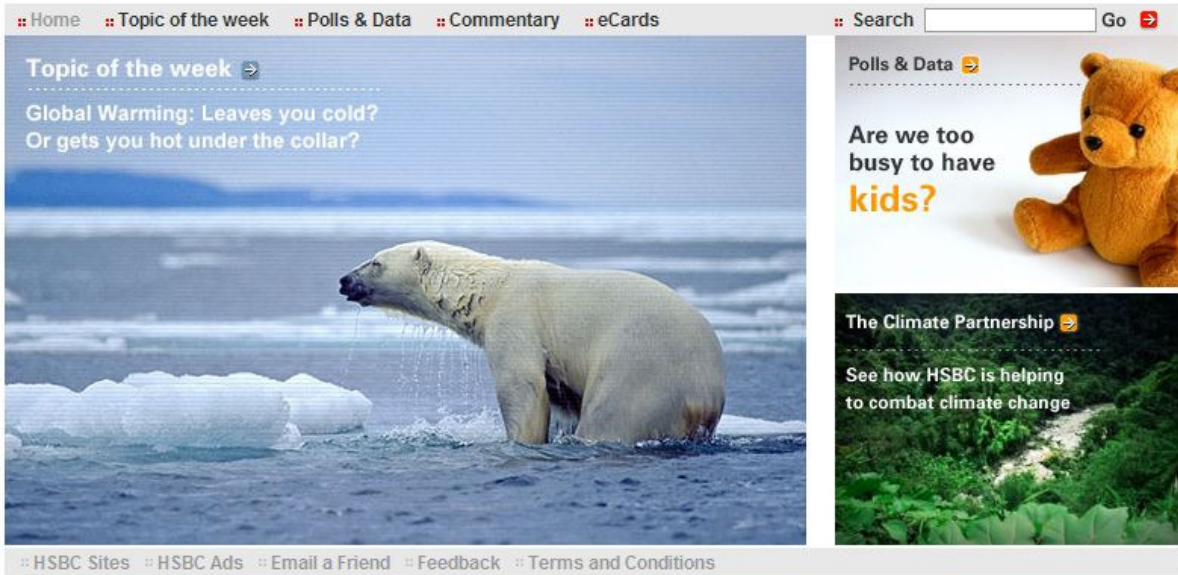


Figure 4.1 Homepage of the web site yourpointofview.com (downloaded on 12 July 2007)

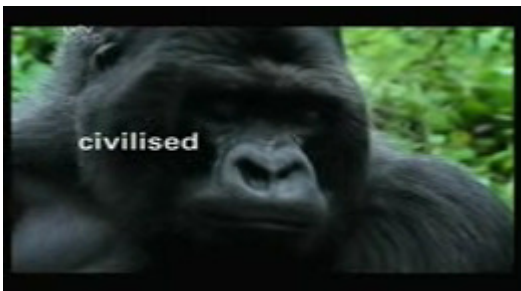
In one of these HSBC commercials, vignettes portraying a gorilla are shown in combination with opposite adjectives representing different points of views about the gorilla (snapshots 4.201-4.210):



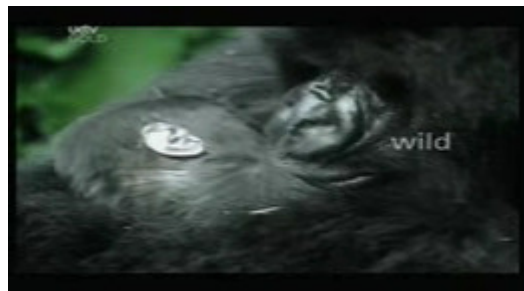
Snapshot 4.201



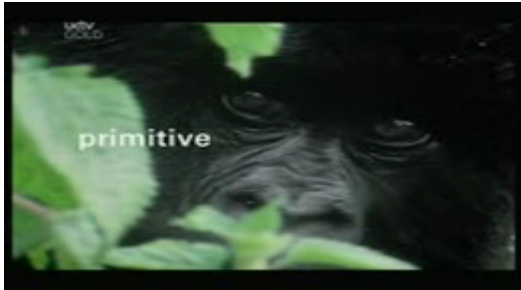
Snapshot 4.202



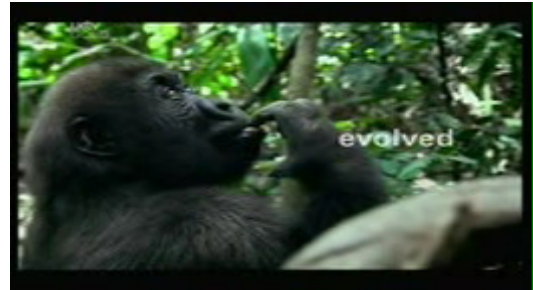
Snapshot 4.203



Snapshot 4.204



Snapshot 4.205



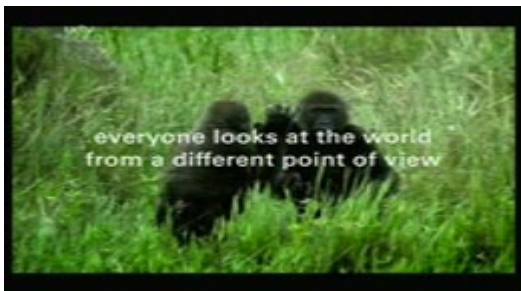
Snapshot 4.206



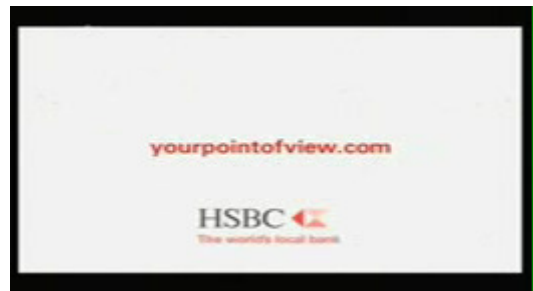
Snapshot 4.207



Snapshot 4.208



Snapshot 4.209

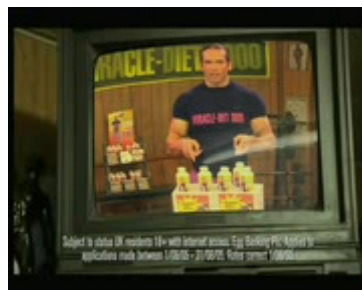


Snapshot 4.210

The commercial for Eggdeal account (snapshots 4.211-4.219) offers an even more marked example of user-oriented language. The form used is that of comparison, between a fraudulent company that claims to sell the “miracle in a bottle” to make people slim, and Eggdeal, which offers honest deals.



Snapshot 4.211



Snapshot 4.212

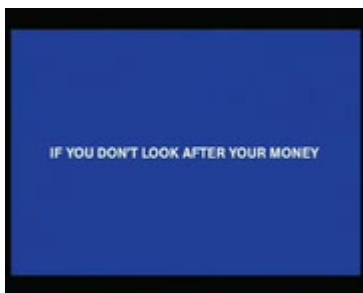


Snapshot 4.213

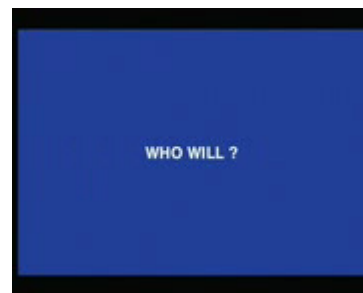
The first part of the commercial bears no relation whatsoever to banking: this rather slimy, muscular man (snapshots 4.211-4.213) speaks, in a foreign accent, about his money-making machine:

My job is to sell the miracle in the bottle. People would pay anything to look thinner, more beautiful. You know, there's a lot of fat people out there. I don't really care, you know, as long as money comes in I'm happy, you know". Whether they're rich or poor, it doesn't matter. What counts is that they've to pay. After that, who cares!

The role of the testimonial here is presented in a negative way. He is a cheat who only cares about making money for himself by deluding people with false promises. The testimonial is regarded as patronising, and fulfilling his own self-interest rather than that of the consumers. The second part of the advert is based on the premise that consumers are the only ones who can really look after their money (snapshots 4.214-4.215):



Snapshot 4.214



Snapshot 4.215

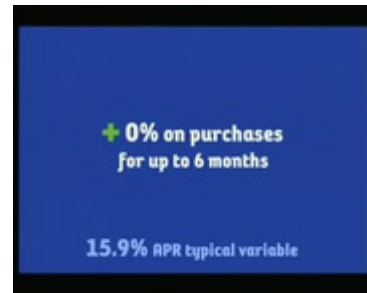
“If you don't look after your money who will?” is evidently a rhetoric question, and the answer is that no one will. Then a male voice-over says:

Be smarter with *your* money with an Egg account. *You'll* get 0% interest on balance transfers until the 1st of February 2006 and 0% interest on all purchases until the 1st of February 2006. Plus up to 10% cash back from selected online retailers. *Apply* now Eggdeal.com.

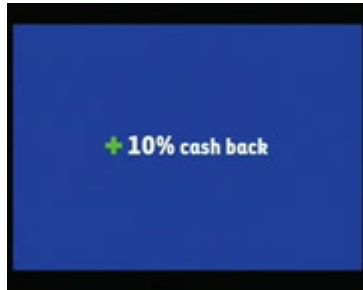
The focus in the language is exclusively on *you* (see italics in the transcription): there is no mention of Eggdeal at all, if *you* are smarter *you'll* get a good interest rate and *you* will look after *your* money. Visuals just show a blue screen, with white lettering summarising the facts presented by the voice-over (snapshot 4.216-4.219).



Snapshot 4.216



Snapshot 4.217



Snapshot 4.218



Snapshot 4.219

This advert combines facts with a direct and user-oriented attitude, resulting in an approach that appears to really fit the high-individualism and low-power distance of the UK. Let us also notice the use of a blue screen, a colour that, according to Hodge and Kress (1988) connotes low-power distance.

In the ING Direct advert, a consumer-oriented language is partly contradicted by the visuals. A male voice-over says:

ING Direct Savings account is for everyone. *You can move your money in and out* whenever you like. It's got one high rate of 5%, and there are no catches. That's why 98% of our *customers are happy to recommend us*. It's easy. Call now, or go online. ING Direct. *It's your money worth saving*

Here, the customer/viewer addressed by the pronoun *you* is the absolute Actor of the material processes described. "You can move your money", "customers are happy to recommend us", and "it's your money worth saving". Nevertheless the images seem to convey a different message:



Snapshot 4.220



Snapshot 4.221



Snapshot 4.222

They portray people moving around a life buoy with the corporate colours of ING Direct and the rate they offer. Obviously, the visuals aim to metaphorically represent the flexibility of the ING account, and the ease with which its customers can move their money in and out of it. On the other hand, the pictures of the customers are in black and white, while the safe buoy logo and the information relating to ING are coloured in orange. Now, as I have written in section 2.1.2.3, colour saturation is a modality marker according to Kress and Van Leeuwen's grammar of images (1996, 2006), and the absence of colour coincides with the lowest naturalistic modality⁴⁹. In this advert the orientation code called for is definitely the naturalistic one – the visuals represent real people in a realistic context – and the contrast between the low modality of the customers and the high-modality of the bank has two main effects: 1) to foreground the bank; 2) to connote a low degree of affinity with the customer, that is to say a great power distance (Hodge, Kress 1988).

Sometimes a company chooses not to speak about itself, but to be spoken about by its own customers. This is the case with Regency, a company specialised in providing mortgages to buy *council houses*, public houses built and operated by councils for the benefit of the local population. Its commercial is also based on the lesson genre, and

⁴⁹ As I have explained in 2.1.2.3, Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996; 2006) have argued that modality also starts decreasing beyond the point of maximum naturalistic saturation. Nevertheless it is not possible to pin down the point of lowest modality by effect of over-saturation as we do with total absence of colour.

the testimonials are customers who have benefited from the company's deals (snapshots 4.223-4.230).



Snapshot 4.223



Snapshot 4.224



Snapshot 4.225



Snapshot 4.226



Snapshot 4.227



Snapshot 4.228



Snapshot 4.229



Snapshot 4.230

Each person relates his or her experience with Regency:

First woman: **Regency** found *me* an affordable way to buy *my* council house without hassle

Second woman: **They** search for the right mortgage to suit your situation

First man: **Regency** took the worry and the hassle away from buying *my* council house

Second man: The service was exceptional

Third woman: All the things *I* was worried about, **Regency** sorted it out for *us*

First man: Now it's *mine*, *I* can make plans for the future

Second man: It's yours to do what you want to do

First woman: **Regency**...made everything so simple

Fourth woman: And *I* would recommend **them** to anybody who was going to buy a council house

Third woman: This is (laughing) *my* house, hehehe.

The main purpose here is to connote inclusion and low-power distance, and this goal is achieved mainly through verbal language. Firstly, we can notice that the whole commercial is built upon the pronominal contrast *I/we-they*, but this time the first person pronoun is used by the endorsers to refer to themselves (see the italics in the text) while Regency is associated with the third person pronoun (see the boldface in the text). *I* or *we* is used here to underline the individual achievement of buying a house. Regency is always referred to through its name, or through the pronouns *they* and *them*, which permits the company to foreground its clientele rather than itself.

If we look at the images, we can see the logo is constantly present on the screen, but its size and its position vary throughout the advert: Regency is, at the same time, *the New* and *the Given*, *the Ideal* and *the Real*, *the Centre* and *the Periphery*. What matters is not to define Regency with respect to the customers, but to present it through them.

Another way to show inclusion is through the use of regional accents. The testimonials presented in the commercial have a variety of different accents, which are arguably used as *metasigns* (Hodge and Kress 1988) connoting inclusion. As Hodge and Kress have argued (1988: 83), *allophones*, i.e. the variant forms of phonemes that make up accents, are used in class societies to “[...] perform the same function as the Jewish shibboleth, usually affecting the social and economic position of millions rather than causing the death of thousands” (1988: 83). In other words, an accent expresses the identity of a community, and it signals inclusion for those who perceive it as

familiar, and exclusion for the others. Myers (1994: 97) has noticed that in British accent variation there is a considerable class element, “[...] because the accents of middle class people vary less with region than do those of working class people”. This means that British accent, in addition to denoting geographic provenance, also connotes status, and varieties which are closer to the standard of Received Pronunciation (RP) are more often associated with high status and bourgeoisie than those which sound more detached from it, and are more likely to signify lower status and working class. In the case of the Regency commercial, the use of different accents, none of which appears close to RP, is arguably used to show solidarity towards people normally excluded from the ordinary housing market for economic reasons, and who are most likely to be interested in the purchase of a council house. The risk with this kind of appeal is that it can be pushed so far as to become patronising: so, for example, the choice to use a grammatically incorrect sentence by one of the endorsers (“*All the things I was worried about, Regency sorted it out for us”) might imply an association between low status, working class and low education.

In conclusion, the analysis of pronoun use in the British BFPS commercials has revealed interesting differences with respect to power relationships. I have noticed that while the use of *I* connotes strong individualism, *we* is often used to refer to the company (hence the name of *corporate we* I have minted to denote it). *You* has proved to address the interactive participants, while *they* has shown to have a double function, to refer to a third party different from both the addresser and the addressee (e.g. in the HSBC commercial), and to speak about the company from a non-corporate perspective (e.g. in the Regency commercial).

I have also pointed out how a study of language from a CDA perspective can reveal a good deal about the intended relationship between the advertiser and the viewer. In particular, the study of the pair *we/you* within the verbal language has shown how the collocation of either pronoun in the position of Actor or Beneficiary of the Processes described can point to either a corporate centred (if *we* is Actor) or a user-centred (if *you* is Actor) perspective.

In the framework of the cultural approach of this study, the individualistic appeal (e.g. in the Natwest ads) seems to be in line with the British high-IDV measured by Hofstede. On the other hand, the notion of PDI emerging from the samples appears much more uncertain than Hofstede's clear-cut low-PDI measurement. Commercials conveying a low-PDI attitude (e.g. HSBC and, verbally, Eggdeal, ING Direct and Regency) alternate with others characterised by a high-PDI approach (e.g. Natwest, Lloyds TSB. Furthermore, even in the low-PDI ones, non-verbal signs, like colour (e.g. ING) and prosody (e.g. the accents and the ungrammatical sentence in the Regency ad) can point to a high-PDI or patronizing attitude towards the audience.

4.2.7 The Limits of Privacy: Personal Life and Emotions in BFPS Advertising

Reference to personal life and the use of emotions in advertising is quite tricky: on the one hand, it can enhance attention and trigger identification; on the other hand, it can be perceived as phoney or intrusive. Once again, the main criterion determining the way this type of appeal is received is cultural.

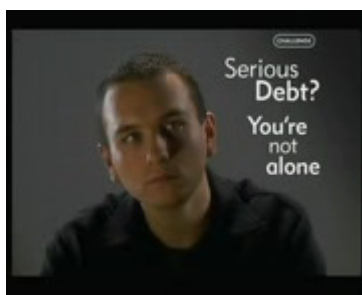
The analysis of the BFPS corpus has revealed that reference to personal and emotional life is more frequent in the British commercials when compared to those in Italian. However paradoxical this may seem, it nevertheless falls within the cultural schemata of the two countries.

De Mooij (2005) has noticed that people from individualistic cultures are much more likely to speak about their personal life with recent acquaintances than people from collectivistic cultures. This can be easily explained if we consider that trust in collectivistic societies is closely related to the concept of the in-group, and for someone to be admitted to the in-group takes time. It is important to underline that it is not sociability that is at issue here: a person can be very sociable and talkative, and, at the same time, very protective about his/her personal life. Conversely, someone can be taciturn, but, nonetheless, more willing to speak about his/her personal life once s/he has opened up.

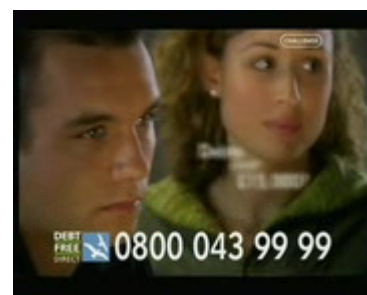
Under these circumstances, it does not seem very surprising that in a form of public communication like advertising, personal life is exploited more in the UK than in Italy.

Normally, the emotions used in BFPS commercials are negative ones. Financial problems are usually associated with feelings of concern, distress and depression, which permit the advertiser to indirectly foreground the solution advertised. This being the case, the use of emotions in the BFPS commercials from the British sub-corpus, and their absence from the Italian samples, appears to be the result of culture-bound practice. In the British low-UAI culture, strong, negative emotions are better received than in the Italian high-UAI culture.

Debt Free Direct (snapshots 4.231-4.239) is the UK's "leading provider of free and impartial debt advice on serious financial problems"⁵⁰.



Snapshot 4.231



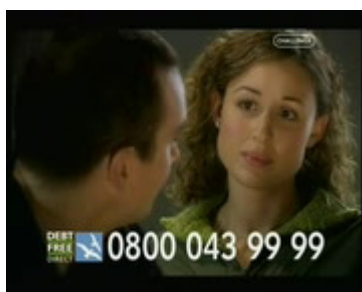
Snapshot 4.232



Snapshot 4.233



Snapshot 4.234



Snapshot 4.235



Snapshot 4.236

⁵⁰ <http://www.debtfreedirect.co.uk/>



Snapshot 4.237



Snapshot 4.238



Snapshot 4.239

A pensive man appears on the screen (snapshot 4.231) and a male voice-over – supposedly his own – says:

Is debt destroying your life? For me it got so bad I couldn't afford my monthly repayments. I even put my *home* at risk.

The lettering on the screen reads: “Serious debt? You’re not alone” and a woman appears next to the man. Interestingly, the voice-over says *home* (italicised in the text) and not *house* (“put my home at risk”). Arguably, the choice of this word is not random: *to put one’s home at risk* not only means to expose one’s abode to the risk of being repossessed, but also implies jeopardising one’s personal life. Indeed, the Online Oxford English Dictionary defines a *house* as “A building for human habitation”, but the entries for *home* include “the seat of domestic life and interests”, “the members of a family collectively”, “the home-circle or household”. In other terms, the use of the word *home* implies that debt is impinging on the lives of the man and his partner. A different voice-over continues:

If you owe more than 15,000 pounds to three or more lenders, and you or your partner have a full time job there could be a solution to your debt problems.

The solution to the problem here is not stressed as handy: there are a number of conditions to be met, and, even so, it only *could* be possible. The lettering on the screen summarises the circumstances under which Debt Free Direct could help, with a close-up of hands intertwining in the background. The first voice-over carries on:

I called Debt Free Direct. They've helped thousands of people turn their lives around. DFD understood exactly what I was going through, and their advice was completely confidential and free of charge. They're experts in finding the right solution if you are in serious debt problems.

The testimonial is sharing a delicate moment in his personal life with the audience, and he is mainly presenting Debt Free Direct not as a solution-finder, but rather as a sympathy-giver. He says people at Debt Free Direct understood what he was going through, which seems to connote more emotional support than business advice. Finally, the second voice-over concludes the advert reminding the viewer once again of the conditions to call:

Please remember, only call if you have debts over 15,000 pounds, and you or your partner have a full-time job. Simply call DFD now on 0800 043 99 99. It could change your life.

The lettering on the screen keeps summarising the spoken words (“Solve your debt payments”, “Free advice”, “Right debt solution for you”), while the faces of the represented participants become more relaxed. Under the conditions listed, Debt Free Direct could not only solve the financial problems of those who call them, but actually change their lives.

The appeal here is of an emotional nature, but it seems to me that the whole advert is poised between two opposite forces: on the one hand, sympathy and human warmth; on the other hand, discretion and self-control. Myers (1999) has noticed that Britons do not have much tolerance of direct emotional addresses in advertising, and this could be explained by the correlation Hofstede (2001: 155-157) has established between social anxiety, powerful expression of emotions and high-uncertainty avoidance. In low-uncertainty avoidance cultures, emotions are expressed in a more restrained way; therefore, in the Debt Free Direct commercial, language alternates between emotive and plain, human sympathy and self-restraint. At a visual level, a similar balancing is

noticeable: the close-ups of the represented participants indicate closeness to the audience, but their gaze is away from the camera (with the only exception being the man looking at it very briefly in snapshot 4.238), and the horizontal angle is often oblique, which makes the approach less emotionally involving. If emotions are displayed, this is done in a symbolic and impersonal way (e.g. the hands interwoven in Snapshot 4.233).

The First Class mortgage commercial (snapshots 4.240-4.251) presents a similar structure.



Snapshot 4.240



Snapshot 4.241



Snapshot 4.242



Snapshot 4.243

The voice-over of the man in the pictures (snapshots 4.240-4.245) describes the distressing financial situation he and his partner have been through:

Our home was going to be repossessed. I'd lost my job, and the debts had gone out of control. We'd found it really difficult to cut down on our life style.

The order of the sentences in this period appears to be interesting. It would have been more logical if the clauses "I'd lost my job" and "and the debts had gone out of control" had preceded "Our home was going to be repossessed". Indeed, in terms of cause and effect, it appears more likely to imagine that the house was going to be repossessed after he had lost his job and the debts had become unmanageable. To swap the clauses over foregrounds the fact that the house was going to be repossessed, with

the aim of having a major impact on the audience. The loss of the house – also here defined as *home* – again implies a potentially disruptive effect on the household. Arguably, this sort of emotional appeal in a commercial triggers much more sympathy and identification in the audience, but it is necessary to curb an emotionally overcharged approach that could be annoying to British viewers. In this commercial, this is done both at a linguistic and paralinguistic level. Linguistically, the use of the past continuous and past perfect tenses (‘going to be repossessed’, ‘had lost’, and ‘had gone’) signals that the situation of financial distress is over, and hints at the solution that is going to be presented. Visually, frames which seem to stress the misery of the man – e.g. snapshot 4.240, where he is presented as very small through the use of a high-angle shot⁵¹ – alternate with others where a certain degree of separation from the audience is marked by the absence of direct gaze and the use of oblique horizontal angle. Similarly, the solution to the problem is presented on both levels of communication:



Snapshot 4.244



Snapshot 4.245

In snapshots 4.244-4.245, we see the man joined by his partner. They embrace and laugh together, while the man’s voice-over says:

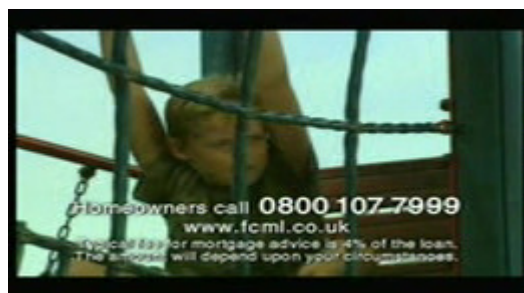
We thought there was no chance of getting a re-mortgage, until I called First Class mortgages. They helped us to keep our home. Although we paid more on the long term, we were able to reduce our monthly outgoings. It put us back on track.

⁵¹ Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996; 2006) have pointed out that vertical angle in camera shots is a function of power. High-angle shots depict represented participants as small, and indicate they are subordinated to the power of interactive participants. Conversely, low-angle shots portray represented participants as big and thus as exerting power on interactive participants. In the case of First Class mortgage, it seems to me that the use of a high-angle in snapshot 4.240 is aimed at illustrating the power of the debts imposing upon the man, rather than a power distance relationship between represented and interactive participants.

The emotional appeal of verbal language here is reduced, with more technical information being given about the monthly repayments of the mortgage (“Although we paid more on the long term, we were able to reduce our monthly outgoings”). Images convey the idea of the recovered serenity of the household, but still, this is done with great sense of measure. The two represented participants are always portrayed by profile, which results in a less *emotionally aggressive* approach than showing them frontally. It is also noticeable that they hold each other in quite a loose embrace, and show each other’s love exclusively through smiles. A stronger manifestation of affection (e.g. a tighter hug or a kiss) is deliberately excluded. The second part of the advert has a structure which is identical to that of the first part, as shown by the pictures (snapshots 4.246-4.249) and the transcription below:



Snapshot 4.246



Snapshot 4.247



Snapshot 4.248



Snapshot 4.249

I felt like I was drowning. Managing on my own was always hard. With the divorce and child care costs I could hardly pay the interest on my loans. I rang First Class mortgages. They had similar cases and consolidated my debt. I paid over a longer term, and ended up paying more, but the monthly payments were reduced, allowing a little extra for small treats

The back view of the woman in snapshot 4.246, like that of the man in the first part of advert (snapshot 4.243), highlights her vulnerability (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996), thus matching the emotional charge of the verbal language (“I felt like I was drowning.

Managing on my own was always hard. With the divorce and child care costs I could hardly pay interest on my loans”). At the same time, the back view, as well as the oblique angle of the other snapshots, permits the viewer to maintain a certain degree of emotional detachment from the situation. Also the use of frequent cutting from one scene to the other has the effect of reducing the emotional tension of the commercial. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) have pointed out that the disconnected moving images require an effort on part of the viewer to re-establish narrative continuity. This implies that with filmic sequences that make use of quick cuts, audiences are too busy putting back together subsequent shots and retrieving the semantic unity of the visuals to be able to bond with the represented participant(s).



Snapshot 4.250



Snapshot 4.251

It is interesting that the slogan (snapshot 4.251) reads “Getting your finances back on track”: the use of the noun phrase *your finances* instead of a personal pronoun (e.g. *you*) makes the overall tone of the advert more detached and less intrusive.

Noticeably, both Debt Free Direct and First Class commercials frame the corporate logo in the upper part of the screen (snapshots 4.239 and 4.251), that is to say, they present the company as the *Ideal* solution (see 4.2.1). Considering the fact that the same visual composition is also found in the commercial for Greenhill Finance (see snapshot 4.78), we might argue that the British BFPS analysed seem to show a trend, whereby verbal language connoting a problem in terms of concern and distress is usually combined with visual language connoting the company as the *Ideal* solution.



Snapshot 4.252



Snapshot 4.253



Snapshot 4.254



Snapshot 4.255



Snapshot 4.256

The Italian commercial for Credial (snapshots 4.252-4.256) shows the close up of a mature man (E), who endorses the loan company answering the questions of the male voice-over (VO):

VO: Quanto hai preso?

E: 4000.

VO: Da soli o tutti insieme?

E: (smiling) In contanti.

VO: Per farci?

E: Quello che mi pare.

VO: E cosa ti hanno chiesto?

E: Zero spiegazioni.

VO: Ma le rate?

E: Piccole piccole.

VO: E come si fa?

E: Al telefono o su internet.

VO: Cioè?

E: Basta chiedere e Credial risponde (slight smile).

VO: Credial. Semplice come un sì.

Evidently, the endorser is very reticent when it comes to answering questions which pertain to the private sphere. When asked what he has borrowed 4,000 euros for, he simply answers “quello che mi pare”, which literally means ‘what I like’, but also implies that he does not want to explain how he intends to use the money. Similarly, he dodges the question about what he was asked before being granted the loan: his answer “zero spiegazioni” means that did not have to account for his personal circumstances in order to borrow the money. Obviously, this cannot be true, as no company would lend money to a customer without having the right guarantees, and it only appears to be another elusive reply. This question-answer pattern, where the question is very specific and the answer very generic, is maintained throughout the commercial. The repayments are qualified as “piccole piccole”, with the iteration of the adjective conveying a childish overtone, and the way to get a loan as simple as making a phone call or surfing the net (“E come si fa? Al telefono o su internet”).

The slogan “Semplice come un sì” (lit. ‘Simple like a yes’) indicates that the particular pattern of the advert also serves another purpose, that of presenting a Credial loan as hassle-free. As in the Equilon and Fi.gen.pa commercials (see 4.2.3), also here the main purpose is to soothe the high-uncertainty avoidance of the Italian audience. Visually, this is achieved through the close-up of the testimonial (snapshots 4.252-4.254), who eventually turns out to be just one of the many who have chosen Credial (snapshot 4.255). The viewer is thus invited to identify him/herself with a

group, not a single individual, and this is another strong appeal in a collectivistic society.

4.3. Conclusions

In this chapter I have analysed the discourse of Banking and Financial Product and Service (BFPS) advertising.

The category has been chosen for analysis because of the striking quantitative difference noticed between the British sub-corpus – where BFPS commercials were among the most frequent – and the Italian one – where BFPS adverts appeared to be rather rare. It has been hypothesised that such a gap could be due to the different recourse Britons and Italians have to BFPSs, both for cultural and socio-economic reasons. By international standards, collectivistic, high-UAI Italy is considered a higher-saving rate country than the individualistic, low-UAI UK. In Italy, the access to the capital and mortgage market is also far more restricted than in the UK.

The analysis of the language and paralanguage has shown that IDV-COL is the primary correlating Hofstedian dimension in both the British and the Italian BFPS sub-corpus.

Most of the British commercials have been shown to prefer a direct, exact, and instrumental style on the verbal level, and a unique-explicit style on the visual level, two typical traits of communication in high-IDV countries. Products and services are advertised stressing facts (e.g. Alliance and Leicester), or foregrounding personal choice via an *I*-oriented verbal language (e.g. Natwest). Different rhetorical tropes are used in both verbal and visual language (e.g. Norton Finance, Greenhill Finance), but always in an unequivocal way, with disambiguation achieved by means of explanations, anchorage and relay.

Conversely, in the majority of the Italian commercials, communication style is less direct and language less informative. If we exclude the example of Capitalia, where the succinct text verges of obscurity, in most cases verbal language is used in a clearly

affective way. In the samples considered, the establishment of an emotional bonding with the audience is prioritised (e.g. SanPaolo, Equilon, Fi.gen.pa); similarly, images are used to personalise the company-customer relationship (e.g. SanPaolo, Credial). On the whole, communication is high context, in that it relies on what is beyond the explicit message, and appeals to the “We consciousness” and “membership ideal” (Hofstede 2001: 227) of collectivistic societies.

Although British and Italian cultures both score very highly on Hofstede’s MAS index, BFPS commercials from the British sub-corpus mirror a more masculine culture than the samples from the Italian sub-corpus. Famous endorsers and the preference for a verbal language fostering success, victory and competitive spirit (e.g. Halifax, Premium Bonds, Alliance and Leicester) are more frequent in the British BFPS adverts. In the Italian samples, masculinity is reflected in the presence alone of powerful endorsers (e.g. Banca Mediolanum), but does not noticeably affect the verbal language.

UAI seems to be a correlating dimension in both the British and the Italian BFPS sub corpus. In the British samples, low UAI is evident in both formal choices (e.g. the use of special effects in Tesco, the modality-lowering visual metaphor in Norton Finance, or the rhyme-structure the APS commercial) and structural choices (e.g. the allusions to uncertainty inherent in life in most of the mortgage ads, or a restrained depiction of emotions in Debt Free and First Choice). In the Italian BFPS adverts, high-UAI is mainly mirrored by the deliberate exclusion of language or visuals stressing anxiety and anguish (if this is done, the overall situation is presented as ironic, like in Fi.gen.pa) and by the preference for a language foregrounding the simplicity, safety and hassle-free nature of the product/service advertised.

The relation between PDI and BFPS commercials has proved to be the most complex to assess.

Especially with the British sub-corpus, it has been impossible to categorise the samples analysed into univocal patterns that can be correlated using the UK’s PDI-score measured by Hofstede. The hierarchical relationships reflected, both verbally and visually, in the British BFPS commercials have turned out to be too diverse to be

explained by the PDI-dimension cultural model. Commercials characterised by verbal language and/or visuals minimising PDI differences (e.g. HSBC, Egg) alternate with others connoting high PDI (e.g. Loans.co.uk, Barclays), resulting in an inhomogenous overall picture.

In the case of the Italian sub-corpus, most of the samples fit into the high-PDI societal norm, with the San Paolo Banco Di Napoli commercial as the only noteworthy exception.

I would argue that while the isolated case of San Paolo in the Italian sub-corpus can be explained through the notion of value paradox (see 3.3.1), the situation is more complex in the British sub-corpus. The very dissimilar attitudes shown towards the notion of power difference in several British samples would seem to suggest a community-bound rather than a culture-bound discourse. What I am proposing here is that Hofstede's PDI dimension might not be the key to interpreting the variability of British BFPS commercials with respect to power relationships, and other theories could offer a better insight into it, such as Holliday's notion of "small cultures" (1999).

By Holliday's definition (1999: 237), "[...] a *small culture* paradigm attaches 'culture' to small social groupings or activities wherever there is cohesive behaviour, and thus avoids culturist ethnic, national or international stereotyping". Small cultures "[...] can [...] run between as well as within large cultures" (1999: 239): this means that *small cultures* "[...] do not necessarily have [a] Russian doll or onion-skin relationship with parent large cultures" (1999: 239), and they can be "[...] any social grouping from a neighbourhood to a work group" (1999: 247). Evidently, the notion of *small culture* is not very different from that of *discourse community*, defined by Swales (1990: 24) as "[...] a group of people who link up in order to pursue objectives that are prior to those of socialization and solidarity, even if these latter should consequently occur" and where "[...] the communicative needs of the *goals* tend to predominate in the development and maintenance of its discorsal characteristics". Indeed, Holliday (1999: 251-252) has written that "The relationship between small culture and discourse is clearly strong" (1999: 251), and even if the two concepts not

always coincide “In many ways the discourse community *is* a small culture” (1999: 252).

It seems to me that the concepts of *small culture* and *discourse community* can be very useful to explain the particular discursal practice detected in the British BFPS commercials with respect to power distance. In the context of banking and financial advertising, the power relationship between the corporate and the user, as depicted through linguistic and paralinguistic interaction between represented and interactive participants, appears to depend more on a commonality of goals than on a cultural paradigm. Within this goal-based framework, the UK’s low-PDI score does not noticeably affect the power discourse of BFPS advertising. Far from being univocal, this appears to be split into different discursal practices, foregrounding distance or proximity depending on the shared objectives of the corporate community to which they give voice.

CHAPTER V

THE CULTURE IN THE TROLLEY: SUPERMARKET AND CONVENIENCE GOODS ADVERTISING

5.1. Preliminary remarks

In marketing, *convenience goods* is a collective name used to refer to all those “products that the customer purchases frequently, immediately, and with the minimum effort” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*). Common staples, like bread or pasta, are convenience goods, and so are numerous household products, like deodorants, washing powders, air fresheners, etc.

In the Western, capitalistic world, the idea of convenience goods is often associated with that of big *supermarket chains*, a form of retailing whereby a wide variety of food and other household merchandise is made available for customers in departmentalised, self-service stores.

In this chapter I have analysed commercials for supermarkets and convenience products extracted from my British and Italian sub-corpora. Given the wide scope of the category, this analysis encompasses sundry products, which have been sub-categorised and examined in the separate sections below.

5.2. The Analysis

5.2.1 Too Cheap or Not too Cheap: the Language of Supermarket Commercials on British and Italian TV.

In this first section I have considered the discourse of supermarket advertising. A supermarket is defined as “A large self-service shop, selling a wide range of groceries and household goods, and frequently one of a chain of stores” (*Online Oxford English*

Dictionary). In this work, I have used the term more generically, to also refer to hypermarkets⁵² – which are mainly distinguished from supermarkets on the basis of size and location – and large food retailers – which exclusively deal in foodstuffs.

Table 5.1 below summarises the supermarket commercials found in the two sub-corpora, without accounting for either the different versions of a commercial used to advertise the same product, or the repetitions of the same commercial.

SUPERMARKETS (HYPERMARKETS, LARGE FOOD RETAILERS)	
<i>BRITISH SUB-CORPUS</i>	<i>ITALIAN SUB-CORPUS</i>
Aldi	Conad
Asda	Despar
Coop	Carrefour
Iceland	Lidl
M&S	
Morrisons	
Sainsbury's	
Somerfield	
Tesco	
TOTAL 9	TOTAL 4

Table 5.1 Supermarkets advertised in the British and the Italian sub-corpora

As in the case of BFPS commercials, British samples are twice as numerous as the Italian ones. In this case, the main reason might be economic: TV advertising is costly, and only the largest and wealthiest companies can afford to buy slots on the main channels to advertise their products. In the UK, where large-scale retail trade is more deeply rooted than in Italy⁵³, the large companies that can meet the expense of a TV advertising campaign are more numerous.

Arguably, the different extent to which large-scale retail trade is present in the UK and Italy might stem back from the different levels of individualism in the two cultures. Large supermarkets are meant to be cost- and time-effective, but they do not

⁵² The Online Oxford English Dictionary defines a *hypermarket* as a “very large self-service store, usually situated outside a town, having an extensive car park and selling a wide range of goods”.

⁵³ This is also reflected in the fact that all the main supermarket chains in the UK are originally British, whereas in Italy the biggest ones are foreign (like Carrefour and Lidl).

foster a trust-based relationship between the seller and the buyer, as medium and small groceries do. Thus, it appears unsurprising that large supermarkets are more widespread in individualistic UK than in collectivistic Italy.

Going back to our commercials, the linguistic and paralinguistic analysis of the samples collected has shown that the main difference between the two sub-corpora lies in the type of appeal made. In fact, whereas the British commercials highlight cost- and time effectiveness, the Italian ones put the stress on quality and tradition.

Tesco, the largest British retailer by both global sales and domestic market share⁵⁴, have built their brand image around small prices and good value. Almost all the commercials for their own-branded products are basic, and exclusively foreground the product and the price.



Snapshot 5.1



Snapshot 5.2

In the commercial for a hairdryer (snapshots 5.1-5.2), the camera lingers on the item advertised, while a male voice-over says:

Hairdryer, from Tesco. Pretty useful if you're having a bad hair day. And to be truly honest, pretty handy if you're just having a bad money day. Tesco. Every little helps.

The product is evidently denoted as cheap, both through verbal and non-verbal language. The text is built around the use of idiomatic language and puns. The expression a *bad hair day* has a double meaning: it refers to a day when one's hair is particularly unmanageable, but, in an extended use, it also indicates “a day on which everything seems to go wrong” (*Online Oxford English Dictionary*). Playing on the polysemy of the word *hair* in the context of the idiom considered, the Tesco hairdryer is presented as useful to tame one's unkempt hair, but also to put a bad day straight.

⁵⁴ <http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/article755991.ece>

The nature of the bad hair day, and the way in which Tesco's hairdryer makes it better are disambiguated in the second sentence. Here a pun is used to transform the idiom "a bad hair day" into "a bad money day", which, from a conversational perspective⁵⁵, results in the "flouting" of the Gricean maxim of "relation".

In 1975, H.P. Grice proposed four conversational maxims that arise from the pragmatics of conversational language:

"Maxim of Quality": Do not say what you believe to be false, or that for which you lack adequate evidence;

"Maxim of Quantity": Make your contribution as informative as is required;

"Maxim of Relation": Be relevant;

"Maxim of Manner": Avoid ambiguity; be brief; be orderly.

The overt disrespect or "flouting" of one of these maxims on the part of the speaker has normally two main consequences: 1) it produces a specific linguistic effect (e.g. irony, sarcasm, etc.); 2) it requires the interlocutor to infer what the speaker's communicative intentions are, based on the context and on what s/he knows about how conversation works, that is to say, it brings about what Grice (1975) defines "conversational implicature".

In this Tesco commercial, the use of the phrase "a bad money day" flouts the maxim of relevance, insofar as there is no apparent relationship between a hairdryer and a day on which one has no money. The viewer is therefore expected to pragmatically infer the meaning of the peculiar expression, by also using the visual hints provided in the ad. The fact that Tesco is a supermarket chain, the appearance of the price next to the item advertised (snapshot 5.2) and the slogan of the company, "Every little helps", all aid the viewer to establish a connection between the hairdryer and the "bad money day". A Tesco hairdryer (and by synecdoche⁵⁶ all Tesco products) is cheap and therefore handy also for those who do not have much money. The

⁵⁵ Every commercial has a more or less overt conversational structure, with the addresser and the addressee of the advertising message being the interlocutors.

⁵⁶ A figure by which a more comprehensive term is used for a less comprehensive or *vice versa*; as whole for part or part for whole [...]. (*Online Oxford English Dictionary*).

message is eventually decoded, with the additional effect of highlighting Tesco's low prices.

In the hairdryer commercial, Tesco is connoted as a good value supermarket also through the use of specific *prosodic features*. In linguistics, *prosody* describes the acoustic properties of speech which cannot be predicted from orthographic transcription, so it includes, among the other things, loudness and accent. The voice-over in the Tesco commercial analysed above is a shouting one, not dissimilar from that of a peddler in the market, a place which is normally associated with good value. Arguably, loudness is deployed here to establish an association between Tesco and markets, by virtue of the low prices they both share. Similarly, the Geordie accent of the voice-over (one of the most distinctive among English accents) conveys a connotation of Tesco as working class (see 4.2.6).

Images are also used to emphasise the tiny prices of Tesco: the minimalist use of the hairdryer on a white worktop directs the attention of the viewers exclusively to the product, and the use of a high vertical angle makes the item look smaller, a *smallness* which connotatively refers back to the price of the product.



Snapshot 5.3



Snapshot 5.4

Tesco's style is very distinctive, and it is virtually unchanged in all its commercials: so, for example, in the advert for light bulbs (snapshots 5.3-5.4), the same Geordie voice-over says:

Light bulbs. Let's be honest, we want you to buy them from Tesco. So, here are the whats (*the wattage appears next to the bulb*) and here are the whys (*the price appears next to the bulb*). Tesco. Every little helps.

Here the focus is on the reason why it may be worth buying light bulbs from Tesco: they are the same as everywhere else and they are very cheap. Tesco is presented as a no frill-supermarket; there are no promises being made, but only facts being shown.

If not price, convenience is the main appeal foregrounded in Tesco's adverts. A typical example is offered by the commercial for the British traditional Christmas turkey dinner (snapshots 5.5-5.12):



Snapshot 5.5

Turkeys. We've got over twenty different types. Fresh...



Snapshot 5.6

..frozen...



Snapshot 5.7

..free range...



Snapshot 5.8

..organic...



Snapshot 5.9

...basted...



Snapshot 5.10

...and garnished.



Snapshot 5.11

From traditional birds, if you've got the time to stuff...



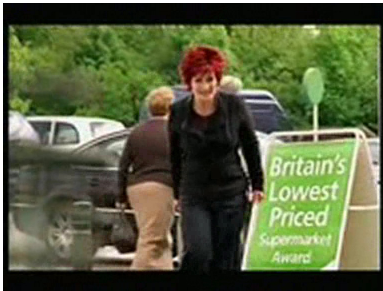
Snapshot 5.12

...to ready-prepared ones, if you simply stuff the time! Tesco. Every little helps.

The sequence of pictures of different types of turkey, and the adjectives listed by the voice-over to describe them, aim to highlight the convenience of shopping at Tesco, where all customer's needs are met. Interestingly, with the price not being the focus of the advert, the male voice-over with a distinctive regional accent is replaced with a female one much closer to RP. Nonetheless, the informal tone is maintained through the recourse to puns and idiomatic expressions, as in the previous two commercials. The stuffing of the turkey, matched by the traditional picture of the bird with berries

and dried fruit to fill it with (snapshot 5.11), is contrasted with having a crammed agenda, a situation wherein a ready-made turkey (snapshot 5.12) is much more convenient. The polysemy of the verb *to stuff* is exploited to foreground Tesco's handiness: whether you belong to the category of people who have the time to stuff the turkey, or to that of those who stuff their time, Tesco is the right supermarket for you.

The second largest supermarket chain in the UK, ASDA, exclusively stresses price in its advertising (snapshot 5.13-5.20):



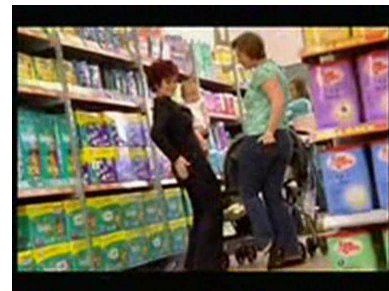
Snapshot 5.13



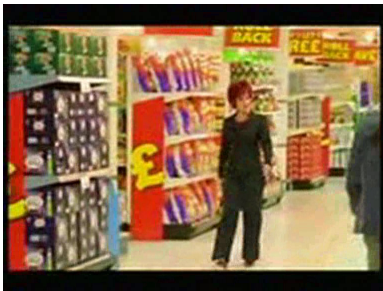
Snapshot 5.14



Snapshot 5.15



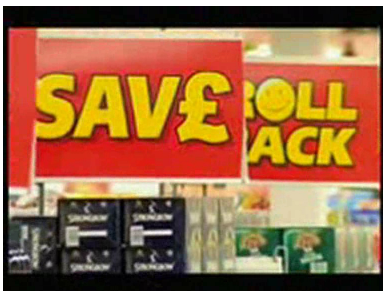
Snapshot 5.16



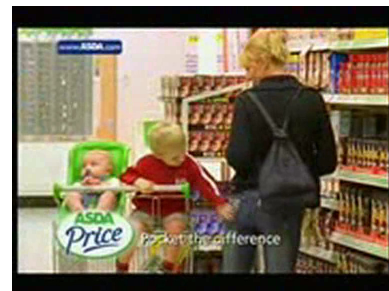
Snapshot 5.17



Snapshot 5.18



Snapshot 5.19



Snapshot 5.20

The commercial here is in the form of the lesson, and the endorser is Sharon Osbourne, wife of the heavy metal singer Ozzy Osbourne, who came into public prominence in the UK after appearing in *The Osbournes*, a reality show that followed her family's daily life. Moving towards the camera and smiling at the audience, she says:

The bottom-slapping supermarket have won the grocer award for Britain's lowest priced for the eighth year running. But ASDA are not stopping there ... look ... (laughing) everyone's at it! (Speaking to a customer in a supermarket aisle) Come on, join in. (Holding a baby, and speaking to her) Yeees! (Speaking into the camera) There are thousands more prices being lowered across the store, which means ASDA mums really do pocket the difference.

I have italicised the phrases that seem to foreground the price issue (the italics in brackets only describe the action), and, as we can see, they take up most of the transcription. ASDA is qualified through the compound adjective “bottom-slapping”, which metaphorically refers to the fact that ASDA customers can slap their bottoms (snapshots 5.15-5.16 and 5.20) and “pocket the difference”, that is, to put the money they have saved in their pockets. The adjective *low* and the noun *price* always occur together in comparative or superlative phrases (“Britain's lowest priced”, “more prices being lowered”). The purpose is delivering the message to viewers that ASDA is increasingly good value, and visuals work together with the dialogue in that direction. In snapshot 5.13, a noticeboard behind Sharon Osbourne reads “Britain's lowest priced supermarket award”, and the same phrase is repeated on the banner below the sign ASDA in snapshot 5.14; and again, snapshots 5.17-5.19 show aisles of an ASDA supermarket crammed with special-offer signs (“sav£”, “roll-back”, “buy one, get one free”). Interestingly, the main addressees of the message are mothers, which suggests an association between women and family balance-keeping. This is not a surprising stereotype in a high-MSI country like the UK. At ASDA mums “do pocket the difference”, and the use of the intensifier *do* refers, once again, to the good value of ASDA shopping.

The presence of a celebrity addressing the audience in the ASDA commercial also involves issues of masculinity and power distance. Sharon Osbourne is a winning

woman and mother, and appeals to the other mothers in the audience, fostering in them a desire to emulate her by choosing the best-value deals at ASDA. Apparently, the gist of the message here is to promote ASDA's good value whilst also dissociating it from connotations of tackiness by suggesting that rich, famous women like Sharon Osbourne also shop at ASDA. The reduced interpersonal space between her and the represented customers on the screen, quite unusual in a low-contact culture, can be interpreted as a tangible sign of Osbourne being not dissimilar from the 'ASDA mums' she is speaking to. On the other hand, the "apparent proximity"⁵⁷ between Sharon Osbourne and the viewers seems to tell a different story. Although Osbourne moves towards the camera (and thus, towards the viewers), she is most frequently depicted through long-shots (snapshots 5.13-5.14, 5.16-5.18). As Kress and Van Leeuwen point out (2006: 263), "[...] the moving image can represent social relations as dynamic, flexible and changeable", and coming towards the camera points to a desire to reduce such distance. Nonetheless, a camera that cuts to a longer shot every time the represented participant is moving toward the viewer also expresses the will to maintain a certain distance from the audience. In terms of personal interaction, Sharon Osbourne comes towards the camera, but, on the whole, she lectures the audience from a *public distance*, which is the distance between people "[...] who are to remain strangers" (Hall 1969: 125).

In the Christmas version (snapshots 5.21-5.24) we do not find Sharon Osbourne, but the price-focus persists:



Snapshot 5.21



Snapshot 5.22

⁵⁷ The term is used by Daniel Chandler to refer to the "[...] apparent physical distance [that] also suggests certain relationships between a person depicted in a text and the viewer (<http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/gaze/gaze05.html>).



Snapshot 5.23



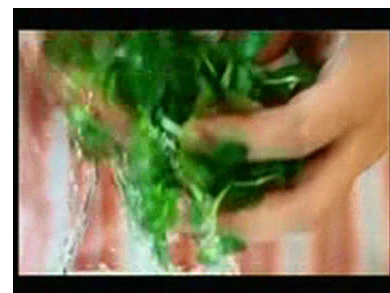
Snapshot 5.24

The protagonist here is Santa Claus, who is catapulted by his elves to ASDA (snapshots 5.21-5.22) so that he does not miss out on their great-deal gifts for 10 pounds and under (snapshot 5.23), the best way to “pocket a lower priced Christmas” (snapshot 5.24)!

Sainsbury’s had long been the market leader in the UK, but it currently represents the third largest supermarket chain, after Tesco and ASDA. Sainsbury’s have worked hard to distinguish themselves from their main competitors mainly on the basis of quality. Over the years, they have earned a reputation as more upmarket shops, especially through the launch of premium-quality foodstuff ranges (e.g. *Taste the difference*). Their advertising campaigns have been endorsed by Jamie Oliver, one of the most famous celebrity chefs in the UK, well known for his protest against the unhealthy food in British schools. Nonetheless, price still retains a great importance in Sainsbury’s advertising discourse.



Snapshot 5.25



Snapshot 5.26



Snapshot 5.27



Snapshot 5.28



Snapshot 5.29



Snapshot 5.30



Snapshot 5.31



Snapshot 5.32



Snapshot 5.33



Snapshot 5.34

In the advert for Sainsbury's watercress (snapshots 5.25-5.34), Jamie Oliver makes a fresh typical English sandwich, and says:

My favourite thing for great ham sandwiches is this beautiful English watercress, from Sainsbury's. The peppery taste goes really well with the ham. Nice ham for the watercress, *and Sainsbury's have lowered 2000 prices since January, even on everyday things.* And look at that...hmmm, it's a good one.

The reference to the price cuts (*italicised in the transcription*) appears evidently unrelated to the overall discourse, which appears to be focussed on quality.

As we can see, all the noun phrases defining the ingredients of the sandwich are modified by positive qualifying adjectives: “great ham sandwiches”, “beautiful English watercress” and “nice ham”. Verbal language is paralleled by images: the setting of the commercial is a cosy kitchen (snapshot 5.25), whose warm, bright colours are reminiscent of those of the ham, the watercress and mustard being used to prepare the sandwich (snapshots 5.26-5.29, 5.31). The sensory coding orientation seems to be the preferred one in the commercial: the camera lingers on the food, switching sometimes from normal to slow motion (snapshot 5.26), with the purpose of pleasing the audience, and creating a sense of anticipation for the taste.

In this context, the sentence “Sainsbury’s have lowered 2000 prices since January, even on everyday things” stands out, almost like an afterthought, as something which was not meant to be there originally. The co-ordinate conjunction ‘and’ (“Nice ham for the watercress, *and* Sainsbury’s have lowered 2000 prices since January, even of everyday things”) is the only linguistic element that implies a logical relation between the sentences and the preceding discourse. At the visual level, chromatic effects produce the same result as the conjunction at the verbal level: in snapshot 5.30, the number 2000 on the Sainsbury’s plastic bag, quantifying the prices cut by Sainsbury’s, is in the same colours as the kitchen and the ingredients Jamie Oliver is using.



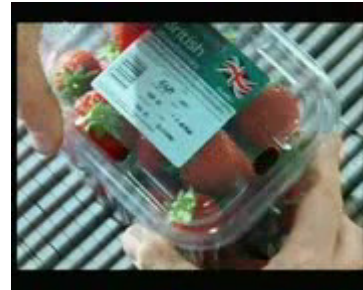
Snapshot 5.35



Snapshot 5.36



Snapshot 5.37



Snapshot 5.38



Snapshot 5.39



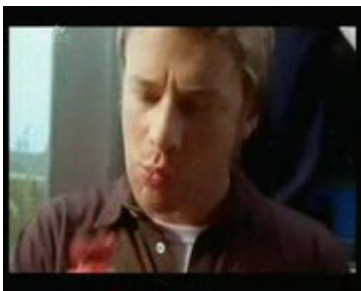
Snapshot 5.40



Snapshot 5.41



Snapshot 5.42



Snapshot 5.43



Snapshot 5.44

In the commercial for Sainsbury's strawberries (snapshots 5.35-5.44), the price claim appears to be better amalgamated into the script, but again it becomes prominent with the respect to the quality discourse. Let us look at the dialogue between Jamie Oliver (JO) and a strawberry farm worker (W):

(In the strawberry farm) JO: Sainsbury's claim that they can get these British strawberries from farm to store in just 48 hours. So I'm going to follow one strawberry to check.

(On the packaging line, talking to a worker) JO: So presumably this costs a farmer a little bit extra. W: No, this costs them less this year for strawberries than it did last year.

(Getting on a Sainsbury's lorry to go to the store) JO: We're still only 12 hours from the field.

(Arriving at the Sainsbury's store) JO: Thus, our strawberries got in store right now. And at these prices they won't be spending long in it either!

The purpose here is to prove that Sainsbury's strawberries are fresh. Nevertheless, the verbal discourse makes no explicit reference to their freshness, which is inferred by the viewer from the fact (reported and shown) that they get from the farm to the store in only forty-eight hours. Conversely, explicit reference to the price is made, as is evident from the parts of transcription I have italicised. Sainsbury's strawberries are cheaper for the farmers to produce, and cheap enough for the final customers not to let them stay long in store after they have been delivered. Interestingly, price is the only reason given to explain why customers are believed to be buying them ("And at these prices they won't be spending long in it either") – the quality issue is not presented at all. Images reinforce this idea: snapshots 5.41, 5.42 and 5.44 clearly show the Sainsbury's lorry advertising, in bright colours, that two-thousand prices have been lowered since January.



Snapshot 5.45



Snapshot 5.46



Snapshot 5.47



Snapshot 5.48



Snapshot 5.49



Snapshot 5.50



Snapshot 5.51



Snapshot 5.52



Snapshot 5.53



Snapshot 5.54

In the Christmas commercial for Sainsbury's parsnips (snapshots 5.45-5.54), the main topic becomes the retrieval of Christmas spirit through a nice dish of parsnips with bacon, cooked by Jamie Oliver:

Do you remember how exciting Christmas was when you were a little kid? And then did it all get a little bit, sort of samey? Not anymore. *Sainsbury's parsnips are really good right now.* So this Christmas just give them a drizzle with a little bit of maple syrup in the last couple of minutes, and chuck in some dry-cured stripped bacon. Gorgeous. Go on, try something new today! (*On receiving another frying-pan as a Christmas gift*) Very funny.

The price factor is not mentioned at all in this case, but neither is the quality a main issue. Sainsbury's parsnips are defined as "really good" (see italicised sentence in the transcription above), but the difference is made by Oliver's creativity, who enhances the vegetables with bacon and maple syrup (snapshot 5.52-5.54).

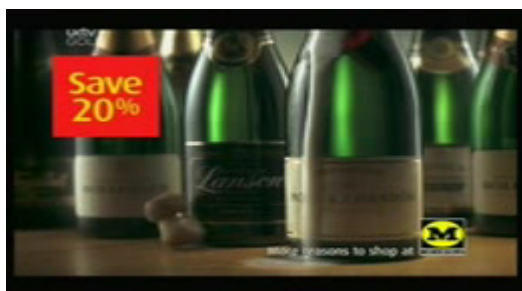
It is interesting to notice that the images introduce a hint of irony that tones down the nostalgia-imbued verbal language at the beginning of the commercial. In fact, the sameness that has replaced the childlike Christmas excitement of the old days (snapshots 5.45-5.47) is portrayed through Jamie Oliver receiving the same frying pan as a Christmas gift (snapshots 5.48-5.50)! This visual trick prevents the overall language from becoming too sentimental, something which might not be well received in the low-UAI, emotionally-restrained British culture (see 4.2.7). The same irony is exploited in the end of the commercial, when Oliver invites the audience to ‘try something new today’ – which is also Sainsbury’s slogan – and he receives another frying pan as a present! The appeal in this commercial is creativity and innovation (both related to Oliver’s chef skills), and the collocation of logo and slogan in the bottom right-hand side of the screen seem to confirm this interpretation (see 4.2.7).

Morrisons is the fourth largest supermarket in the UK. Their slogan, “More reasons to shop at Morrisons” plays on the company name through the use of assonance and alliteration. In fact, the only explicit reason declared via the verbal and visual modes appears to be of economic nature, as displayed by the selection of visuals taken from numerous different ads shown below (snapshots 5.55-5.66):



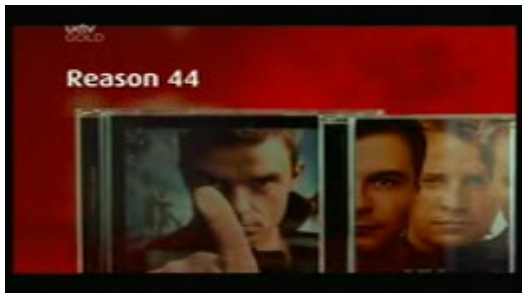
Snapshot 5.55

Reason 243...



Snapshot 5.56

20% off all champagne and sparkling wines. More reasons to shop at Morrisons.



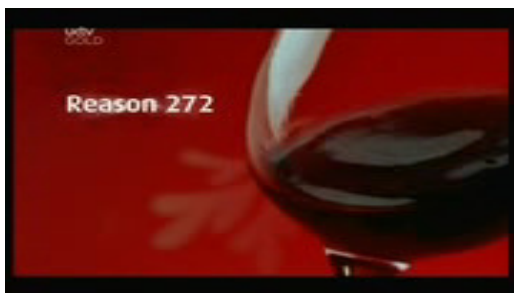
Snapshot 5.57

Reason 44...



Snapshot 5.58

...Single-album-chart CDs only £9.77. More reasons to shop at Morrisons.



Snapshot 5.59

Reason 272...



Snapshot 5.60

...At least 20% Australian wines. More reasons to shop at Morrisons



Snapshot 5.61

Reason 385...



Snapshot 5.62

...A leg of fresh pork, only £3.19, per kilogram. More reasons to shop at Morrisons.



Snapshot 5.63

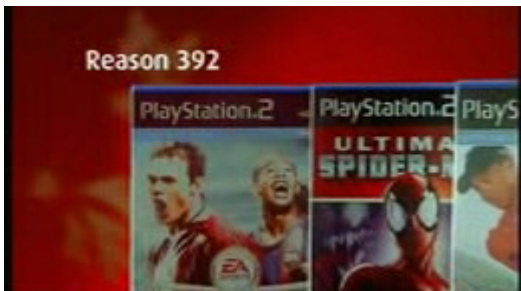
Reason 67...



Snapshot 5.64

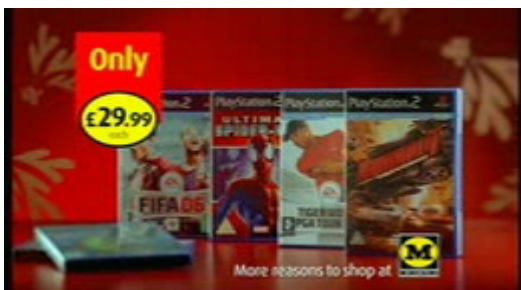
...A twenty-four pack of Foster's, now only £10.49. More reasons to shop at Morrisons.

”



Snapshot 5.65

Reason 392...



Snapshot 566

...The latest Playstation 2 games, only £29.99. More reasons to shop at Morrisons.

Cooperative Food, colloquially known as The Coop, is part of The Cooperative Group, the world's leading consumer-owned business, and it is the fifth largest food retailer in the UK.



Snapshot 5.67



Snapshot 568



Snapshot 5.69



Snapshot 5.70



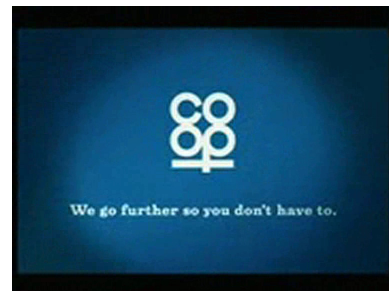
Snapshot 5.71



Snapshot 5.72



Snapshot 5.73



Snapshot 5.74

In their commercial (snapshots 5.67-5.74), an animated sheep, sporting a perm and make-up that resemble the style of the famous R&B songwriter Aretha Franklin, extols the virtues of Coop food, singing an *ad hoc* adaptation of Franklin's famous hit *Think*:

(Main sheep) And think...

(Backing sheep) Think

(Main sheep) ...think about food for you and me, ehhhh, and think...

(Backing sheep) Think, think

(Main sheep) ...'bout our ingredients. Aint' no competition, ain't no [*inaubile*], but let me tell you 'bout the news from Coop, if you please. Gonna give you less additives...

(Backing sheep) Additives

(Main sheep)...less additives...

(backing sheep) Additives

(main sheep) ...give you less additives...

(main sheep and backing sheep together) ...less additives.

(main sheep). Hey, think about it. You, think about it... (*music fading out*)

(male voice-over) At the Coop we're committed to food with less additives.

The only claim in the commercial is quality: the news is that Coop is committed to food with less additives and preservatives. Images also tell us that “Co-op brand goods are non-GM & free from Tartrazine, MSG & Cochineal” (snapshot 5.70), and the boxes reading *MSG*, *Tartrazine* and *Cochineal* being moved out of the Co-op shop (snapshots 5.71-5.73) metaphorically represent the additives being taken out of Co-op food. Nonetheless, the presenter chosen to give this piece of serious information is a blues-singing-animated sheep! From a naturalistic coding orientation perspective, whose goal is to depict the real world as faithfully as possible, the cartoon-like ewe-diva is a low-modality marker. The important core verbal message, regarding all the chemicals banned from Co-op foodstuffs, is included in an overall context which can be considered nonsensical. The quality issue is important, but not to the extent of precluding the possibility of being ironic about it. After all, the fact that the information is not spoken but sung along a popular, successful tune also adds up to the jocular tone of the advert. Furthermore, the comedic approach helps improve memorableness.



Snapshot 5.75



Snapshot 5.76

In the commercial for Somerfield, the UK's sixth largest supermarket chain, a woman equipped for an expedition is about to leave her house (snapshots 5.75-5.76)



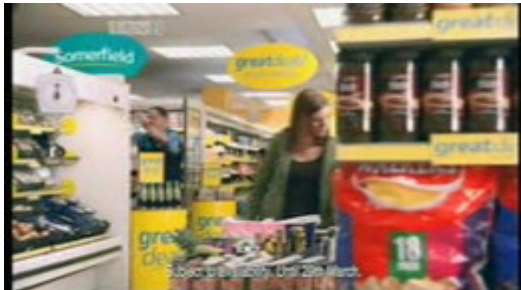
Snapshot 5.77



Snapshot 5.78

She turns to her family (snapshot 5.77) and says, in a voice broken with emotion: “I love you”, while a low-pitched, string sound plays in the background. Here we have a clear example of a background melody being used in an iconic way to represent emotions. In this specific case, the feelings portrayed are fear and suspense. Van Leeuwen (1999: 135) has written that the vibrating sound of the strings “[...] literally and figuratively *trembles* [...]”, and, as such, it is particularly suitable for representing “[...] emotions, for instance fear [...]”. He has pointed out that “Our experience also tells us that [...] low-pitched sounds [tend to be produced] by large people, large animals, large musical instruments, large engines and so on. Hence [...] very low, rumbling sound effects can be particularly ominous”. Thus, in the Somerfield commercial, the initial eerie background music matches the dramatic images of the woman leaving her family. So far, viewers do not know what the commercial is for: only after the woman has stepped out of the house and fallen over (snapshot 5.78) do we realise that the scene presented is just a spoof of dramatic/adventure films. In fact, a female voice-over says:

Sometimes shopping for great deals can seem like a bit of an expedition. But not at your local Somerfield, where you'll find great deals on your doorstep. Like this whole leg of lamb, now half price. And these African Horizon wines, also half price. Somerfield. Something different.



Snapshot 5.79



Snapshot 5.80



Snapshot 5.81



Snapshot 5.82

The expedition in the images turns out to be an ironic metaphor to express the difficulty in “shopping for great deals”, and to foreground Somerfield as the handy supermarket for bargains (snapshots 5.79-5.81). The whole dramatisation revolves around the price, which is also highlighted in the images, as shown by the lettering “half price” in bold fonts (snapshots 5.80-5.81). The lamb and the wine briefly appear in close-ups, but neither is described in qualitative terms. They sit there, like still nature paintings, exclusively associated with good-value.

Iceland, as we read in their web site, are “[...] a unique British food retailing business with over 650 stores throughout the UK”⁵⁸. The endorser/testimonial in their TV commercials is the pop star and light-entertainment celebrity Kerry Katona.

⁵⁸ <http://www.iceland.co.uk/>



Snapshot 5.83



Snapshot 5.84



Snapshot 5.85



Snapshot 5.86

In the commercial for Iceland desserts, Katona (K) is featured in one of the chain shops with three children (C) wanting each a different dessert:

K: Which desserts do you want?

C1: Apple!

C2: Lemon!

C3: Pecan!

Male Voice-Over: Apple pie, lemon meringue and pecan Danish from just 1 pound at Iceland.

K (at home): So that's why mums go to Iceland.

I have italicised the two lines relevant to the analysis. The focus on the price is made explicit by the use of the conjunction phrase *so that's why* at the beginning of Katona's last line ("So that's why mums go to Iceland"), which is also the slogan of the food retail chain. *So* is a causative conjunction which means "For that reason, on that account, accordingly, consequently, therefore" (*Online Oxford English Dictionary*) and it establishes a direct connection between shopping at Iceland and what has been said before by the voice-over (i.e. "Apple pie, lemon meringue and pecan Danish from

just 1 pound at Iceland”). Under these circumstances, price appears to be the reason for which mums go (or should be going) to Iceland.

At the visual level, the cause-effect relation between low prices and going to Iceland is made more explicit by the dots preceding the slogan (snapshot 5.86), which signal to the viewer that the clause “... that’s why mums go to Iceland” is to be explained based on what has been said before.

Also here, as in the ASDA commercial above, the specific category of mothers is targeted through another celebrity mother. Unlike Sharon Osbourne, though, Kerry Katona is portrayed in close-ups, and she looks through the camera at the mothers at home and smiles at them. The reduction of the apparent proximity, combined with Katona’s strong northern accent (see *allophones*, 4.2.6), offsets her status as a celebrity and produces an inclusion effect towards the audience.

In the Christmas commercial for Iceland’s ready-made roast joints, the appeal pivots around the pairing of good value and convenience.



Snapshot 5.87



Snapshot 5.88



Snapshot 5.89



Snapshot 5.90

A sceptical Kerry Katona is reading a traditional recipe for stuffing turkey (snapshot 5.87), but she soon gives up in favour of Iceland’s Roast from Frozen Stuffed Turkey Crown (snapshot 5.90):

Base two: stuff check”. *Get a life!* These go straight from freezer into the oven. *Easy!*

I have italicised the parts relevant to the analysis. Spending hours on cooking a traditional Christmas turkey is regarded as a waste of one’s leisure time. The informal idiom *Get a life* is normally used as a taunt, to spur dull people to do more exciting things (*Online Oxford English Dictionary*). In the commercial, boredom is related to cooking, and the solution is Iceland’s ready-made roast joint, which is “easy” and makes life easy. Katona’s direct look into the camera (snapshot 5.88) and the close up of her smiley face (snapshot 5.89) are telling those viewers – possibly mums – who value their free time that they can be like her and go to Iceland.



Snapshot 5.91



Snapshot 5.92



Snapshot 5.93



Snapshot 5.94

In the second part of the advert, the focus shifts onto good value, with a male voice-over illustrating the range of Iceland’s ready-made roast joints:

Iceland have a new range of boneless joints ready to roast straight from frozen, and *they’ll feed from a family of four up to fourteen. We guarantee they’ll turn out perfectly.* Turkey, pork, beef, gammon, and lamb.

While the pictures linger on the price quite overtly (snapshots 5.91 and 5.93), verbal language refers to good value indirectly, mentioning the number of people who can eat from one Iceland roast. The voice-over speaks through a *corporate we*, and guarantees that “they’ll turn out perfectly”. Interestingly, neither the taste nor the quality of the

product is an issue: appearance is what matters, as confirmed by the last part of the advert.



Snapshot 5.95



Snapshot 5.96

The setting is the dinner party where the Iceland's roasts are being served. One of the guests (G) approaches the hostess, Kerry Katona (K), and says:

G: Looks great!

K : Ehm...it's a...it's an old family recipe!

Food *looks* great and Karry can ironically pretend it has been prepared according to an old family recipe..

Waitrose and M&S are two chains that are renowned for being more markedly quality-oriented. Nevertheless, in the only Waitrose sample featured (a Christmas-oriented one recorded on ITV1 on the 7 December 2005) the price issue seems to be quite central:



Snapshot 5.97



Snapshot 5.98



Snapshot 5.99



Snapshot 5.100



Snapshot 5.101



Snapshot 5.102



Snapshot 5.103

The commercial is mainly visual: accompanied by the hit song *It's Gonna Be a Lovely Day*, by the S.O.U.L. S.Y.S.T.E.M., the camera takes the viewers to the places of origin of the featured products. It moves from a green field of sprouts (snapshot 5.97) to a snowy gammon factory (snapshot 5.98), from a French champagne cellar (snapshot 5.99) to a free range goose farm (snapshot 5.100), from an Icelandic deep-frozen prawn factory (snapshot 5.101) to a lorry carrying spices in the middle of the desert (snapshot 5.102). Every image is *anchored* (see 4.2.3) by the overprinting revealing the product and some price-related facts. Adjectives highlight the quality of the products: Waitrose do not simply sell champagne, goose, or spice, but “Premier Cru champagne” (snapshot 5.99), “Free Range Goose” (snapshot 5.100), and “Organic Mixed Spice” (snapshot 5.102). Nonetheless, captions do not fail to tell us that

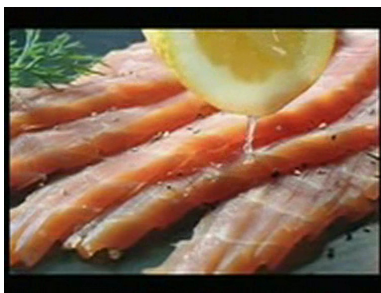
champagne is reduced by 33% and that sprouts, gammon, goose, prawns or spice cost X or from X per kilogram.

The verbal language of the female voice-over, at the end of the commercial, only speaks about quality:

The farmers, growers and suppliers of one supermarket are working hard to make sure you and your family have the very best of everything this Christmas. Waitrose. Quality food, honestly priced

Waitrose address their audience on behalf of the “farmers, growers and suppliers of one supermarket”. Foregrounding the hard work of their farmers, growers and suppliers, Waitrose stress the quality of their own products. Waitrose is not *a* supermarket it is *the* supermarket, the one guaranteeing you “the very best of everything” to make sure your Christmas is a lovely day, as suggested by the song playing in the background. The slogan, “Quality food, honestly priced” reflects the appeal ranking of the whole commercial: quality above all, but with an eye on the price.

M&S commercials are certainly the most distinctive of all those found in the British sub-corpus. Quality is the only, paramount issue in the TV advertising for the UK’s most iconic and widely-recognised retail chain, and it is related to notions of high-status. The commercial described below specifically refers to M&S Food:



Snapshot 5.104

This is not just smoked salmon. This is line-caught, wild, Alaskan, oak-smoked salmon.



Snapshot 5.105

This is not just steak. This is farm-assured, slowly-matured, Aberdeen Angus steak.



Snapshot 5.106

This, is not just a Chardonnay. This is an exclusive, Languedoc, gold-label Chardonnay



Snapshot 5.107

These are not just berries. These the sweetest, naturally-ripened, hand-picked summer berries



Snapshot 5.108

This is not just food. This is M&S food.

At the verbal level, we can notice an adjectival over-determination of each item advertised. The pattern *This is/ These are not just...This is/This are...* is used to deictically refer to the food being shown in the images, and to qualify it as special by means of long strings of adjective phrases. At the end, the same pattern is used to coin the slogan: “This is not just food. This is M&S food”, which subsumes into M&S all the qualities listed previously for each food item. M&S is presented as the epitome of excellent food, and high quality at a denotative level corresponds to high status at a connotative level. This appears more evident if we consider the interaction between verbal language and para-linguistic features.

Firstly, attention has to be paid to the breathy female voice-over used in the M&S advert. Van Leeuwen (1999: 133) points out that “[...] the breathy voice [is] always also soft [...] [and it] excludes all but a few others, and can therefore be associated with intimacy and confidentiality. So while the previous commercials (e.g. Tesco and

Iceland) used para-linguistic devices to show inclusion (e.g. loud voice tones and distinctive accents), in the M&S one, voice modulation is employed to connote exclusivity reserved only for few. The female voice-over is not speaking to everybody, but only to the restricted in-group who can fully appreciate (and possibly afford) M&S food. Thus, M&S becomes a synonym for status, quality becomes posh, and the slogan seems to suggest another interpretation: this is not food for everybody; this is food for those who want to be posh.

Secondly, pictures exclusively foreground quality. In the M&S visuals there is nothing denoting the price. The camera lingers on close-ups of the line-caught, oak-smoked salmon, the slowly-matured Angus steak, and the Languedoc Chardonnay, appealing to the senses of viewers. The coding orientation preferred here is the sensory one: the commercial aims to please the target audience, creating a sense of anticipation in tasting the food and sharing in the status attached to it. The slow-motion of the whole commercial, and the reduced musical time of the guitar playing in the background contribute to the creation of a dreamlike atmosphere that enhances the modality of the advert⁵⁹.

The general framework of the Italian supermarket commercials appears to be quite different. Conad (an acronym for *Consorzio Nazionale Dettaglianti*) is a cooperative association managing one of the largest supermarket chains in Italy.



Snapshot 5.109



Snapshot 5.110

⁵⁹ As shown in chapter 2.1.2.3, in the “sensory coding orientation”, any element aimed at pleasing the viewers is a modality raiser.



Snapshot 5.111

The commercial for Conad (snapshots 5.109-5.114) combines the slice-of-life genre with the lesson, to convey a message that foregrounds first and foremost quality. The theme of the advert is art: the commercial opens with a bus of tourists arriving at a Conad shop (snapshot 5.109). A tour guide, carrying a plastic flower symbol of Conad in her hand in place of the usual umbrella (snapshot 5.110) shows them around in the supermarket (snapshot 5.111) saying:

Eccoci qua! Qui qualità e convenienza diventano... arte.

The stress is noticeably on quality. Firstly, the noun phrase *qualità* precedes *convenienza*, thus implying the primacy of quality issue on that of good value. Secondly, there is no direct reference to the price: the word *convenienza* is defined as “tornaconto, utilità, vantaggio” (*Dizionario d’Italiano Garzanti Online*) or as “opportunità” (*Dizionario De Mauro Paravia Online*), and thus refers to the price question in quite an indirect way.

Conad is denoted and connoted as a work of art. The unlikely situation of a group of tourists visiting a supermarket is explained through the words of the guide, who says that quality and good value combine into art at these supermarkets. The commercial evidently exploits the Renaissance stereotype of Italy as cradle of art and culture, through a set of interrelated signs.

According to the semiotic model proposed by Charles Sanders Peirce (1931-1958), three different types of relationship can exist between a “sign” (or “signifier”) and the “object” (or “signified”)⁶⁰ to which it refers:

⁶⁰ “Sign” and “object” are Peircean terms, and they are equivalent to the Saussurean “signifier” and “signified” respectively.

- 1) “Indexical”, which occurs when signifier and signified are related to each other through a “causal relationship” (e.g. a house with a swimming pool is an “index” of richness *because* lots of money is needed to buy it);
- 2) “Iconic”, which occurs when the relationship between signifier and signified is based on “likeness” (e.g. a geographical map is an “icon” of a country insofar as it shows *what the country looks like*);
- 3) “Symbolic”, which occurs when the relationship between signifier and signified is “arbitrary” (e.g. in many cultures a dove is a “symbol” of peace *without* any logical connection existing between doves and peace).

In the case of the Conad commercial, a parallelism is established between the supermarket and Italy: Conad is an index of high quality and good value in the same way as Italy is an index of art and culture. Interestingly, the index used here is culture-bound: in fact, considering Italy as the cradle of civilisation necessarily means to look at it from an Italian, or at least western, perspective.



Snapshot 5.112



Snapshot 5.113



Snapshot 5.114

In the second part of the advert, a male voice-over takes the floor, and says:

Conad. Oltre 40 anni di serietà. 3.000 imprenditori, 30.000 addetti, 3.000.000 di clienti, ogni giorno.

The language here conveys what I would call a *humanistic* view of Conad, consistent with the Renaissance stereotype introduced before. Differently from the British commercials, where figures were used to refer to prices (e.g. Tesco and Iceland), here they stand for people: 3,000 entrepreneurs, 30,000 employees, and 3,000,000 customers signify that the man is at the centre of the company (as metaphorically shown by the smiling Conad guard at the centre of the screen in snapshot 5.112) just like the man was at the centre of the world in the Renaissance *Weltanschauung*. The stress on quality is made even clearer here, through the small print at the bottom of the screen (snapshot 5.113-5.114) reading: “Da oltre 40 anni una solida garanzia di qualità”. Like a work of art, Conad retains their intrinsic value over the years, and offer their customers a solid quality guarantee. “Questo è Conad”, *this is Conad*, is how the tour guide concludes the commercial, while the tourists take pictures of the logo (snapshot 5.114).

The visuals and the background music are also consistent with the artistic discourse of the verbal language. The use of frontal perspective (snapshots 5.111-5.112) is once again reminiscent of Renaissance art: borrowing Peirce’s terminology illustrated above, we could say that the pictures are used as an icon of the Renaissance. The music playing in the background throughout the commercial is Mozart’s minuet in D major, and is, in its turn, an index of high culture. As Van Leeuwen (1999: 83) has pointed out:

‘Classical’ music was, and still is, the ‘high culture’ music of Western society. A well developed taste and interest in classical music constitutes what Bourdieu (1986: 16) called the ‘legitimate taste’ and is a ‘mark of distinction’ for members of the dominant class.

Van Leeuwen’s definition implies a connection between high culture and power. A taste for elevated musical genres, and in general for fine arts, is a hallmark of the ruling class, so choosing a supermarket that connotes itself through high culture could

be indicative of one's collocation on the social ladder. Like the M&S commercial, in the Conad advert quality and status are associated, but whereas in the former high status was a synonym for posh, in the latter it is a synonym for learned.



Snapshot 5.115



Snapshot 5.116



Snapshot 5.117



Snapshot 5.118



Snapshot 5.119



Snapshot 5.120



Snapshot 5.121



Snapshot 5.122



Snapshot 5.123



Snapshot 5.124



Snapshot 5.125



Snapshot 5.126



Snapshot 5.127



Snapshot 5.128

Despar is the Italian name of Spar, an international retail franchise present in 33 countries in Europe and the rest of the world. The key word of the commercial illustrated above (snapshots 5.115-5.128) is *opportunità*:

Il mondo è pieno di opportunità che ti vengono incontro tutti i giorni. Sono così tante e sono tutte da cogliere, sono tutte da amare, sono tutte da vivere. Sono tutte infinite opportunità e sono tutte vicino a te. Ti basta solo sapere dove guardare. Despar. Da 45 anni un mondo di opportunità.

Verbal language on its own appears to bear no relevance to what is advertised: a supermarket can offer quality, good value, low cost, but normally it is not associated with opportunity. It is only through images that we manage to make sense of the spoken language. Here we are in the presence of what could be called “reverse

anchorage”: as Daniel Chandler points out⁶¹, “There are also many instances where the ‘illustrative use’ of an image provides anchorage for ambiguous text [...]”, and the Despar commercial offers an example in this sense. It begins in a kitchen, with a woman opening a cupboard (snapshot 5.116) and looking at some products she is likely to have purchased from Despar. Then she starts thinking of a number of situations (snapshot 5.117), and the visuals turn into a series of vignettes, alternating between a Despar supermarket and a homely setting. We are taken to the aisles of the Despar shop where the woman has been shopping (snapshots 5.118-5.119), we see the dairy counter (snapshot 5.120), the bakery (snapshot 5.121), and the greengrocers (snapshot 5.122). Then the setting changes: the camera cuts to a house interior, where a man is taking a bake out of the oven (snapshot 5.123). Later, the same man appears sat at a table with lots of other people, among whom is also the woman from the beginning of the advert (snapshot 5.124). The table is prepared for a family feast, and we also see a smiling young girl being told something by an older man, presumably her grandfather. Finally, the camera cuts to the initial kitchen again, where we see our woman and some Despar carrier bags on the table (snapshots 5.126-5.127). Only now is the link between visuals, verbal language and Despar established, with the female voice-over reading aloud the slogan, “Despar. Da 45 anni un mondo di opportunità” (snapshot 5.128). The images help us understand (or at least infer) that the world of opportunities mentioned by the voice-over is the world of Despar, where customers have the chance to get hold of a large range of fresh products without having to go too far⁶² (“Sono tutte infinite opportunità e sono tutte vicino a te”), and the chance to share them with the people they love (“Sono così tante e sono tutte da cogliere, sono tutte da amare, sono tutte da vivere”). Language is not self-explanatory in this commercial; it is like an empty signifier of which we can make sense only through the signifieds provided by the visuals. Despar is associated with some basic values of Italian lifestyle, primarily family and conviviality, but the message of the commercial is understandable only if we interpret visuals and words as one multimodal text.

⁶¹ <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem09.html>

⁶² In Italy, the typical Despar shops are neighbourhood groceries or small supermarkets, much more conveniently located as compared to big supermarkets/commercial centres.

In conclusion, the comparison between the language of supermarket advertising in the UK and in Italy has shown some substantial differences. In the vast majority of British commercials (Tesco, ASDA, Morrisons, Somerfield, Iceland), discourse appears to place emphasis on either price or convenience. In some cases the quality issue is foregrounded, but it remains a function of price/good value (Sainsbury's, Waitrose); in others, wholesomeness represents the focus of the advert, but it is presented in an ironic fashion (Coop). Only in one case is quality the paramount, pervasive topic (M&S), and it is associated with connotation of high status and exclusivity. All these patterns find an explanation in the British cultural schemes as illustrated by Geert Hofstede.

IDV is one of the Hofstedian dimensions which can provide an explanation for the focus on price in most British supermarket commercials. De Mooij (2005) has noticed that the low-context communication typical of individualistic societies attaches a great importance to facts, and this has emerged from the analysis of some BFPS commercials in the previous chapter (see 4.2.2.). Now, speaking about or showing prices in an advert is the most incontrovertible evidence that the product in question is good value; it is a demonstrable fact, much more so than words about quality. Secondly, the primacy of economic issues in the advertising language of British supermarkets can be seen as part of a pursuit of self-interest. This is a distinctive feature of high-IDV societies, and in particular of Britain, the cradle of economics as a discipline. Hofstede (2001: 250) points out that Adam Smith, one of the fathers of modern economics, “[...] assumed that the pursuit of self-interest by individuals through an “invisible hand” would lead to the maximum wealth of nation”, and he argues that this idea is still a pillar of the thinking of the UK, a country ranked near the top for individualism.

UAI also offers a cultural scheme to interpret the price-focussed advertising discourse of supermarkets in the UK. This scheme is closely related with religion and ethics. In the section of his work concerning uncertainty avoidance and religion, Hofstede (2001: 176) has written that statistically-proven relationships exists between high UAI and Catholicism, on the one hand, and low UAI and Protestantism, on the

other. “Catholicism” – he says – “stresses life after death and the believer’s ability to ensure participation in it more than do Protestant groups [...]. Conversely, “Protestantism, and especially Calvinism, encourages the use of worldly ways to cope with uncertainty [...] as willed by God [...]”. One of these *ways* is work. In his famous *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930/1992), Max Weber spoke about the “Protestant work ethic”, a Calvinist value emphasizing the necessity of constant labor in a person's calling as a sign of personal salvation. In Weber’s view, closely related to this work ethic, and thus to the spirit of Calvinism, was the spirit of capitalism. Asceticism was a rule of life for Calvinists: they believed that wealth is a gift from God and must be only spent in his glory, without indulging oneself. Increasing one’s wealth as an end in itself was condemned, but earning it by pursuing a “calling” was a sign of God’s blessing. The Calvinist ethic has permeated British culture ever since, becoming the cornerstone of the country’s prosperity, and making money a value much more than in other countries. Consequently, it does not seem surprising that the majority of supermarkets highlight cheap products as value added products.

As we have seen, in some cases price is not – or not the only – issue at the centre of British supermarket advertising discourse, and convenience is also foregrounded. In these cases, low UAI and high IDV also provide suitable explanation. Hofstede (2001) has noticed that low-UAI cultures seem to prefer convenience foods; in the case of Great Britain, this is also connected with the country’s IDV-related hedonism, whereby personal leisure time is highly valued. Convenience foods are mainly designed to save consumers’ time, so they respond to the needs of a culture where the demand for foodstuffs saving trouble in the kitchen is higher than that for quality food.

In the light of what is presented above, it is evident that the sporadic adverts that place the emphasis on quality rely on *value paradox*, give viewers *the desired* and not *the desirable*, and present them with what they *should* want instead of what they *actually* want. Unlike the *normative* commercials, which aim to convey an idea of matter-of-fact inclusiveness, those exploiting the *value paradox* are connoted through posh exclusivity.

The two commercials from the Italian sub-corpus utilise a different set of appeals. Good value is not neglected in the Conad ad, but it is considered in combination with quality, through references to the artistic tradition of Italy. In the Despar one, quality is explored mainly visually, with the camera lingering on the fresh products in the aisles of the supermarket, and it is associated with traditional values, like family and conviviality.

The major stress on quality is dependant on the higher UAI of Italian culture, and on its larger “consumption of “purity” products” (Hofstede 2001: 180). De Mooij (2005) has pointed out that *purity* and *cleanliness* represent two common appeals in the advertising of high-UAI cultures (see 3.3.1), and this holds especially true of commercials for foodstuffs or mineral water.

PDI also has a significant weight in shaping the verbal and visual advertising discourse of Italian supermarkets. Let us consider two instances of verbal language from the two samples analysed:

(a) *Da oltre 40 anni una solida garanzia di qualità* (Conad, small print)

(b) *Da 45 anni un mondo di opportunità* (Despar, slogan)

In both cases, the key feature of the supermarket (*qualità* for Conad and *opportunità* for Despar) is associated with the idea of a long-time established tradition (see italicised phrases in (a) and (b)). Old age as a value demanding authority and respect is among the features of high-PDI cultures (Hofstede 2001) and represents a frequent appeal in their advertising discourse (De Mooij 2005). In the specific cases of our commercials, the semiotic references to the great artistic past of Italy in the Conad commercial, or the presentation of generational vignettes in the Despar one (e.g. snapshot 5.125) highlight old age as a measure of wisdom, trustworthiness, and value.

Interestingly, the recourse to famous endorsers seems to be alien to Italian supermarket advertising, whereas it appears more frequent in the English samples. Once again, as in the case of the BFPS advertising, the MAS dimension and its related

idea of success prove to be more pervasive in the British advertising discourse than in the Italian one.

5.2.2 “I Almost Die for Food, and Let Me Have It”⁶³. The Language of Food Advertising.

Foodstuffs are among the most frequently purchased convenience goods, regardless of one’s culture. Everyone has to eat in order to live, and even if with different modalities, everywhere people buy foodstuffs with greater regularity than any other products.

On the other hand, eating is a highly culture-bound practice. Although an individual may live in different countries for long periods, travel around the world for most of his/her life, or enjoy eating out in exotic restaurants, s/he retains eating habits which are deeply rooted in his/her culture. In her analysis of the connections existing between consumer behaviour and culture, De Mooij (2004) has noticed that foodstuff purchase dynamics are profoundly culture-driven, and can hardly be influenced or altered through marketing.

Unsurprisingly, the category has proved to be the largest one both in the British and in the Italian collection of commercials. The tables below summarise the food commercials found in the two sub-corpora:

⁶³ In a famous scene of Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* (Act II, Scene 7, l. 104), a hungry and desperate Orlando utters this sentence while brandishing his sword at Duke Senior and his exiled court in the forest, who are just starting to eat.

BRITISH SUB-CORPUS – FOOD ADVERTISING

AAH BISTO GRAVY POWDER	FLORA BUTTER	LYON EGGS	NUTRIGRAIN BARS
ACTIVIA YOGHURT	FLORA PRO-ACTIV ANTI-CHOLESTEROL DRINK	MC CAIN CHIPS	OLD EL PASO ENCHILADAS
ALL BRAN FLAKES CEREAL	FLORETTE FROZEN BROCCOLI	MC VITIES BISCUITS	PEPERAMI SALAMI
AMOY NOODLES	FROSTIE'S TIGER POWER CEREAL	MULLER LIGHT YOGHURT	PETIT FILOU YOGHURT
ANCHOR SPREADABLE BUTTER	GOODFELLOW LA BOTTEGA PIZZA	MULLER YOGHURT	PHILADELPHIA LIGHT SOFT CHEESE
AUNT BESSIE'S YORKSHIRE PUDDING	HELLMANN'S MAYONNAISE	MÜLLER VITALITY DRINK	QUORN SAUSAGES
BAXTERS STOCK CUBE	HOVIS BREAD	NESTLE BITESIZE CEREAL	SPAM TINNED BEEF
BENECOL ANTI- CHOLESTEROL DRINK	HP SAUCE	NESTLE CHEERIOS CEREAL	WALLS MICRO SAUSAGES
BERTOLLI RUSTICO TOMATO SAUCE	KELLOGG'S ALL BRAN FLAKES CEREAL	NESTLE FITNESS CEREAL	WALLS NEW FAVOURITE RECIPE SAUSAGES
BIRDSEYE FROZEN FOODS	KELLOGG'S CRUNCHY NUT CLUSTERS CEREAL	NESTLE FROSTIES SHREDDIES CEREAL	WEETABIX CEREAL
BLUE DRAGON SAUCES	KELLOGG'S CRUNCHY NUT NUTTY CEREAL	NESTLE NEW FITNESS AND FRUIT CEREAL	WEETABIX WEETAFLAKES CEREAL
CAPTAIN BIRDSEYE NUTRITION MISSION FROZEN FOODS	KELLOGG'S RICE KRISPIES MULTIGRAIN CEREAL	NESTLE SHREDDIES SCHOOL FUEL CEREAL	TOT: 71
CAPTAIN	KELLOGG'S	NESTLE TRIPLE	

BRITISH SUB-CORPUS – FOOD ADVERTISING			
BIRDSEYE'S READY MEALS	SPECIAL K CEREAL	BERRY SHREDDED WHEAT CEREAL	
CHICAGO TOWN PIZZA	KERRYGOLD SOFT BUTTER	NESTLE WHOLEGRAIN CEREAL	
CLOVER BUTTER	KINGSMILL BREAD	NEW ALL BRAN FLAKES YOGHURTY CEREAL	
COW AND GATE GROWING-UP MILK	KNORR CHICKEN TONIGHT SAUCE	NEW CRAVENDALE HINTOF MILK	
DANONE ACTIMEL ANTI-CHOLESTEROL DRINK	KNORR STOCK CUBES	NEW DAIRYLEA LUNCHEABLES	
DANONE DANACOL ANTI-CHOLESTEROL DRINK	LEA AND PERRINS WORCESTER SAUCE	NEW ST. IVEL ADVANCE MILK	
DOLMIO READY-MADE SAUCE	LOYD GROSSMAN SAUCES	NEW WHITE HOVIS	
FITNESSE BARS	LURPAK BUTTER	NEW ZEALAND LAMB	

Table 5.1 Food Advertisements in the British sub-corpus

ITALIAN SUB-CORPUS – FOOD ADVERTISING

AMADORI 10+ WURSTEL DI POLLO	GALLO INSALATA EXPRESSO RISO	PAPILLON GELATI E SURGELATI	STAR GRAN SUGO AMATRICIANA
AURICCHIO MEZZELUNE	GALLO RISO	PARMALAT JEUNESSE SUCCHI E DESSERT	VALLÉ ALLEGÉE MARGARINA
AURICCHIO PROVOLETTINA E SALAMINO	GALLO RISO BLOND EXPRESSO	PARMALAT OMEGA 3 LATTE	TOT: 62
BARILLA I PICCOLINI	GRANA PADANO	PARMIGIANO REGGIANO	
BARILLA LE EMILIANE	GRANA PADANO GRATTUGGIATO	PATASNELLA PIZZOLI(X2) PATATINE SURGELATE	
BARILLA SUGO POMODORO E RICOTTA	GRANAROLO LATTE	PHILADELPHIA LIGHT	
BAYERNLAND LATTICINI	GRANORO PASTA	POMODORO ITALIANO PELATO ANICAV	
BERTOLLI SUGHI DI CASA	INVERNIZZI CILIEGE	PONTI ACETO BALSAMICO DI MODENA	
BONDUELLE AGITA E GUSTA INSALATA	JOCCA FORMAGGIO MORBIDO	QUATTRO SALTI IN PADELLA EXTRA MEZZELUNE GIGANTI	
BONDUELLE TRIO FRESCHEZZA INSALATA	KELLOGG'S CHOCO POPS CHOCO CRISPIES CEREALI	RANA SFOGLIAVELO FORMAGGIO E PERE RAVIOLI	
CAMEO MUESLI VITALIS	KIMBO CIALDE & MACCHINA CIALDE AMSTRAD	RAZZE FRANCESI DA CARNE	
CHIQUITA BANANE	KRAFT SOTTILETTE	RISO SCOTTI RAPID	

ITALIAN SUB-CORPUS – FOOD ADVERTISING			
CONSORCIO TONNO IN SCATOLA	LEERDAMMER FORMAGGIO	RIUNIONE PRODOTTI ITTICI	
CUORE OLIO DI MAIS	MANZOTIN BLU CARNE IN GELATINA	ROVAGNATI GRAN BISCOTTO PROSCIUTTO COTTO	
DANONE ACTIVIA YOGHURT	MAYA PRO-ACTIV DRINK ANTI- COLESTEROLO	RUMMO PASTA	
DANONE YOGURT	MONTANA BRESAOLA DELLA VALTELLINA	SCOTTI PASTA DI RISO	
DE CECCO PASTA	MONTANA CARNE IN GELATINA	SICILIA LEMONSUCCO	
FOGLIABELLA OROGEL SPINACI	MONTANA MINI- BURGER	SIMMENTHAL CARNE IN GELATINA	
GALBANETTO SALAME	MONTORSI I FRESCHI SALUMI	STAR GRAN PESTO TIGULLIO	
GALBANINO FORMAGGIO	NESTLE CHEERIOS CEREALI	STAR GRAN RAGÙ	

Table 5.2 Food advertisements in the Italian sub-corpus

BRITISH SUB-CORPUS SNACK ADVERTISING		ITALIAN SUB-CORPUS SNACK ADVERTISING		
AERO CHOCOLATE SNACK	MR. KIPLING CAKES	BACI PERUGINA CIOCCOLATINI	MAINA GRAN NOCCIOLATO PANETTONE	ORO SAIWA BISCOTTI
AMBROSIA DEVON CREAM	NEW QUACKER SEASON CRACKERS	BAULI CROISSANTERIA	MATILDE VICENZI MINIVOGLIE PASTICCINI	PALUANI PANDORO
BACI CHOCOLATES	PRINGLES CRISPS	BAULI PANDORO	MILKA LUFLÉ CIOCCOLATO	PAVESI GOCCIOLE AL CIOCCOLATO BISCOTTI
BENEDICK'S CHOCOLATES	RYVITA RIE CRACKERS	CHUPA CHUPS LECCA-LECCA	MILKA MJOY CIOCCOLATO	PAVESI GOCCIOLE BISCOTTI
BENEDICK'S MINGLES ASSORTED CHOCOLATES	STARBURST	COLUSSI GRANTURCHESE FROLLINI	MON CHERI CIOCCOLATINI AL LIQUORE	PAVESI GOCCIOLE EXTRA DARK BISCOTTI
BOUNTY COCONUT-FILLED CHOCOLATE	THORNTONS CHOCOLATES	DUFOUR CAMELLE	MOTTA BUONDÌ CROISSANT	PAVESI NUOVE GOCCIOLE BISCOTTI
CADBURY DAIRY MILK	TWIX CHOCOLATE SNACK	DUFOUR SUGARFREE CAMELLE	MOTTA COPPA DEL NONNO GELATO	PAVESI PAVESINI BISCOTTI
CADBURY EASTER EGG DELIGHT EGG CHOCOLATE	WALKER'S CRISPS	FERRERO ROCHER CIOCCOLATINI	MOTTA PANETTONE	PAVESI TOGO BISCOTTI
CADBURY'S MINI-ROLLS CHOCOLATE SNACKS	WALKERS NEW SENSATIONS OLIVE OIL CRISPS	FRUITTELLA CAMELLE	MULINO BIANCO	RICODELIZIE GALBI SNACK ALLA RICOTTA
CELEBRATIONS CHOCOLATES	WALKERS POTATO HEADS	GRISSINBON GRISSINI	MULINO BIANCO 2006	SPERLARI ZANZIBAR CIOCCOLATINI
EXTRA COOL BURST MINTS	WALL'S ICE CREAMS	KINDER CEREALI SNACK AL CIOCCOLATO	MULINO BIANCO CAMPAGNOLE BISCOTTI	VIGORSOL AIR ACTION GOMME DA MASTICARE
FERRERO GIOTTO CHOCOLATES	WALL'S MAGNUM 5 SENSES	KINDER CIOCCOLATO AL LATTE	MULINO BIANCO CROSTATINA	VIVIDENT XILYT GOMME DA MASTICARE

BRITISH SUB-CORPUS SNACK ADVERTISING		ITALIAN SUB-CORPUS SNACK ADVERTISING		
FERRERO ROCHER CHOCOLATES	WALL'S STRAWBERRY CORNETTO	KINDER COLAZIONE PIÙ MERENDINE	MULINO BIANCO MICHETTI CRACKERS	TOT: 52
FRUITTELLA SWEETS	TOT: 33	KINDER E FERRERO MERENDINE	MULINO BIANCO PAN GOCCIOLI MERENDINE	
JORDANS COUNTRY CRISPY CRACKERS		KINDER FETTA AL LATTE SNACK AL LATTE	MULINO BIANCO SACCOTTINI MERENDINE	
KINDER BUENO CHOCOLATE SNACK		KINDER PINGUÌ SNACK AL LATTE E CIOCCOLATO	MULINO BIANCO SFOGLIA DI GRANO CRACKERS	
KIT KAT CHOCOLATE SNACK		LINDT CIOCCOLATO	MÜLLER CREMA DI RISO	
LINDT LINDOR CHOCOLATES		LINDT EXCELLENCE CIOCCOLATO FONDENTE	MULLER FIOCCHI DI CIOCCOLATO SNACK ALLO YOGHURT	
MALTESERS CHOCOLATE SNACK		LINDT LINDOR CIOCCOLATINI	NOVI CIOCCOLATO FONDENTE NERO	
MARS DELIGHT CHOCOLATE SNACK		LOACKER MINIS WAFER	NOVI GIANDUIOTTI	

Table 5.3 Snack advertisements in the British and Italian sub-corpora.

A basic distinction between food advertising (tables 5.1 and 5.2) and snack advertising (table 5.3) has been made exclusively for the sake of convenience. The three tables include all products found at least once in the two sub-corpora, but they do not account either for different versions of a commercial used to advertise the same product, or for repetitions of the same commercial.

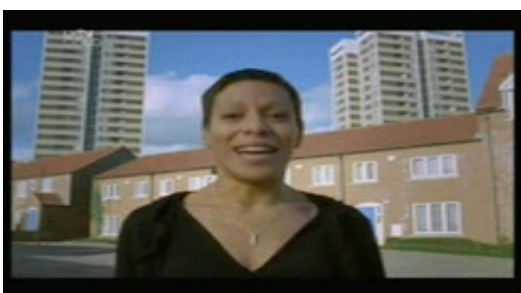
The number of food items advertised in the British and Italian sub-corpora is more or less the same (71 and 62 respectively), whereas snack commercials appear more numerous in the Italian sub-corpus (52) than in the British one (33). The latter data appears quite surprising, in consideration of the fact that Britons are top of the league for snack consumption in Europe⁶⁴, and all British supermarkets have many more aisles than their Italian counterparts devoted to the sale of nibbles. The reduced presence of snacks on British TV advertising might actually be a consequence of government policy aimed at turning the screw on *junk food advertising*, following the alarm of an “obesity time bomb” launched by the food watchdog⁶⁵.

Going on to analyse the commercials, it is interesting to notice that some British adverts for *traditional* products appeal to viewers through *value paradox*, by advertising, together with the food item, a better self to which every viewer should be longing. This is the case with the commercial for AHH Bisto (snapshots 5.129-5.153), a powder for making the typical British roast gravy, where a number of people look into the camera to “make a pledge”:



Snapshot 5.129

I James Metcalf...



Snapshot 5.130

...I Deborah...

⁶⁴ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/3692085.stm>

⁶⁵ <http://media.guardian.co.uk/advertising/story/0,,1081518,00.html>. Junk food advertising has become a real issue in the UK over the last few years, and numerous restrictions have been enforced on their broadcasting on TV, especially during children’s shows (see, for example, <http://media.guardian.co.uk/site/story/0,,1951310,00.html>), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/6154600.stm>, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/news/news.html?in_article_id=397730&in_page_id=1770, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article640334.ece>).



Snapshot 5.131

...I Keith Jones, father of two...



Snapshot 5.132

...do solemnly promise...



Snapshot 5.133

...to you, my family...



Snapshot 5.134

...to spend more quality time together...



Snapshot 5.135

...chatting about the stuff of life...



Snapshot 5.136

...doing what families do...



Snapshot 5.137

...which is why we make this pledge ...



Snapshot 5.138

...to change our routine...



Snapshot 5.139

...for just one night a week ...



Snapshot 5.140

...to come home, on time ...



Snapshot 5.141

...cook a proper meal together ...



Snapshot 5.142

...sit at the table ...



Snapshot 5.143

...eat proper food...



Snapshot 5.144

...with proper gravy.



Snapshot 5.145

So, henceforth...



Snapshot 5.146

...from this day forward...



Snapshot 5.147

...this night...



Snapshot 5.148

...this night...



Snapshot 5.149

...this night...



Snapshot 5.150

...will be our night...



Snapshot 5.151

...our family night.



Snapshot 5.152

Ahh Bisto.



Snapshot 5.153

The vow made by the represented participants in the commercial is to *change a routine* that does not include doing *family-centric activities*, such as coming home earlier, cooking a proper meal together, and eating it sat at a table. The commercial is pivoted around *value paradox* as it highlights values, such as family and home-cooking, which are non-normative in individualistic British society, which is characterised by “[...] weak family ties [and] rare contacts” (Hofstede 2001: 236)⁶⁶, and by a profound hedonism, whereby cooking or any other form of housework are not supposed to be an obstacle to one’s leisure and self-enjoyment. Nevertheless, British mainstream cultural

⁶⁶ With reference to IDV and family ties, Hofstede (2001: 227-228) has pointed out that “Whereas in the collectivistic society the family is the smallest unit, in the individualistic society the individual is the smallest unit. [...] People in collectivistic societies are integrated not only horizontally but also vertically. They stay in close contact with their parents, grandparents and other elders as long as these are alive, and they can expect their own offspring and other juniors to maintain contact with them. But vertical integration extends beyond the grave; the collectivist family honors the memory of deceased ancestors and cares for their graves”.

values permeate the advert, and curb the value paradox it exploits. This is particularly evident if we analyse the verbal language at the core of *the pledge*.

The woman in snapshot 5.139 says that the change of routine will affect “just one night a week”. The use of the adverb *just* to modify the noun phrase of time “one night a week” reinforces the idea of exceptionality of the event⁶⁷. The idea conveyed is not that of a permanent disruption of a culture-bound routine, but that of *one* special night a week, the “Aah night” also advertised through the web site overprint in snapshot 5.153.

A meal cooked with Ahh Bisto is therefore presented as a weekly treat, and funnily enough, it is defined through the adjective, *proper* (“cook a proper meal together” snapshot 5.141, “eat proper food” snapshot 5.143), whose main meaning is “genuine; being in fact what it is called” (*Online Oxford English Dictionary*). The main implication of this adjectival choice is that the viewers who identify themselves with the pledge makers are actually dealing with the idea of eating *real food* just once a week!

Similarly, the idea of eating a home-made meal sat at a table (“sit at a table” snapshot 5.142) just once a week is another proof of the combination between value paradox and cultural norm on which the Ahh Bistro advert is based. In fact, reuniting the whole family around a table for dinner is the optimal solution to “spend quality time together”, to chat “about the stuff of life doing what families do”, and thus having the “family night” the commercial is promoting. However, in British everyday life it is not uncommon to consume even one’s main evening meal informally, sitting on the sofa and eating on one’s lap, while watching TV or doing other activities that do not necessarily include socialising⁶⁸. This means that a *sit-down meal* might well be regarded as “the desired” (see 3.3.1) and be associated with a special occasion in the context of high-IDV mainstream British culture.

⁶⁸ As evidence of this widespread practice, one of Sainsbury’s forums, called “Do you eat at a dining table regularly?” invites people to post messages about how often they sit at the table to have their main meal of the day (<http://www.sainsburys.co.uk/YOURIDEAS/forums/thread/6753.aspx>).

The Aunt Bessie's Yorkshire pudding commercial also rests on the value paradox of the family get-together for a traditional meal:



Snapshot 5.154



Snapshot 5.155

Old-fashioned, sepia pictures of a woman baking Yorkshire puddings flow on the screen (snapshots 5.154-5.155), while a male voice-over says:

Aunt Bessie's Yorkshire puddings are as good as they've always been.



Snapshot 5.156



Snapshot 5.157

Through a dissolve, we are brought to present day, in a house interior where a family is gathered around the table for a meal including Aunt Bessie's Yorkshire puddings (snapshot 5.156). The male voice-over concludes:

They taste just like a good pud should. Aunt Bessie's. You know you're home.

The final shot is for a bag of Aunt Bessie's Yorkshire puddings and the slogan "You know you're home" (snapshot 5.157).

The aim here is to show continuity between the past and the present as proof of the unchanged quality standards of the product advertised. From a linguistic perspective, this goal is achieved through the use of present tenses. If we consider the first line ("Aunt Bessie's Yorkshire puddings are as good as they've always been") we

understand it results from the fusion of two finite sentences: *Aunt Bessie's puddings are good* and *Aunt Bessie's puddings have always been good*. The idea of an unchangeable goodness in the present, conveyed by the present simple tense, is matched by that of a goodness unchanged over the years up to the present, suggested by the choice of the present perfect tense. Syntactically, the same idea of continuity is expressed via the fusion of the two concepts into a single sentence, in which two clauses are linked together through the use of a complement of equality (“Aunt Bessie’s Yorkshire pudding are *as good as* they’ve always been”). Para-linguistically, the use of dissolve instead of cut (i.e. the *past* sepia images dissolving into the *present* coloured images) has the same effect the verb tenses and the sentence structure have at a linguistic level, in that it stresses the smooth transition from old times to present day.

So Aunt Bessie’s brand is presented as a long time institution in Yorkshire-pudding making, and is associated with the cosy feeling of homeliness, both linguistically (the slogan “You know you’re home”) and pictorially (snapshots 5.156-5.157 showing a family sitting together at the table). Nonetheless, also in this commercial, as in the Aah Bisto one, *value paradox* and mainstream values are combined.

In fact, it is noticeable that the homely feeling does not relate to home-made food, and there is actually no mention whatsoever of freshly baked puddings. Aunt Bessie’s language is self-referential: its present puddings are compared to its past puddings, but not to home-made ones. Aunt Bessie’s puddings “taste just like a good pud should”, but the *good pud* is not defined as home-made, and the use of the modal *should*, denoting a low modality, highlights the fact that there is no fixed standard to evaluate a pudding, except Aunt Bessie’s own. The point I want to make here is that the idea of convenience and time-saving in the kitchen, inherent in the low-UAI and high-IDV British society, emerges as a priority also in the promotion of long-established foodstuffs. A traditional Yorkshire pudding, today as in the past, can foster homely feelings without having to be home-made. The idea of the traditional preparation of Aunt Bessie’s puddings is suggested by the first two snapshots (5.154-5.155), but the de-saturated colour not only relates them to the past, but also lowers the modality, in

the framework of the naturalistic code orientation of the advert. Pudding home-making is connoted as unrealistic or, at best, a part of the past.

The Italian commercials for Star ready-made sauces appear to be deeply rooted in the Italian cultural background:



Snapshot 5.158



Snapshot 5.159

In the advert for Gran Ragù Star, a man (M) expresses his reservations to his wife (W) about her idea of using a ready-made meat sauce for their guests (snapshots 5.158-5.159):

M: Un ragù *pronto* per i nostri invitati?

W: *Ma* questo è il Gran Ragù Star. Sarà un successo, *Scommettiamo?*

M: *Scommettiamo!*

I have italicised the parts which are relevant to my analysis. The surprise of the man is rendered through the falling intonation of his question. This prosodic feature makes it clear that that the question being asked is a rhetorical one, and that the man is being judgemental about the decision to serve guests a ready-made meat sauce. In this context, the adjective *pronto* (= *ready-made*) has a negative connotation: the condition of being *pronto* is implicitly described as a diminishing feature of the product. This is made more evident by the use of the disjunctive conjunction *ma* in the second line: it is a ready-made ragù, *but* it is Gran Ragù Star, therefore it will be successful.

The second part of the advert confirms this interpretation:



Snapshot 5.160



Snapshot 5.161



Snapshot 5.162



Snapshot 5.163

The setting is now that of the dinner party during which the ready-made sauce is being served. The hostess clinks a glass (snapshot 5.160) to attract the attention of her guests (G), and asks them whether they like her *ragù*:

W: Allora, vi piace il mio ragù?

G1: Eccezionale!

W: È un ragù pronto.

G2: Mente

W: Visto?

VO: Star. Il tuo segreto in cucina.

One of the guests answers that it is exceptional, while everybody else continues eagerly eating the pasta dressed with the *ragù*. The hostess then reveals that the delicious *ragù* is actually a ready-made sauce: a long silence follows, broken by a second guest, who assumes that the hostess is lying, and teasing her guests by trying to make them believe the sauce is pre-made (snapshot 5.161). Everybody goes back to eating, while the hostess points out to her husband that she has won the bet (snapshot 5.162). The possibility of the sauce being ready-made is treated as ludicrous and ruled out as a joke by the guests, on the assumption that a good *ragù* has to be home-made.

As a consequence, using Star tinned sauce becomes a secret (“Il tuo segreto in cucina” is the final slogan, snapshot 5.163), something to hide from the others.

An identical structure is also found in the other two commercials for Star sauces found in the corpus, Pesto Tigullio Star (snapshots 5.164-5.167) and Sugo all’Amatriciana Star (snapshots 5.168-5.171), where the statements about the sauces being ready-made are labelled as “bugia” or “falsità”.⁶⁹



Snapshot 5.164



Snapshot 5.165



Snapshot 5.166



Snapshot 5.167



Snapshot 5.168



Snapshot 5.169

⁶⁹ In the Pesto Tigullio commercial, the landlady is called a *liar* when she says the pesto is ready made; in the Amatriciana one the idea the sauce is ready made is considered *false* by the guests.



Snapshot 5.170



Snapshot 5.171

Interestingly, in all three commercials the wife is presented as the *housewife*, the one who is charged with the preparation of food. She is the one who is held responsible for choosing a ready-made sauce, she is the one who reassures her husband about it, and she is the one who asks her guests if they like *her* sauce. The Star commercials rely on a very Italian and high-MAS⁷⁰ culture iconography of woman, whereby the fairer sex is characterised by “[...] extreme femininity, passivity and self-abnegation” (Hofstede 2001: 309). In this specific case, the women of the commercials use a *trick* to avoid slaving in the kitchen (they use a ready-made sauce), but even so, they are the ones in charge of the preparation and success of the dinner parties.

Comparing the pictures in the Aah Bisto ad with those from the Star commercial, it becomes apparent that visuals also convey profoundly culture-bound messages.

In the case of the gravy powder, despite the fact that the main appeal is family values, not one snapshot shows a household. The commercial promotes a family night, but it does not show one: each represented participant is portrayed as an individual (even the children, as we can see in snapshots 5.134 and 5.151), making a pledge in conjunction with many other individuals to whom they are not apparently related. Furthermore, the fact that the pledge makers belong to different ethnicities (Irish, Caucasian, Black, and Indian) reflects the cultural variegation that characterises British society.

Conversely, in the Star commercials, the family household and conviviality appear to be the main foci of the pictures. In all three commercials (snapshots 5.160-5.162, 5.166, 5.170) we see the host couple sitting at a table with other people – supposedly

⁷⁰ About the unusual relationship between high MAS and the role of woman in the UK, see chapter 4.2.4 and, in particular, footnote 45.

other members of the family or friends – and chatting merrily while having dinner. The Italian culinary tradition is connoted through chromatic choices that call to mind the national tricolour: in snapshots 5.163, 5.167 and 5.171, the green, white and red colour pattern is found not only in the Star logo, but also in the packaging, where the colours of the Italian flag are brought together by deliberate choice. The commercial seems to signal that, even though they are ready-made, Star sauces fall within the renowned Italian gastronomic tradition. As in the famous French advert for pasta Panzani analysed by Roland Barthes, even here pictures are a signifier whose “[...] signified is Italy, or rather *Italianicity*” (1977: 33)⁷¹.

The combination of wholesomeness and family values to appeal to the audience is quite frequent in Italian commercials for ready-made sauces



Snapshot 5.172



Snapshot 5.173



Snapshot 5.174



Snapshot 5.175



Snapshot 5.176



Snapshot 5.177

⁷¹ Henceforth I will be using the felicitous Barthesian coinage “*Italianicity*” to mean the quintessence of Italianness.



Snapshot 5.178



Snapshot 5.179

In the ad for Sugo Pomodoro e Ricotta by Barilla (snapshots 5.172-5.179), the world's leading pasta maker and one of the major Italian food companies, the quality of the sauces is determined not only by the premium ingredients chosen to make them, but also by the fond feelings the Barilla cook harbours for his family while being at work. A female voice-over – that of the represented woman – says:

Mio marito è un cuoco Barilla. Io gliel'ho chiesto: “Ma come fai a fare un sugo così buono?” Lui mi ha risposto che per la ricetta di pomodoro e ricotta non sceglie solo la ricotta migliore. Dice che pensa a noi che saremo i primi ad assaggiarla e a giudicare da come gli e' venuto, io gli credo e come.

The Barilla cook is first and foremost a husband (“Mio marito è un cuoco Barilla”) and a father. This second role is inferred via the use of the pronoun *noi* (“Dice che pensa a noi che saremo i primi ad assaggiarla”), which deictically points to the the pictures (snapshots 5.172, 5.174-5.177) showing a young boy and a baby boy. The goodness of the Barilla sauce relies not only on the quality of the fresh ingredients (“non sceglie solo la ricotta migliore”), but on the love the cook puts to his job thinking that his family will be the first ones to try the sauce. The fact the sauce is ready-made is not even mentioned here: the professional role of the man is obliterated by his role as a family man. The pictures also foreground his role as a husband and a father, rather than a corporate man: most of the snapshots are inside his house (only in snapshot 5.169 is the man at work) and show him with his wife and his children. So not only is Barilla sauce not presented as a pre-prepared sauce, it also has the added quality of being made with great care for someone you love. Here the concern for quality intertwines with the closeness of family ties, indices of high UAI and low IDV respectively. The slogan, “Dove c'è Barilla c'è casa” summarises the spirit of the

commercial: Barilla becomes an index of homeliness, and its products have all the qualities of home-made foods. This trend is also found in the other Barilla commercials, the one for Emiliane Barilla (1) and that for I Piccolini Barilla (2):

(1) Mio figlio sì che sa farle le tagliatelle. Certo, alla Barilla non usano più il mattarello, ma la sua scuola è lì, nella tradizione emiliana. Lui dice che per farle bene, ruvide, porose, pensa a come le faccio io, e funziona. Perché ora quando ho voglia di tagliatelle fatte in casa anch'io scelgo le sue.

(2) Mia mamma ha più fantasia di tutti. Lei lavora alla Barilla e ha fatto I Piccolini, una pasta come quella grande, ma più piccola, che tutti i bambini possono mangiare insieme ai grandi. Dice che l'ho ispirata io ed anche se non so cosa vuol dire, anch'io da grande mi voglio ispirare.

In (1), the voice-over is that of an elderly lady, who speaks about her son working as a pasta maker at Barilla. Here other values are brought in, such as tradition (“la sua scuola è lì, nella tradizione emiliana”) and the experience and common sense of the elders (“per farle bene, ruvide, porose, pensa a come le faccio io, e funziona”) both associated with high PDI. Hofstede (2001) has pointed out that in high-PDI societies, authority is based on tradition, and respect and awe are shown towards elders. In this case, the authority concerns tagliatelle making, and it rests in the Emilian tradition of home-made egg pasta (foregrounded by the unmistakable accent of the elderly lady), physically represented by the old mother.

In (2), the voice-over is that of a young girl, whose mum works at Barilla and has invented a new size of pasta for children (“una pasta come quella grande, ma più piccola, che tutti i bambini possono mangiare insieme ai grandi”.) The focus of the commercial is children: the mother is inspired by her young girl to make a new type of pasta only for children. The very brand name, “I Piccolini”, a diminutive typical of children’s language, underlines the fact that the target of the product is the youngest. Other linguistic features also contribute to the overall childish connotation of the commercial, which is particularly evident if we look at the lexical choices from a paradigmatic perspective, that is, if we compare the lexical items used with those which *could have been used*. For example, let us consider the informal “mia mamma” (“Mia mamma ha più fantasia di tutti”) instead of the standard *mia madre*; the generic verb phrase “ha fatto” (“ha fatto I Piccolini”) in place of the more specific alternatives

ha inventato or *ha creato*; the noun phrase “i grandi” (“i bambini possono mangiare insieme ai grandi”.) to mean *the adults*.

The visuals (not enclosed in the thesis) also foreground the young girl and her playful world: a few images showing the mother at work are interspersed with a long sequence of pictures showing mother and daughter at home, playing, running, or eating.

The commercial presents children as a separate microcosm from that of adults, as creatures to be taken care of and pampered, even with the creation of a tailored pasta size. This appears to be a typical characteristic of those countries that, like Italy, score high on the UAI index. Hofstede (2001: 162) has pointed out that in high-UAI societies children learn that “[...] the world is a hostile place and to be protected from experiencing unknown situations”. Conversely, in low-UAI societies children are regarded and treated as adults. Linguistically speaking, this explains why, in the previously analysed commercial for Aah Bisto, the young boy in snapshot 5.134 and the young girl in snapshot 5.136 can take part in the pledge and speak in terms of *spending more quality time together* and *doing what families do* without sounding phoney.



Snapshot 5.180



Snapshot 5.181



Snapshot 5.182



Snapshot 5.183



Snapshot 5.184

In the commercial for HP brown sauce (snapshots 5.180-5.184), *Britishness* is the main appeal, as suggested by the final slogan that describes HP as “the official sauce of Great Britain” (snapshot 5.184) and shows a pattern made with sauce that reminds us of the Union Jack. But what makes Great Britain? If we look at snapshots 5.180-5.183, we can see that the country is portrayed through a series of sketches that convey very different values from those we have found in connection with Italianicity (tradition, high quality, family, conviviality) in the commercials above. HP is advertised as the official sauce of random workers on duty in white vans (snapshot 5.180), footballers’ wives out partying (snapshot 5.181), wedding punch-ups (snapshot 5.182) and brash girls on hen parties (snapshot 5.183). The values highlighted here are the typically high-IDV ones of work and hedonism, and they come to be presented as the values of a whole nation through the link provided by HP sauce.

One basic divergence that has emerged so far from the comparative analysis of the British and Italian supermarket- and food-related TV advertising discourse is the greater emphasis put on *convenience* issues in the former as opposed to *quality* issues highlighted in the latter. A related difference is the one between the values of *quickness* and *slowness*. Whereas the concept of *fast* and *easy to make* food is a strong appeal to the high-IDV, low-UAI British society, in the Italian low-IDV, high-UAI society, *slow* food is a synonym for food made with care, and, therefore, a guarantee of quality. Two remarkable examples are provided by the commercials for two convenience goods, the British Amoy noodles and the Italian pasta Rummo.



Snapshot 5.185



Snapshot 5.186



Snapshot 5.187



Snapshot 5.188



Snapshot 5.189

In the Amoy commercial (snapshots 5.185-5.189), a female voice-over describes what makes Amoy noodles different from ordinary noodles:

Unlike ordinary noodles, Amoy Straight-to-Wok noodles don't need boiling. They go straight from the pack to the wok, so now making a stir-fry is so quick we had to slow things down a bit. Amoy. The tastiest stir fry in no time.

I have italicised the phrases relevant to linguistic analysis. It is evident that *rapidity* represents the main appeal in the language of the commercial. Making a stir fry with Amoy noodles takes “no time”, and it is so “straight” and “quick” that – the voice-over humorously points out – slow-motion had to be used (snapshots 5.186-5.188) in order to screen the preparation!



Snapshot 5.190



Snapshot 5.191



Snapshot 5.192

In the Rummo commercial, the close-up of a piece of pasta is shown on a blank screen, while Brahms's lullaby is sung by a female voice. There is no spoken language, only captions explain to the audience that "A Benevento dal 1846 la natura non ha fretta". In the end, a pack of pasta replaces the piece, accompanied by the caption "La lavorazione è più lenta. La pasta è più buona", and by the slogan "Così lenta, così buona". A low male voice-over, like that of person speaking softly not to wake up someone who is asleep, reads out the slogan.

At least three different appeals are encompassed by the few words of the ad: 1) the *long time tradition* of the product, established in Benevento since 1846 ("A Benevento dal 1846..."); 2) the *purity* of the product, described as a fruit of the nature that takes its time ("...la natura non ha fretta"); 3) the high quality of the product, presented as direct consequence of its slow making ("La lavorazione è più lenta. La pasta è più buona", "Così lenta, così buona"). Evidently, all three fit the mainstream cultural schemata of the high-PDI and high-UAI Italian society. The slow manufacturing of the pasta is symbolised by the metaphor of *sleep* brought in by the soundtrack to the commercial. Like a baby, pasta Rummo is lulled and taken care of until it is perfect.

The idea of tastiness is present in the Amoy commercial as well ("The tastiest stir fry in no time"), but it is unrelated to the rest of the discourse, and overshadowed by

the prevailing appeal of time-effectiveness. Conversely, in the Rummo ad, the pasta is good *because* it is slow.

The idea of *quick and easy* is often collocated in a humorous context in British food commercials, as we have seen with the Amoy noodles.



Snapshot 5.193



Snapshot 5.194



Snapshot 5.195



Snapshot 5.196



Snapshot 5.197



Snapshot 5.198

In the advert for Wall's Micro Sausages the situation presented is even grotesque. A young man takes a girl home, and offers to microwave some Wall's Micro-sausages (snapshot 5.193), ready in 60 seconds (snapshot 5.194). At this point, his dog goes berserk, and attacks him (snapshot 5.195), pushing him into a different room and closing the door. Here it takes his trousers down, and starts spanking him with a drenched cloth (snapshot 5.196)! While the ludicrous situation is taking place, the sausages are cooked, and the girl opens the door to tell the boy. The rather strange sight scares her off (snapshot 5.197), and she decides to leave, claiming she will ring

him later. The dog has accomplished its mission: it leaves its owner in his underwear and moves to the unattended kitchen, to eat the sandwich with the Wall's Micro-sausages that the girl had made for the young man (snapshot 5.198). Then, a male voice-over says: "Wall's Micro-sausages: sizzling in 60 seconds". There is no apparent link between the product advertised and the situation depicted. Pictures are characterised by a rising crescendo of ludicrousness and, consequently, by an increasingly lower modality, with the only aim of entertaining the audience. Inter-textual references are made to comedy films, in particular *There's Something About Mary*, from which the dog sketch is sourced. No logical reasoning is used to persuade the prospective audience: the only piece of serious information concerns the cooking time, and is provided through the slogan. The use of alliteration ("sausages sizzling in sixty seconds") makes the notion of convenience stand out even more as the only relevant detail provided about the product. Food here is not traditional, convivial, or healthy: it is a function of time, something to get over with quickly and easily to leave more time for one's personal amusement.

Examples of food commercials that highlight convenience and time-saving have also been found in the Italian sub-corpus. In these cases, the quality issue is always explicitly stressed alongside these traits, as if to reassure the audience that the excellence of the product is not jeopardised by its time-effectiveness.



Snapshot 5.199



Snapshot 5.200



In the commercial for Riso Scotti Rapid (snapshots 5.199-5.201), a particular variety of rice that takes less time to cook than ordinary rice, the endorser Gerry Scotti (a popular TV quiz show presenter chosen for his homonymy with the rice brand name) says:

Riso Scotti Rapid. Rapidità con qualità. E' riso Scotti.

I have italicised the phrases relevant to my analysis. *Rapidità* is the distinguishing feature of the rice (the adjective *Rapid* is also part of the brand name), but it is complemented by *qualità*. A second guarantee of this quality is the name of the manufacturer (“È riso Scotti”), used as part of the product branding, which implies an authority based on an established tradition.

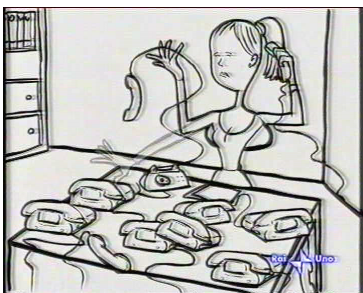
The familiar face of the endorser, looking straight into the camera from a frontal plane parallel to that of the viewer, also contributes to the creation of a bond of trust between the advertiser and the audience. In fact, the word of a celebrity adds value to the promise of quality inherent in the brand name of the rice in a high-MAS society.

In the Riso Gallo Insalata Express commercial, the animated cock of the packaging gives advice on how to cook a good rice salad without effort after a bad day at work:



Snapshot 5.202

Consiglio numero 7:



Snapshot 5.203

giornata da cani? Fatti un Gallo!



Snapshot 5.204

Insalata Express è una vera insalata di riso...



Snapshot 5.205

...pronta da gustare, senza faticare.



Snapshot 5.206

Gallo Insalata Express.
Chicchiiiiiricchi, strappa e gusta

The structure of the commercial appears much closer to the British convenience/humour pattern seen above. Informal verbal language is preferred, with the idiomatic expression “giornata da cani” (lit. ‘a dog’s day’, that is, a very stressful day) being used to create an ironic contrast with the following phrase “fatti un Gallo”, where Gallo refers to both the brand name and the cock appearing on the packaging. The main verbally defined characteristic of Gallo ready-made rice salad is its convenience: it is effortless (“pronta da gustar senza faticare”), all you need to do is to tear it open and then enjoy it (“strappa e gusta” is what the slogan says).

Nevertheless, the quality issue is also crucial in this commercial. Gallo Insalata Express is defined as “una vera insalata di riso”, and the adjective *vera* is highlighted through extra emphasis being placed on it. It seems to me that this adjective and its particular prosodic feature are not random, but carefully studied to dissipate doubts

that may have arisen in the audience. In fact, the adjective phrase “vera insalata di riso” serves the purpose of reinforcing the authenticity of the product when set against the overall jocular context created by the initial puns.

The same *authentication* of the product is carried out at a visual level. In terms of naturalistic coding orientation, the pictures in the commercial appear rather unreal (low modality), with an animated cock speaking (snapshots 5.202, 5.204-5.206) and with the represented prospective buyer (the hectically busy woman in snapshot 5.203) being a cartoon-like character. Only the rice salad bears resemblance to the real world (snapshots 5.204-5.205), that is, it is shown in high-modality. Even if we assumed that the sensory coding orientation has been applied here (i.e. that the main purpose of the commercial is to please the audience), the delicious-looking rice in snapshot 5.205 would still be a modality raiser. So, in either interpretation scheme, the picture of the rice marks a higher degree of truth, consistent with the phrase “vera insalata di riso”.

There is also another function that the adjective “vera” might have in this context. One of the definitions provided by the *Dizionario d’Italiano Garzanti Online* for the entry *vero* is “rafforzativo della qualità di una persona o di una cosa”, that is, an intensifier meant to stress the quality of the person or thing it refers to. Such being the case, “una vera insalata di riso” would be a rice salad which is qualitatively very good, an extra specification deemed necessary to highlight the wholesomeness of the product, in addition to its authenticity.

The condition of being ready-made or too easy to cook is often connoted as something negative in Italian food commercials.



Snapshot 5.207



Snapshot 5.208



Snapshot 5.209



Snapshot 5.210

In the ad for Amadori 10+ chicken frankfurters, a man comes back home from work with a bunch of red roses, and tells his wife he wants to treat her to a meal out (snapshot 5.207). On hearing this, the wife has a tantrum (snapshot 5.208):

No, a cena fuori no. Io non ce la faccio più ad andare avanti così. Tutti quei piattoni, così complicati...è ora di cambiare, da oggi iniziamo a mangiare come si deve, solo cose genuine.

She then puts a plate of frankfurters on the table (snapshot 5.209). The husband (snapshot 210) looks astonished, and attempts a timid protest (“Ma...”), but his wife interrupts him before he could complete his sentence, shouting: “Ma cosa?” Later in the advert, a male voice-over tells us that the wholesomeness of Amadori chicken frankfurters lies in the fact they are GM-free and only made with free range chickens. Nevertheless, the *ma* uttered by the man, and the face he pulls in snapshot 5.210 say a lot about the mental association between frankfurter eating and wholesomeness. A sausage is immediately associated with a quick, unhealthy meal, so it seems paradoxical to the husband (and, allegedly, to the audience) that the resolution to start a healthier diet is followed by a plate of sausages being served. Only later does his (and possibly the viewer’s) opinion change, following the information provided by the voice-over, and Mr. Amadori’s pledge of the quality of his food (“Parola di Francesco Amadori”), a reassurance based on the long-established tradition of his brand.

In the Amadori commercial we also find humour, but it is of a different nature to that observed in the Wall’s sausages advert. It comes from the discrepancy between the offer of the man to treat his wife to the restaurant and her unexpected, sultry refusal. A stereotypically Italian situation is portrayed: the working husband, his

housewife woman, the husband inviting his wife to eat out to save her spending time cooking. The comic effects arise from the fact that his wife chooses to spend another night at home cooking for him instead of accepting his invitation, as the majority of wives would probably have done. Then, the situation becomes even more comic when her idea of healthy food turns out to be a plate of sausages. With wariness of convenience foods (high UAI), respect for tradition (high PDI), and clear-cut division of roles according to genders (MAS), evidently this commercial is deeply rooted in Italian culture.

The idea of wholesomeness is not absent from British commercials, but as in the Coop ad analysed in 5.2.1, it is often treated in a jocular way.



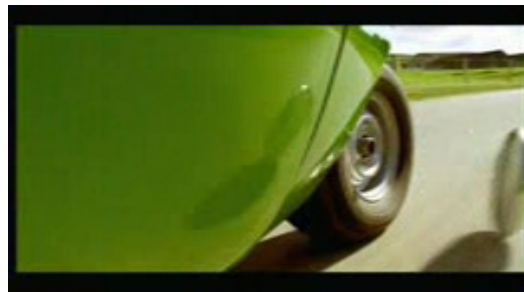
Snapshot 5.211



Snapshot 5.212



Snapshot 5.213



Snapshot 5.214



Snapshot 5.215



Snapshot 5.216



Snapshot 5.217



Snapshot 5.218



Snapshot 5.219



Snapshot 5.220



Snapshot 5.221



Snapshot 5.222

In the commercial for Birsdeye frozen peas (snapshots 5.211-5.222), we see a small green car moving along a deserted road (snapshots 5.211-5.212), with a number plate reading *PEA* (snapshot 5.213). The car moves along and loses pieces of itself: a wheel rim (snapshot 5.214), the bumper (snapshot 5.215), and the boot door (snapshot 5.216). A female voice-over says:

Did you know fresh vegetables keep losing vitamins from the moment they're picked? Birsdeye vegetables don't, because we freeze them to lock in all their goodness. Birdseye: we don't play with your food.

The words perform a function of anchorage, making the viewers understand that the car actually stands for a green pea, as suggested by the number plate. I would argue that the car is a type of *metonymical representation* of the pea: it signifies the container for the contained, the means of transport (used to transfer the peas from the

farmer to the retailer) for the transported (the peas themselves). The use of the car in place of real peas serves two purposes.

Firstly, it illustrates the verbal language, and is, in turn, explained by it. For example, the progressive loss of vitamins in fresh vegetables (“keep losing vitamins from the moment they’re picked”) is visually rendered via the image of the pieces coming off the car. Similarly, the integrity of vitamin content in Birdseye frozen peas is symbolised by the brand new car coming out of the refrigerated Birdseye lorry (snapshots 5.220-5.221). Particularly interesting is the use of the verb *to lock in*, in that it appears to provide a criss-cross link between the literal and figurative levels of the commercial. In fact, the idiomatic meaning of the verb *to lock in* (“we freeze them to lock in all their goods”) refers to the literal subject of the commercial (i.e. Birdseye green peas), whereas the literal meaning (expressing the idea of securing something in a place) is clearly reminiscent of the car (i.e. the metonymical representation of the peas). As in the commercial for Norton Finance (see 4.2.3), here the use of a figure of speech is not aimed at conveying hidden meanings to be decoded by the viewer. On the contrary, it facilitates the viewer’s comprehension of the commercial, by creating verbal and visual languages which are functional to each other.

Secondly, it allows quality issues to be displayed without being too serious. The core verbal message (“fresh vegetables keep losing vitamins from the moment they’re picked”) is toned down by the conversational introductory question (“Did you know that...?”) and by the pictures the old jalopy losing pieces on the road, a lighter symbolisation of the decay of fresh vegetables than scientific evidence. As Marieke de Mooij (2005) has pointed out, detailed scientific explanation and the like do not appeal to low-UAI cultures, and might even annoy the viewers from such societies. So, Birdseye may not play with food, as they declare in the slogan (“We don’t play with your food”, snapshot 5.222), but they certainly do with language and pictures.

Similarly ironic is the commercial for Anchor butter spread, where a cow (C) and her young calf Moo (M) speak about additives:



Snapshot 5.223

C: What are you doing up there, Moo?



Snapshot 5.224

M: I am looking out for additives.

C: Looking out for...additives?

M: Yes, you get them in buttery- flavoured spreads, but not in Anchor spreadable.



Snapshot 5.225

C: Moo, do you actually know what additives look like?

M: Ahh...no, but there is a strange thing over there that looks like a cloud with legs?

C: That's a sheep...



Snapshot 5.226

VO: What's your tub?

The topic of the advert is serious (the presence of additives in butter spreads) and a relevant piece of information is conveyed (i.e. that additives are present in most butter spreads, but not in Anchor spread). Nevertheless, the overall context is clearly humorous: the message is put in the mouth of an animated cow and her calf, and the fact that the latter mistakes a sheep for an additive, defining it as “a strange thing that looks like a cloud with legs”, gives a jocular twist to the final message. The low-modality of the pictures combines with the punch line about the sheep, to present

wholesomeness as an amusing appeal. The final slogan, “What’s in your tub” (snapshot 5.226) obviously raises the audience’s consciousness of the additives that may be present in their spreads; nevertheless, these additives are not presented as threatening, because they are mentally associated with the amusing images of a sheep and a cloud with legs.

In a similar vein to the commercial for Anchor spread is the Italian one for Parmigiano Reggiano:



Snapshot 5.227



Snapshot 5.228



Snapshot 5.229



Snapshot 5.230



Snapshot 5.231



Snapshot 5.232



Snapshot 5.233

Here we see a cow trying to sneak into an enclosed pasture reserved for Parmigiano Reggiano cows (snapshot 5.227). The first time it jumps over the fence (snapshot 5.228), but its attempt to mingle with the rest of the cattle is foiled by a Parmigiano Reggiano supervisor (snapshot 5.229), who throws it out (snapshot 5.230). The second time the cow tries to dig an underground passage (snapshot 5.231), but once it comes out on the other side, it finds the same Parmigiano Reggiano supervisor waiting for it, and saying “No, no, non so cosa mangi” (snapshot 5.232). The pictures are accompanied by an instrumental version of Enzo Jannacci’s pop music classic *Vengo anch’io? No tu no* (lit. Shall I come along? No, you can’t), another humorous reference to the cow being excluded from the Parmigiano Reggiano protected field. A male voice-over says:

Il Parmigiano Reggiano è così *naturale* anche perché usiamo *solo latte appena munto e soolo delle nostre mucche*. Parmigiano Reggiano. Non si fabbrica, si fa.

I have italicised the parts of the transcription that are relevant to my analysis, and I have underlined the words which are stressed for emphasis. Let us notice that the adjective used to qualify Parmigiano Reggiano is *naturale*. The focus is not on the taste, but on what is behind it – the purity of the cheese – which is made only with fresh milk (“usiamo solo latte appena munto”) coming from cows carefully selected by the Parmigiano Reggiano cooperative (“e soolo delle nostre mucche”). The adverbs *solo* and *appena* have, linguistically, the same function the fence has pictorially: they mark a partition between what is included in and what is excluded from Parmigiano Reggiano, what is natural and what is not. Prosodic features like the lengthening of the vowel in the second “solo” or the emphasis put in the pronunciation of the adjective “nostre” (“e soolo delle nostre mucche”) highlight this divide. The corporate adjective “nostre” is used as a synonym for *safe* and *controlled*: the tradition of Parmigiano Reggiano becomes a guarantee for quality in the high-PDI, high-UAI Italian society. In the final slogan (“Non si fabbrica, si fa”), the contrast between *natural* and *artificial* is rendered through the contrast between the generic verb *to make (fare)* and the more specialised *to manufacture (fabbricare)*. The implied

message is that Parmigiano Reggiano is not one in a series, but retains the exclusivity features of hand-made products.

On further analysis, similarities between the Anchor spread and the Parmigiano ad in the overall structure and the visual language used exist only on the surface. Like the Anchor spread commercial, the Parmigiano ad combines funny visuals with a serious linguistic core, and in both cases the low modality of the images mitigates the verbal content. However, the verbal core in the Parmigiano ad is much more serious than its counterpart from the Anchor spread commercial. Firstly, in the Anchor ad we have a conversation between two fictitious characters, an animated cow and her little calf, whereas in the Parmigiano one a voice-over speaks about the product. Secondly, in the Parmigiano commercial, there is no trace of jocularly in the verbal language, as is the case with the Anchor ad. The voice-over in the Parmigiano commercial foregrounds the quality of the products as an effect of the way in which they are made. In the Anchor ad, the young calf only tangentially deals with the serious issue of preservatives in spreads (“you get them in buttery- flavoured spreads, but not in Anchor spreadable”), and then moves on to speak about sheep in terms of clouds with legs. The verbal comic element we find in the British commercial is absent from the Italian one.

Further evidence could be shown to bear out the main differences noticed between food commercials in the British and Italian sub-corpus, but the spatial constraints of this work make it necessary to limit the analysis to the most interesting samples.

On the whole, we have seen that convenience emerges as a priority appeal in the language of British food advertising, and it appears related to a number of individualistic values, like the importance of personal leisure and hedonism. Non-mainstream values, such as tighter family ties, homecooking, and conviviality are sometimes indicated as *the desired* (see 3.3.1), but they are always qualified through the use of time (i.e. they apply to the past) or frequency (i.e. they apply to sporadic events) limitations.

Another appeal in British food advertising is humour, exploited at both the verbal and the visual level. Sometimes it co-occurs with the idea of convenience, resulting in

entertaining commercials; frequently, it is used to mitigate more serious appeals (e.g. wholesomeness, high quality) to avoid sounding too technical or too paranoid when giving information about the nature of the product advertised. In both cases, it responds to the high uncertainty-tolerance of the majority of the British audience. As de Mooij (2005) has pointed out, cultures scoring low on the UAI scale cope more comfortably with ambiguity and are keener on using humour than high UAI societies

The language of Italian food advertising appears ruled by the appeal of quality, in connection with the mainstream values of tradition, close family ties, home-cooking and conviviality underlying high-PDI, collectivistic Italian society. Value paradox is not an option in Italian food advertising. Thus, for example, the convenience of a ready-made sauce is regarded with so much suspicion that it is almost advertised as a gamble, and it is only by dispelling its manufactured nature and by underlining its resemblance with a home-made one that it becomes acceptable. From this perspective, Italian food advertising can be said to be more conservative than its British counterpart. Situational or visual humour is found in Italian commercials too, but it is never in the way of messages concerning the quality and purity of the product. Creating ambiguity about such paramount issues in a high-UAI society is probably not wise from a marketing standpoint.

In conclusion, the analysis of the samples selected from my two sub-corpora seems to suggest that in both the UK and Italy national cultural schemata affect food advertising considerably more than BFPS advertising. This appears hardly surprising if we think that cross-cultural marketing experts agree on the fact that “[...] the older the product category, the stronger the influence of culture [which] explains why food products are persistently culture-bound” (De Mooij 2004: 7).

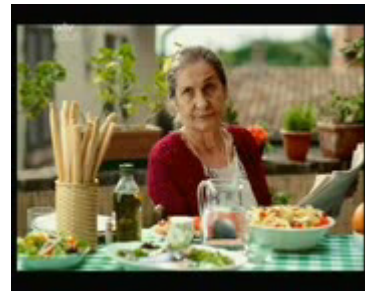
5.2.2.1 Representing the Other: Italy in British Food Advertising, and Vice Versa.

In the previous section, I showed that in both Britain and Italy, mainstream cultural values influence the language of food advertising, and I pointed out how this data is in

accordance with cross-cultural marketing studies that describe food as a strongly culture-bound product category. But how do the two cultures portray each other? What happens, for example, when typical Italian pizza is promoted in a British commercial, or, conversely, when the British rite of afternoon tea is exploited in an Italian ad? In this section I want to investigate the language of British and Italian food advertising in representing *the Other*, a topic that appears to be extremely interesting in the light of the culture-sensitive nature of this commercial category.



Snapshot 5.234



Snapshot 5.235



Snapshot 5.236



Snapshot 5.237



Snapshot 5.238



Snapshot 5.239

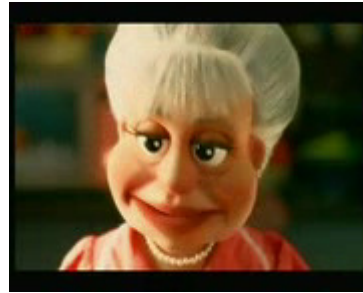
In the British commercial for Bertolli Rustico pasta sauces, an elderly man is shuffling along carrying a tray (snapshot 5.234). However, when his wife gives him a disapproving look (snapshot 5.236) he straightens up and starts walking normally. Then the camera crabs right, showing, in sequence, beautiful vegetables (snapshot 5.237), a plate of farfalle dressed with Bertolli sauce (snapshot 5.238) and then the jars

of sauce. The setting is stereotypically Italian: the elderly couple are sitting out on a patio during a very pleasant sunny day, surrounded by plants and flower pots. In the background, we can see the typical Mediterranean houses painted in light yellow or beige. These soft colours clash with the bright ones of the aubergines, tomatoes, onions and the other greeneries laid out on the table, surrounding the jars of sauce and connoting them as fresh and natural. The voice-over closing the commercial says: “Now you can enjoy the rich distinctive taste of Bertolli Rustico pasta sauces”. The only verb in this plain verbal message is *to enjoy*, that is, “to get pleasure from something” (*Online Oxford English Dictionary*). There is no mention whatsoever of the convenience of using a jar of sauce: the stress here is on the satisfaction the “rich and distinctive” taste of Bertolli Rustico sauces gives on the palate. Interestingly, two non-haphazard adjectives are used to define the taste. It is *rich*, in that it is “strong in a pleasing attractive way” (*Online Oxford English Dictionary*), just like the strong colours of the beautiful vegetables on the table; it is *distinctive* “because it is different from other things” (*Online Oxford English Dictionary*), supposedly different from British everyday staple foods. Heavy adjectivisation to define taste was not a feature of the British food advertising previously examined: Amoy noodles were defined as the right ingredient for “the tastiest fry” and Aunt Bessie’s Yorkshire pudding was “as good as a pud should be”. However, the Bertolli sauces are defined through two adjectives, both less ordinary than *tasty* and *good*, as if to underline the extraordinariness of the taste the audience is invited to enjoy. Both visuals and words convey what I would call a *tourist vision* of Italy, based on the good-weather-and-tasty-food stereotype. We do not find the Italian explicit quality appeal here (even if the images connote the *freshness* of the product), nor do the words or visuals used underline the notion of convenience. Italy is portrayed hedonistically, as the country of *dolce vita*, al fresco meals, and an easy pace of life.

The Dolmio sauce commercial stereotypes Italy and Italian more heavily, by playing with prosodic features of the language, like intonation:



Snapshot 5.240



Snapshot 5.241



Snapshot 5.242



Snapshot 5.243



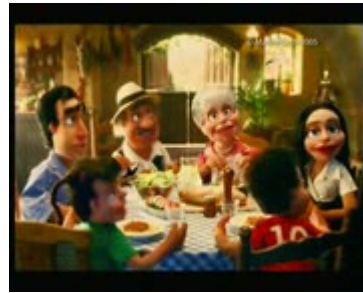
Snapshot 5.244



Snapshot 5.245



Snapshot 5.246



Snapshot 5.247



Snapshot 5.248



Snapshot 5.249

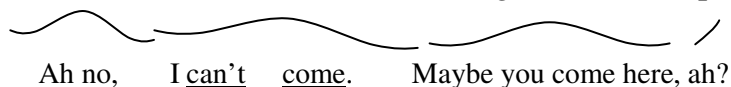
The characters of the advert are dolls. The young man, who still lives in his parents' house, is talking to his girlfriend on the phone (snapshot 5.240):

Sofia , hi



I have used the curve as a graphical device to indicate the exaggerated falling intonation with which he speaks, a stereotypical feature used in English to connote the prosody of Italian language⁷². On hearing him speak with his girlfriend, the concerned Italian *mamma* (snapshot 5.241) uses her secret weapon to keep him at home: she lifts the lid of the Dolmio sauce she is cooking and wafts its smell towards her son (snapshot 5.242). The young man pauses for a few seconds (snapshot 5.243), to breathe in the savour, then he tells his girlfriend (Snapshot 5.244):

Ah no, I can't come. Maybe you come here, ah?



The verb phrase “I can’t come” is pronounced as two distinct units, by putting the same stress on both the modal and the main verb (I have indicated the stress by underlining the verbs in question). In particular, the final sound /t/ in *can't* and the initial one /k/ in *come* are equally emphasised and separately pronounced, a feature that sounds very un-English and obviously quite Italian to the British ear, whereas it combines with the intonation and becomes reminiscent of Italian south-western accents (Neapolitan in particular) to the ear of an Italian native speaker.

Then the pasta with the Dolmio mince sauce is served (snapshot 5.245), and we can see the whole family sitting together at the table (snapshot 5.246). At a certain point the doorbell rings – it is probably Sofia accepting the young man’s invitation to come over. The whole family pause for a second (snapshot 5.247), look at each other, and then decide not to bother about the guest outside the door, and continue eating. The camera cuts to a close up of the smiling *mamma* (snapshot 248), who has won her son over with the sauce, and says:

⁷² This exaggerated feature has often been exploited in British comedies to achieve comic effects. This is the case with the very popular (and politically incorrect) *Allo, 'Allo!*, the long-running British sit-com, broadcast by BBC1 from 1982 to 1992, and telling the misadventures of René Artois, a café owner in a small French village during WWII. As a collaborator of the French Resistance, René has to juggle hilarious situations to prevent the Gestapo officers who attend his café from finding out about him. Among the funny characters crowding his café, is the fascist Captain Bertorelli, who woos René’s wife and waitresses, only cares about eating and singing, and speaks with ludicrous nasal accent and falling intonation, adding an *-a* at the end of all his words (e.g. his catchphrase “What a mistake-a to make-a”).

You see? *Nothing* gets in the way of Dolmio day

Intonation is a less significant feature here, whereas the deviation from the standard in the pronunciation of consonant sounds is used to keep stressing Italianicity at the verbal level. I have italicised the consonants relevant to my analysis. The sound /s/ in “you see” becomes a /z/ in mamma’s pronunciation (/ju: zi:/ instead of /ju: si:/); the sound /θ/ in “nothing” becomes a /t/, the sound /ŋ/ becomes /n/, and the vowel sound /ɪ/ is replaced by /i/ (/nɪtin/ instead of /nɪθ.ɪn/). Something similar happens when the father speaks at the end (snapshot 5.249), stating the slogan “When’sa your Dolmio day?” The sound of the consonant *r* in the possessive adjective “your” is not an alveolar approximant, as in most varieties of English (/ɹ/), but it is a alveolar trill (popularly known as a *rolled R*), as in standard Italian (/r/). Graphically, the Italianicity is also underlined by the presence of an *-a* next to the short form ‘s of the verb *to be* (“When’sa” instead of the standard *When’s*), a British stereotype about the Italian pronunciation of English (see footnote 71). Visuals and sound provide many other British common places about Italians: gender-related roles, with the mother/wife that sees about cooking; the possessive love of Italian mothers, with the Dolmio *mamma* that keeps her son at home with her delicious cooking, and, in the end, does not let his girlfriend in; the Italian male as a mummy’s boy, with the young man still living in his parents’ house; a rural image of Italian society, with the father being presented as a farmer; Italians as happy souls singing and playing music all the time, with the mandolin and accordion music playing in the background. Last but not least, Italianicity is also connoted chromatically, through the green of the background, the red of the tomatoes, and the white of the father’s shirt in the last snapshot. Arguably, using real actors to portray Italy through such a wide range of stereotypes would have looked provincial and possibly offensive. However, the use of dolls keeps the overall modality of the advert low (it is only raised when food is shown, snapshot 5.242 and 5.245), so the stereotypes hit a fictitious portrayal of Italy and not Italy as such.

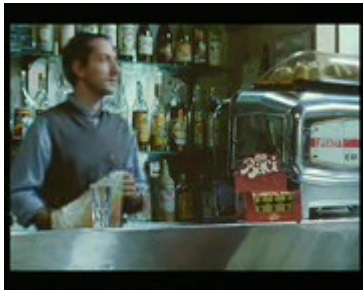
The Nestle Baci commercial is a mini love story pivoting around the Italian love chocolates *par excellence* (the commercial was transmitted on the 7 February 2005,

the week before Valentine's Day). The two protagonists are a man (M) owning a small bar and a pretty young woman (W) who attends it daily, always ordering the same thing: an espresso and a Baci chocolate. The man's voice-over (VO) tells the viewer about this sweet routine, while a piano melody plays in the background:



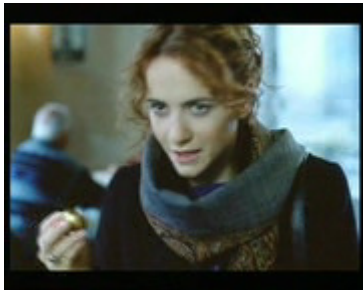
Snapshot 5.250

Background piano melody starts



Snapshot 5.251

VO: Every day she comes here...



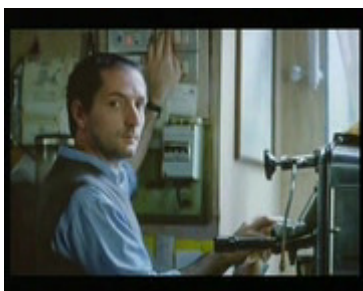
Snapshot 5.252

W: Buongiorno, un espresso per favore...

VO: ...same coffee

W: ...e un Nestle Baci.

VO: ...same chocolate...



Snapshot 5.253

VO: ...same seat beneath the heater...



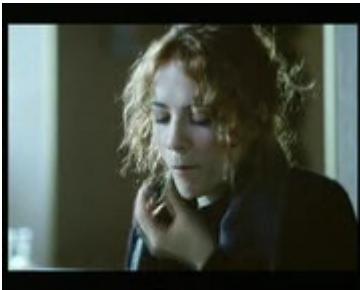
Snapshot 5.254

VO: ...to keep her warm.



Snapshot 5.255

VO: Every day...



Snapshot 5.256

VO: ...she eats her Baci...



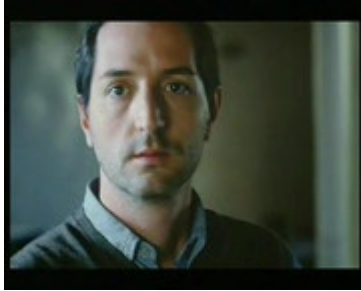
Snapshot 5.257

VO: ...and reads her love note...



Snapshot 5.258

VO: ... hidden in its foil.



Snapshot 259

VO: Every day she melts my heart.

The verbal language in the first part of the commercial (snapshots 5.250-5.259) intersperses the voice-over of the man with the words of the woman making her usual daily order. Daniel Chandler has pointed out that “[i]n dramatic films, it [the voice-over] can be the voice of one of the characters, unheard by the others”⁷³, and this is the case with this commercial. The man spots the girl approaching (“Every day she comes here...”, snapshot 5.251), sees her coming in, and hears her ordering her coffee and her Baci (“...same coffee, same chocolate...”, snapshot 5.252). His eyes follow her sitting at her usual table, under the heater he will turn on for her (“...her usual seat under the heater, to keep her warm”, snapshots 5.253-5.254), and then linger on her while she eats her chocolate and reads her love note⁷⁴, unaware of melting his heart (“Every day she eats her Baci, and reads her love note hidden in its foil. Every day she melts my heart”, snapshots 5.255-5.259). He keeps quiet, but the voice over allows the viewers to read his mind (see the camera that increasingly zooms in onto his face in snapshot 5.259) and hear his thoughts. They are in English, but with a strong Italian inflection. Nevertheless, unlike the Dolmio commercial, we do not have exaggeration. The English being spoken here is that of a real native Italian with a natural intonation. The only distinctive feature is the strongly rolled *r*, and I believe its use is not haphazard. In fact, the repetition of the exotic alveolar trill /r/ (“every”, “here”, “heater”, “warm”, “her”, “reads”, “heart”) creates what, in stylistics, is known as *internal or hidden alliteration*. Now, the use of a figure of speech in language is always a measure of great attention being paid to its formal structure and its internal organisation, that is, of a stylistic refinement that is a prevailing characteristic of poetic

⁷³ <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/short/gramtv.html>

⁷⁴ Baci chocolates are characterised by the presence of love notes folded inside the wrappers.

messages. As a consequence, the internal alliteration of the /r/ might convey Jakobson's *poetic function* as the main linguistic function of the man's voiced thoughts. The poetic function, "[...] by promoting the palpability of signs, deepens the fundamental dichotomy between signs and objects"⁷⁵. In this case, therefore, drawing attention to the poetic function of the language means to point out the distinction between what is said and what is meant. The man's thoughts-in-words are not aimed at acquainting the viewer with the routine of the girl ordering the same coffee and the same chocolate in his bar every day, but they are *signs* to refer to the emotions that this routine stirs up in his mind.



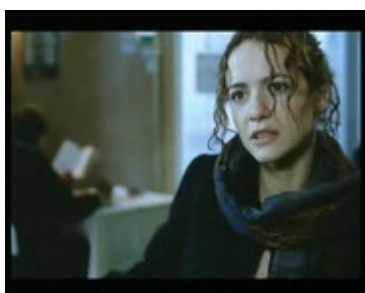
Snapshot 5.260

Background piano melody



Snapshot 5.261

Background piano melody



Snapshot 5.262

W: Un espresso per favore.

⁷⁵ <http://courses.essex.ac.uk/lt/lt204/lingpoetics.htm> .

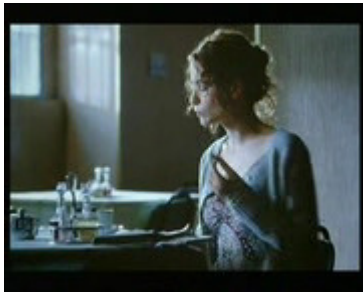


Snapshot 5.263



Snapshot 5.264

W: Grazie...



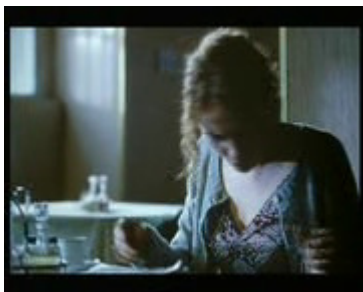
Snapshot 5.265

Background piano melody



Snapshot 5.266

Background piano melody



Snapshot 5.267

Background piano melody



Snapshot 5.268

Background piano melody



Snapshot 5.269

Background piano melody



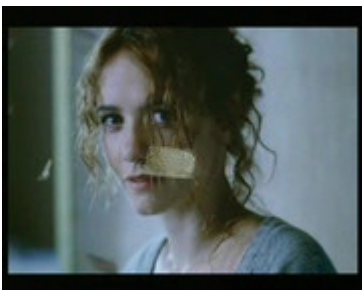
Snapshot 5.270

Background piano melody



Snapshot 5.271

Background piano melody



Snapshot 5.272

Background piano melody



Snapshot 5.273

Background piano melody

The commercial is divided into two halves. After contemplating the girl, and sharing his fond thoughts for her with the audience in the first part, now the man decides to take action. The girl comes into the bar, drenched in her coat, and asks for her usual coffee (“Un caffè per favore”, snapshots 5.260-5.262). Before she could carry on and order her Baci chocolate, the man offers her one as his gift (“Questo è da parte mia”, snapshot 5.263). The girl looks confused; she thanks him and sits down (“Grazie”, snapshots 5.264-5.265). The most noticeable feature of the language now is that it is no longer English, but it has been replaced by Italian. The authenticity of the Italian love story being told is reinforced by the use of Italian language. It does not matter that the majority of the audience probably cannot understand that language: the dominant poetic linguistic function of the message makes connotation more important than denotation. Words are now a mere symbol for love, and their actual meaning has only secondary importance. This fact becomes even more apparent when the verbal language completely disappears in the final part of the commercial. The last nine snapshots (5.265-5.273) are only accompanied by the piano melody *Nuvole Bianche*, by the Italian composer Ludovico Einaudi. We see the girl sitting on the usual chair (snapshot 5.265) and eating her Baci (snapshot 5.266). She looks for the love note inside the foil, but this time she can’t find one (snapshot 5.267). Then the man turns the heater on (snapshot 5.268-5.269), and this time he also warms up her heart, with a shower of love notes coming out of the heater (snapshots 5.270-5.271). The girl casts a sweet look on the man (snapshot 5.272), then the camera cuts to a red box of Baci, containing the chocolates wrapped in golden foil. The final slogan now is in English again: “Hazelnut wrapped in chocolate. Chocolate wrapped in love”. The first sentence denotes the chocolate with its hazelnut centre; the second one is poised between the

real and the metaphorical plane. In fact, Baci chocolates are really wrapped in love notes, but the latter become a metonymy for love as a feeling, the love of the man surrounding the girl in the form of a shower of little love notes.

Here, Italianicity evidently coincides with passion and romance, two characteristics through which the Italian man is often stereotyped, especially in northern cultures. The emphasis on erotic love is stronger in the British commercial for Baci than in the Italian one (snapshots 5.274-5.279):



Snapshot 5.274



Snapshot 5.275



Snapshot 5.276



Snapshot 5.277



Snapshot 5.278



Snapshot 5.279

The whole commercial avails itself of computer-aided technology and is played around the literal meaning of the word *bacio* (Italian for *kiss*). Two chocolate lips deliver a kiss (snapshot 5.274) that turns into an unwrapped Baci chocolate (snapshot 5.275) sitting on one of the distinctive love notes. The chocolate then starts spinning, and turns first into a wrapped Bacio (snapshot 5.276), and then into a champagne

bottle full of Baci (snapshot 5.277). The bottle pops open, and Baci chocolates fly out of it (snapshot 5.278). One Bacio comes to rest in close-up, and a Christmas-tree glass ball flies onto the screen and encapsulates it (the commercial was recorded on the 15 December 2005), while the slogan: “Un Bacio. Cosa vuoi dirmi?” appears on the screen (snapshot 5.279). The soundtrack, playing throughout the ad, is a cover of *Wishin’ and Hopin’*, originally sung by the Italian-American singer Ani di Franco, and original soundtrack of the film *My Best Friend’s Wedding*. A young female voice-over comments on the commercial as follows:

Un Bacio Perugina. Cosa vuoi dirmi? Arrivano i Baci, esplode la festa. Auguri, da Baci Perugina.

At the connotative level, a Bacio here is not necessarily a love token, but a means of communication with others, a sweet way to tell someone something (“Un Bacio Perugina. Cosa vuoi dirmi?”)⁷⁶. The greater stress put on the erotic component of the Baci chocolates in the British commercial is also underlined through chromatic symbolism. The Italian starry-night-like blue Baci box (not shown here, but called to mind by the background colour) is replaced in the UK by a red tin (snapshot 5.273), and red is renowned as the colour of passion, love and sex in western culture. Similarly the Italian silver-and-blue wrapping is substituted for a gold-and red wrapping in the UK, which adds extra connotations of preciousness and classiness to the product.⁷⁷

Searching the Italian sub-corpus for food commercials portraying Britain and Britons, I have found few examples. This is mostly explained by the fact that British cuisine is not as popular in Italy as Italian cookery is in the UK. Generally speaking, the Italian approach to food is not characterised by the same degree of multi-ethnicity as Britain, both for historical and cultural reason. Italian eating habits are, overall,

⁷⁶ I have overlooked the second part of the verbal message (“Arrivano i Baci, esplode la festa. Auguri da Baci Perugina”), because it is a specific addition meant to advertise the product during the Christmas season (the commercial was recorded on 15 December 2005). However, the original message, with the lip-shaped chocolates which turn into Baci chocolates, and the slogan “Un Bacio. Cosa Vuoi dirmi?” was distinctive of the whole campaign, and was retained also during Valentine’s period.

⁷⁷ Interesting approaches to colour symbolism from a cultural-historical perspective are those provided by John Gage in his books *Colour and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction* and *Colour and Meaning: Art, Science and Symbolism*, on which the remarks made about the Baci commercials are based.

quite conservative, and very few foreign foodstuffs make it onto national television advertising.

Alcoholic and soft drinks (mostly whisky and tea) are the only food-related products which are occasionally associated with Britain in both Italian culture and Italian advertising. Nevertheless, while Italianicity in British commercials is regarded as a unitary national feature, this is not the case with Britishness in Italian ads. For instance, an excellent whisky can be described as an authentic Scotch whisky⁷⁸, and the best tea will frequently be associated with Englishness on Italian television, but it is quite unlikely to find a product defined as *genuinely British*.

Only one commercial in my Italian sub-corpus exploits the notion of Englishness, and it is one for Twinings tea:



Snapshot 5.280



Snapshot 5.281



Snapshot 5.282



Snapshot 5.283

⁷⁸ My Italian sub-corpus does not include any commercials for whisky, but a diachronic survey of Italian TV advertising is sufficient to have an idea of how frequently advertisers have suggested a connection between the Scottish origin and the excellence of single malt whiskies. Examples from the last three decades are the commercials for Macallan (1980s, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pNDuqIV80GE>), and Glen Grant (1990s <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lpui3ysPg1c> , 2000s <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x9D4seEXPEg>).



Snapshot 5.284



Snapshot 5.285



Snapshot 5.286



Snapshot 5.287



Snapshot 5.288



Snapshot 5.289

The circular aerial view of a cup a tea (snapshot 5.280) turns into the table of an open bar on the crowded Portobello Road in London. A teapot is sitting on the table, next to a plate with lemon wedges and a copy of *The Times* (snapshot 5.281). Then the camera swivels around to show the young people sitting at the table (snapshots 5.282-5.283), and then progressively zooms out onto the table, showing the whole group and the waitress serving tea (snapshots 5.284-5.285). As the frame gets increasingly wide, we see another aerial view, this time one of the whole area, and we recognise a few hallmarks of London, such as the red double-decker with a Twinings banner stuck on its side (snapshots 5.286-5.287) and a black cab (snapshot 5.288). Finally, the pictures turn into the circular image of the brim of a teapot first, and then the whole teapot with a Twinings teabag brewing in it is shown. Concurrently, a young female voice-over says: “Twinings. Dal 1706 il tè inglese bevuto dagli inglesi”. The whole commercial is

accompanied by the song *Something to Talk About*, included in the original soundtrack of the film *About a Boy* starring Hugh Grant, the most popular English actor in Italy and the Londoner *par excellence*.

The most apparent purpose of the commercial is to establish a connection between Twinings tea and its motherland, as a guarantee for quality and authenticity. Verbal language puts emphasis on the long-established tradition of the tea (“Twinings. Dal 1706...”), and points out that it is the best because it is what the expert English people have been drinking ever since (“...il tè inglese bevuto dagli inglesi”). The neutral, nationality adjective *inglese* is turned here into a positive qualifier, a synonym for the excellence of Twinings. In fact, it becomes the middle element of a syllogism based on a cultural stereotype, that is, the fact that all English people are experts about tea:

English people drink Twinings tea => English expertise in choosing and blending the best tea varieties is renowned => therefore, Twinings tea must be the best

Tradition and quality are foregrounded through the verbal language, two values that are typical of the high-PDI, high-UAI Italian society. If we carefully examine the visuals, we can see they are a potpourri in which some elements through which Britain is usually stereotyped in Italy are mingled with habits and values that are typically Italian.

In snapshot 5.281, the teapot and the copy of *The Times*, two symbols of Englishness, are put together with a plate of lemon wedges, calling to mind the Italian or continental habit (but not at all British!) of drinking tea with lemon. The distinctive English bobby, the police officer visible in the background of snapshot 5.283, the double-decker bus (snapshots 5.286-5.287), and the black cab (snapshot 5.288) all point to the desire of the advertiser to connote the tea as quintessentially English. Nevertheless, the overall situation of the young people sitting outdoors and drinking tea appears a *calque* of a typically Italian habit. In fact, even if open air bars are present in London (but not in the rest of England), their customers are quite unlikely to sit down there for a cup of tea. The traditional afternoon tea is generally an indoor habit, destined for tea rooms and mostly limited to older ladies, posh people and tourists. The habitual customers of open air bars are young men and women, and most

often they are not sitters, and prefer to stand and chat over a cocktail or beer, rather than a cup of tea. Thus, it seems to me that the commercial presents the all-Italian practice of a sit-down, outdoors espresso or aperitif, replacing the latter with the *more English* cup of tea.

The Italian commercial for Twinings tea appears even more deeply rooted in Italian culture if we compare it with the British Twinings tea commercial, starring Stephen Fry, a famous British comedian who came to public attention with the popular BBC sit-com *Blackadder*⁷⁹ :



Snapshot 5.290

I've always enjoyed my Twinings...



Snapshot 5.291

...but till now they've only made ones with...



Snapshot 5.292

...funny names.

⁷⁹ *Blackadder* is a four-series sit-com aired by BBC1 between 1983 and 1989. Although each series is set in a different historical period, they all follow the fortunes (and misfortunes) of Edmund Blackadder (played by Rowan Atkinson), who in each is the member of an important family dynasty present at several significant periods and places in the British history.



Snapshot 5.293

This is the famous Twinings blending room ...



Snapshot 5.294

...behind these very doors they've been blending since 1706.



Snapshot 5.295

Finally, after 300 years, they've come up with this, an everyday tea you can drink all day long.



Snapshot 5.296

Three hundred years?! What took them so long?!



Snapshot 5.297

New Everyday Tea from Twinings. A tea you can drink all day long



Snapshot 5.298

Come on, open up, let's see what you've been up doing there.

The use of a comedian as a testimonial is the most immediate index of the overall humorous tone of the commercial. In a perfect RP, Fry acquaints us with his preference for Twinings tea (snapshot 5.290), but says he is sceptical about the funny names of blends (snapshots 5.291-5.292). Then he shows us the blending room, where for three hundred years experts have been working to finally develop Twinings New Everyday tea (snapshots 5.293-5.295). In the end, comes the punchline: pulling a puzzled face, Fry wonders why on earth it took Twinings people such a long time to blend some plain tea! The upper-class accent of the endorser/testimonial and his ceremonious presentation of the three-century old blending room in the opening give a satirical flavour to the final witty remark. The high-status halo, conveyed by the RP and often associated with tea drinking, and the cult of tradition collapse under the lightness of British common sense, whereby it is comical to waste so many years for something as simple as an everyday tea blend. The value of convenience and time-effectiveness emerges once again in combination with humor, and in striking contrast with the eulogy of slowness found in some Italian commercials (e.g. the pasta Rummo one). The only serious piece of information about the tea (snapshot 5.297) is followed by a conclusive, humorous tail, with Fry banging on the door of the blending room asking the people inside to open up, to see what they have been doing in all these years.

In conclusion, I think a very clear picture emerges from the analysis conducted in this section. British commercials for Italian foodstuffs seem to exploit typically British stereotypes about Italy and Italians, characterising them mainly through verbal language, but using para-linguistic features to reinforce words (e.g. chromatic symbolism).

No examples of Italian commercials for British foodstuffs have been found, and the only relevant case has been retrieved from the closely-related commercial category of soft drinks. Both verbal and visual codes in the Twining tea commercial have proved to foreground Englishness rather than the more extensive notion of Britishness. Nevertheless, the deconstruction of the ad has shown that the represented England and English are more ‘imagined’ than real, resulting from a core of Italian values contaminated by scattered stereotypes, especially at the visual level.

5.2.3 Mirror Mirror on the Wall, Who’s the Cleanest Clean of All? The Notion of Cleanliness in British and Italian TV Advertising

Most anthropologists and cross-cultural marketing experts agree that cleanliness is a strongly culture-bound notion. Geert Hofstede (2001: 161) remarks that:

Among the first things a child learns are the distinction between clean and dirty and between safe and dangerous. What is considered clean and safe, or dirty and dangerous, varies widely from one society to the next, and even among families within a society.

British social anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966) has pointed out that a connection exists between the idea of dirt and that of danger. Dirt is basically matter out of place, something that does not fit our normative mental frameworks, and as such it comes to be connoted as dangerous and threatening⁸⁰. In this perspective, the link Hofstede (2001) establishes between UAI and cleanliness appears quite plain to understand: in high-UAI cultures, dirt is just another source of ambiguity to be dealt with, and the urge to get rid of it is higher than in low-UAI cultures, which “[...] also have their classifications as to dirt and danger, but [they] are wider and more prepared to leave the benefit of the doubt to unknown situations, people, and ideas (2001: 162).

In her cross-cultural analysis of consumer behaviour, Marieke de Mooij (2004) observes that the greater need for cleanliness in high-UAI cultures is reflected in both

⁸⁰ Mary Douglas goes further, and says that, in some cultures, the need to associate dirt with particular categories of people is the origin of racism. Nevertheless, I have not dealt with this aspect of her thought here, as it is not relevant to the topic of this study.

the larger volume of cleaning products they use and in the higher frequency of purity appeals in their advertising.

In the light of both the work published on the cultural susceptibility of the concept of cleanliness, and in consideration of the huge gap existing between the UK and Italy in terms of UAI (see 2.1.3.1) I have decided to compare my two sub-corpora according to this variable. In so doing, I have selected two commercial categories that seem to be among the most relevant to this type of analysis: *house-cleaning products* and *laundry products*⁸¹.

<i>BRITISH SUB-CORPUS – HOUSE CLEANING PRODUCTS</i>				
AIR WICK AIR FRESHENER	DOMESTOS THICK BLEACH	FLASH ALL IN ONE MULTI- PURPOSE SPRAY	HARPIC 2 IN 1 CLIP-ON TOILET GEL	NEW FLASH DUSTER
BOUNTY KITCHEN ROLLS	FAIRY POWER MULTI-PURPOSE SPRAY	FLASH DUST MASTER EXTENDING REACH	MAGIC ERASER CLEANING RUBBER	NEW GLADES SCENTED OILS
CIF POWER CREAM BATHROOM SPRAY	FAIRY WASHING UP SOAP AND BLISS (PREMATURE BABY CHARITY)	GLADE WISP AIR FRESHENER	MR. MUSCLE SHOWER SHINE SPRAY	OUST FAN
CIF POWER CREAM KITCHEN SPRAY	FINISH DISH WASHER CAPSULES AND BOSCH	GLIST DISH WASHER TABLETS	MR. MUSCLE SINK AND PLUGHOLE UNBLOCKER	OUST ODOUR ELIMINATOR
DETTOL AIR FRESHENER	FINISH POWERBALL 2 IN 1 DISH WASHER CAPSULES	HARPIC 2 IN 1 CLIP-ON TOILET DEODORANT	NEW CILLIT BANG MULTI- PURPOSE SPRAY	TOILET DUCK FRESH BRUSH
				TOT: 25

Table 5.3 House cleaning products advertisements in the British sub-corpus.

⁸¹ I have deliberately left out the category of personal hygiene products, which are analysed in greater detail in chapter VI, in relation to the use of sex in advertising.

<i>ITALIAN SUB-CORPUS – HOUSE CLEANING PRODUCTS</i>					
ACE IGIENE CASA SPRAY	ARGENTIL SPRAY	FEBREEZE ELIMINA- ODORI PER TESSUTI	MISTER MUSCOLO SCHIUMA BI- ATTIVA	PRIL 5 CAPSULE LAVASTOVIGLIE	SWIFFER DUSTER
AIAX PROFESSIONAL SGRASSATORE ULTRA	BREF POWER SCIOGLIGRASSO UNIVERSALE	FINISH POWER BALL 4 IN 1 CAPSULE LAVASTOVIGLIE	NELSEN SPRAY DISINCROSTANTE	PRONTO ANTI-POLVERE	SWIFFER SISTEMA ANTI- POLVERE
AIR WICK FRESHMATIC DEODORANTE	CALFORT ANTICALCARE	GLADE SOFFI DEODORANTE	NUOVO FINISH CURA LAVASTOVIGLIE	SOLE PIATTI DETERSIVO	VIKAL PLUS ANTICALCARE
AMBIPUR CASA DEODORANTE	CHANTECLAIR SGRASSATORE UNIVERSALE	MASTRO LINDO SGRASSATORE SPRAY	NUOVO PRONTO PIUMINI	SUPER MOCIO VILEDA	WC NET FOSSE BIOLOGICHE
ANITRA WC ATTIVO	CILLIT BANG SGRASSATORE	MISTER MUSCOLO IDRAULICO GEL	OUST DEODORANTE	SVELTO SGRASSATORE PAVIMENTI	TOT: 29

Table 5.4 House cleaning products advertisements in the Italian sub-corpus.

<i>BRITISH SUB-CORPUS LAUNDRY PRODUCTS</i>			<i>ITALIAN SUB-CORPUS LAUNDRY PRODUCTS</i>		
ARIEL WASHING LIQUID	LENOR FABRIC CONDITIONER	PERSIL WASHING LIQUID	ACE OXY MAGIC SMACCHIATORE	NAPISAN PLUS DISINFETTANTE PER BUCATO	OMINO BIANCO OXY SMACCHIATORE
ARIEL NEW CLEAN ACTION WASHING LIQUID	LENOR SOFTENER	VANISH OXY ACTION FOR CARPETS AND UPHOLSTERY STAIN- REMOVER	BOLT 2 IN 1 DETERSIVO PER BUCATO	NUOVO OMINO BIANCO OXY SMACCHIATORE	SPUMA DI SCIAMPAGNA MARSIGLIA LINEA BUCATO
ARIEL SENSITIVE WASHING LIQUID	NEW BOLD 2 IN 1 WASHING TABLETS	VANISH OXY ACTION MAX STAIN- REMOVER	COCCOLINO AMMORBIDENTE	NUOVO VANISH GEL SMACCHIATORE	VANISH GEL SMACCHIATORE
COMFORT PURE FABRIC CONDITIONER	NEW COMFORT PEARL CONDITIONER CAPSULES		DASH LIQUIDO DETERSIVO PER BUCATO	OMINO BIANCO SMACCHIATORE	VANISH MAX SMACCHIATORE
DAZ WASHING POWDER	NEW PERSIL WITH FRESHNESS OF COMFORT WASHING LIQUID	TOT: 13	DIXAN DETERSIVO PER BUCATO	OMINO BIANCO BIANCOVIVO SMACCHIATORE	TOT: 14

Table 5.5 Laundry products advertisements in the British and Italian sub-corpus.

Tables 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5 show all the house cleaning and laundry products advertised at least once in the two sub-corpora. They do not account for different versions of a commercial used to advertise the same product, nor for repetitions of the same commercial.

Quantitatively, there does not seem to be a big difference between the British and the Italian sub-corpora. The gap is absolutely negligible in the case of the laundry products (14 commercials in Italy versus 13 in the UK), and even if it becomes more significant in the case of house cleaning products (29 commercials in Italy versus 25 in the UK, with a 14% gap), its size does not match the gap between Italy and the UK in terms of UAI (75 vs. 35, see 2.1.3.1). In other words, Italy's much higher uncertainty

avoidance does not appear to be reflected in the quantity of commercials for house cleaning and laundry products, which are not noticeably more numerous than in the British corpus.

The tables above show that a few product brands are present in both markets, and a qualitatively visual analysis proves that some are advertised through commercials so similar as to virtually be copies of each other. Let us consider, for example, the British ad for Mr. Muscle Sink and Plughole Unblocker and the Italian ones for Mr Muscolo Idraulico Gel and Mr. Muscolo Schiuma Bi-Attiva. In all three cases, the protagonist is a puny man who becomes exhausted in a futile attempt to unblock his sink.



Snapshot 5.299



Snapshot 5.300



Snapshot 5.301

In both countries, the incongruity between the brand name of the product (Mr.Muscle/Mr. Muscolo) and the skinny body of the man struggling with his sink (snapshot 5.299 Mr. Muscle UK, snapshot 5.300-5.301 Mr. Muscolo Italy) is used as a source of humour (see 3.3.3). All three ads also share a typical problem-solution structure: if you are in trouble with clogged-up sinks, Mr. Muscle/Mr.Muscolo is the answer. Nevertheless, if we look at the unfolding of the three adverts, we can notice that a substantial difference emerges at the level of verbal language.

- (1)To unblock plugholes don't use bleach because it's just too thin. Even the thick ones. But Mr. Muscle Sink and Plughole Unblocker is a very thick gel, so it sinks through the water and clings to the clog to clear the blockage in no time". Mr. Muscle Sink and Plughole Unblocker. Loves the job you hate.

(2)Caffè, cibo, peli. Poi l'acqua impiega un'eternità a scorrere via, e che odore! Ma ora c'è Mr. Muscolo Schiuma Bi-Attiva. I suoi due liquidi si combinano in una potente schiuma che libera il tubo da cima a fondo ed elimina i cattivi odori. E lo scarico riparte a tutta velocità. Mr. Muscolo Schiuma Bi-Attiva. Veloce con lo scarico lento.

(3) Mr. Muscolo Idraulico Gel, con candeggina, ti libera dai cattivi odori mentre libera lo scarico. Mr. Muscolo Idraulico Gel. E lo scarico respira.

The first difference we notice concerns communication style (see 3.2.1). Transcription (1), from the UK's Mr. Muscle commercial, shows an exacting, direct style, with only the relevant information being given in a straightforward way. The problem is immediately identified: it consists of blocked plugholes. The solution to this problem cannot be bleach, because it is too thin, but has to be Mr. Muscle gel, which clears the blockage in no time. The task-oriented communication, distinctive of individualistic, low-UAU cultures according to Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey's model (1988) is clearly reflected in this commercial. Conversely, transcription (2), from the Mister Muscolo Schiuma Attiva ad, appears to be characterised by a more indirect, elaborate style. The problem for which the ad offers a solution is not clearly exposed, but it has to be inferred by the viewer:



Snapshot 5.302



Snapshot 5.303



Snapshot 5.304



Snapshot 5.305

By seeing the Italian protagonist rinse his coffee pot and plates and wash his dog (in the kitchen sink!), the viewer understands that the problem must be a blocked plughole, but it is never explicitly mentioned. In its place, we receive extra information which is not really necessary to get the functional message across to the viewer. For example, we learn that coffee dregs, food leftovers and hairs cause water to flow through the plughole very slowly, and again we are told the Mister Muscolo Schiuma Bi-Attiva is made of two components which combine into a powerful foam to unplug sink pipes. The more indirect approach, and the lengthier and less relevant information provided fit the communication model of collectivistic high-UAI cultures (see 3.2.1). Furthermore, the Mr. Muscolo Schiuma Biattiva ad also brings in another topic, that of bad odours, which is completely overlooked in the British commercial.



Snapshot 306

The problem of bad odours is stressed more explicitly than that of plughole blockages: in fact, the latter is referred to indirectly through the clause “Poi l’acqua impiega un’eternità a scorrere via”, whereas the former is openly mentioned via the noun phrase “e che odori!”, and is emphasised by the exclamatory tone and by the disgusted face of the man in the advert (snapshot 5.306). Mr. Muscolo Schiuma Biattiva provides a solution not only to blocked pipes (“libera il tubo”) but also to the reek

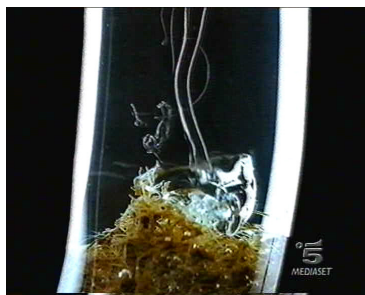
emitted from them (“elimina i cattivi odori”). In transcription (3), from the Mr. Muscolo Idraulico Gel ad, the product’s function of eliminating bad odours is textually foregrounded with respect to that of unblocking plugholes. In fact, the effect of the product on bad odours is described via a main clause (“Mr. Muscolo Idraulico Gel, con candeggina, ti libera dai cattivi odori”), while its main purpose is relegated to a temporal clause (“mentre libera lo scarico”). Visuals work together with verbal language to present the problem of bad odours as a priority:



Snapshot 5.307



Snapshot 5.308



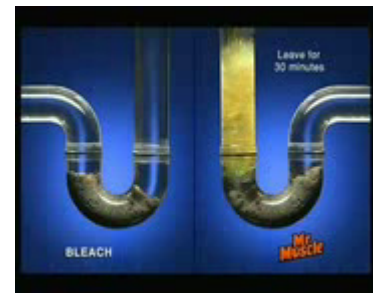
Snapshot 5.309



Snapshot 5.310



Snapshots 5.311



Snapshot 5.312

The semantic and syntactic structure of visual language in the Mr. Muscolo Idraulico Gel ad (snapshots 5.307-5.310) proves to be a mirror-image of the semantic and syntactic structure of verbal language. The bleach-based gel (snapshot 5.307) is first shown as eliminating bad odours (snapshot 5.308), and only afterwards as attacking and removing the clog (snapshots 5.309-5.310). Evidently, pictures express the same

concepts in the same sequence as words (“Mr. Muscolo Idraulico Gel, con candeggina, ti libera dai cattivi odori mentre libera lo scarico”).

Similarly, snapshots 5.311-5.312, from the Mr. Muscle ad, resemble the contents of the verbal message and show the gel as unblocking the pipe, comparing its effectiveness to that of an unnamed bleach brand. Like the verbal language, the UK advert’s pictures also ignore the issue of bad odours, focusing instead on a comparative appeal (bleach versus Mr. Muscle gel), which is statistically well-received in high-IDV cultures (see 3.3.3 and 4.2.2).

Finally, particular attention has to be paid to the slogans:



Snapshot 5.313



Snapshot 5.314



Snapshot 5.315

In the Mr Muscle ad (snapshot 5.313) the catchphrase “Loves the job you hate” evidently highlights the convenience of the product. Through the antinomy created by the use of the semantically opposite verbs *love* and *hate*, the advertiser pursues two objectives: 1) s/he underlines the efficacy of the product, which is almost humanised and presented as deeply committed to its job as plughole unblocker; 2) s/he appeals to all the housewives and househusbands who dislike spending their time contending with extra-ordinary housework like clogged-up pipes, and reassures them with the promise of a reliable product.

In the case of Mr.Muscolo Idraulico Gel (snapshot 5.314), we also have a humanisation of the product, but it appears to be related to the issue of bad odours. The plughole, freed from the clog, can *breathe* at last (“E lo scarico respira”). The idea of the despised housework being taken over by the powerful gel is absent here, and it is replaced by the metaphor of breathing, of clean air going through the plughole. The metaphor is also visual, with the verb *respirare* in the slogan (snapshot 5.314)

increasing and decreasing in size, thus simulating the rhythmical movement of the chest during breathing.

The slogan for Mr. Muscolo Schiuma Bi-Attiva (snapshot 5.315) is the most neutral, as it simply emphasises the fast efficacy of the product (“Veloce con lo scarico lento”).

If we observe the composition of the pictures, we notice that in all three commercials the product is positioned in the left-hand side of the screen, and thus presented as *the Given*, whereas the logo of the producing company is placed in the right-hand side and therefore connoted as *the New* (see 4.2.1). Nevertheless, while the logo appears in the bottom right corner in the British Mr. Muscle ad, in the two Italian Mr. Muscolo ads it is in the top right corner, which conveys an idea of greater idealisation of the company in the Italian commercials (see 4.2.1).

From the commercials analysed above, it seems that the same plughole un-blocker in the UK only gets rid of the clog in no time, while in Italy it also (and primarily) eliminates bad odours. The association between cleanliness and smells seems to be frequent in Italy but not as common in the UK. For example, in the Italian commercial for the fabric freshener Febreze, the female voice-over says:

Hai appena *pulito* e la tua casa non è *fresca* come vorresti? E' colpa degli *odori* intrappolati nei tessuti, che da lì si diffondono dappertutto.

I have italicised the three key words “pulito”, “fresca” and “odori”. The question opening the commercial suggests that the lack of a cause-effect relationship between the action of cleaning the house and its fresh smell is perceived as an incongruity by the standard viewer. We could rephrase the initial query as: “The house has been cleaned, *hence* it should be fresh. Why is it not?” The answer is the odours trapped in the fabrics, and would seem to acknowledge that cleanliness and freshness (or dirt and reek) are not necessarily intertwined. Nevertheless, at the end of the commercial, the same voice-over concludes that Febreze “cattura gli odori e li elimina dai tessuti lasciando una *fresca sensazione di pulito*”. The good smell of Febreze is defined as a fresh fragrance of cleanliness, so the two notions of cleanliness and good smell are not only juxtaposed, but even overlap

Conversely, in the British commercial for Dettol air treatment, the female voice-over presents the cleanliness and the smell of a house as two separate things from the very beginning:

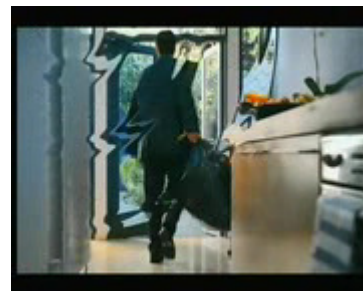
Fact. Bacteria can make even the cleanest homes smell

The bad smell is unrelated to how much you clean your house, because it is caused by bacteria, organisms you cannot eradicate from your house, no matter how spotless it is. This statement is foregrounded as a “fact”, something for which proof exists, and the product is advertised as an air treatment rather than an air freshener.

Another interesting case is provided by the commercials for Airwick Freshmatic air freshner in the UK and in Italy (snapshots 5.316-5.323):



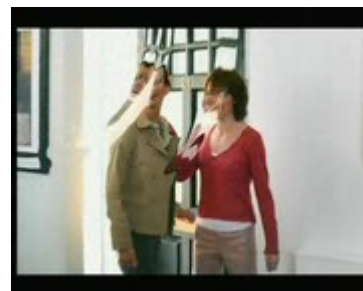
Snapshot 5.316



Snapshot 5.317



Snapshot 5.318



Snapshot 5.319



Snapshot 5.320



Snapshot 5.321



Snapshot 5.322



Snapshot 5.323

The visuals in both versions are perfectly identical, with only some captions changing for obvious linguistic reasons. They show a number of causes of the smell of a house (cooking, rubbish, pets, bathroom odours, and stinky shoes), and they present Airwick Freshmatic as the ideal air freshener. The pleasant fragrance coming out of Airwick is visually rendered through a wavy image, like a ripple on a water surface (see in particular snapshots 5.317 and 5.319-5.320).

The two scripts may also seem as though one is the direct translation of the other, but on a closer inspection we can notice that significant culture-bound differences lie behind the verbal language:

- (1) Every home has a rhythm of its own. And now there's an air freshener that's in tune with it. New Airwick Freshmatic is an automatic spray you can set in intervals of nine, eighteen and thirty-six minutes, to deliver a burst of fragrance all through the day. New Airwick Freshmatic. Set it to the rhythm of your home.
- (2) Ogni casa ha i suoi ritmi ... e i suoi odori. Ma da oggi c'è il nuovo Airwick Freshmatic, il primo spray automatico con pile che programmi proprio come vuoi tu, ogni nove, diciotto o trentasei minuti. Duemilacinquecento soffi per una casa sempre accogliente e profumata. Airwick. Fragranze che cambiano la vita.

Both scripts introduce the idea of the *rhythm* of a house (“Every home has a rhythm of its own”, “Ogni casa ha i suoi ritmi”), but odours are only mentioned in the Italian script (“e i suoi odori”). In the English script, the word *rhythm* is used as a hyperonym

encompassing the idea of odours, so they are not explicitly referred to. Odours are a part of the regular pattern of change that characterises each house; they are regarded as something natural, so the perfect air freshener is one that “is in tune” with them. In the Italian script, the idea of the Airwick freshener being in tune with the rhythm of the house is absent. Here odours are considered as something out of place, an unpleasant appendix that cannot be integrated into the rhythm of a house. Thus, the air freshener has to get rid of them. The different perception of house odours conveyed by the two scripts is also reflected at syntactic level:

(1) Every house has a rhythm of its own. *And* now there’s an air freshener that’s in tune with it.

(2) Ogni casa ha i suoi ritmi... e i suoi odori. *Ma* da oggi c’è il nuovo Airwick Freshmatic

While in (1) the first clause is linked to the following one through the use of the conjunction *and*, in (2) the disjunction *but* is used. Airwick blends in with the house and its rhythm in the British commercial, but does not in the Italian one, where it is actually the solution to a problem. Here the overall perception of the house depends on its good smell: in fact, the use of Airwick makes a house “sempre accogliente e profumata”. A close relationship is established between the cosiness of a house and its pleasant smell in the Italian commercial, while it is not the case with the British one, where only the long-lasting fragrance of the product is underlined (“a burst of fragrance all through the day”).

Significantly, the slogans are also very different. The British ad relevantly invites the viewer to “Set it to the rhythm of your home”, which highlights both the possibility of setting the air freshener to release puffs of fragrance at different intervals during the day and the fact that each house has its own specific needs. In the Italian commercial, Airwick is one of the “Fragranze che ti cambiano la vita” (see also the caption in the final snapshot 5.323). This slogan seems to translate the caption “Fragrances that change your world” appearing in the British visuals (snapshot 322). Particularly

interesting is the difference between the words “world” and “vita” in the two catchphrases which are otherwise identical. Given the fact that Airwick is one of the products marketed by the British company Reckitt Benckiser, one of the world’s leading manufacturers of cleaning products, it seems sensible to assume that the Italian slogan is a translation of the British caption. In terms of translation theory, we could therefore say that the Italian slogan is the *target text* of the English *source text*, and we could observe that the replacement of the word *world* with *vita* is an example of what translators call *substitution*⁸². Substitution is an *oblique translation*, a technique that normally occurs when there is no immediate correspondence between the source text and the target text with reference to a specific item of translation. It is therefore a deviation from the default technique of *equation*, which Taylor (1998: 49) defines as the “[...] the default position whereby if no other pressing reason exists a term should be translated by its one-to-one equivalent”.

In the case we are examining here, it is evident that there are no *pressing reasons* whereby one should have replaced *world* with *vita*, therefore this substitution appears like a deliberate choice made by the ad person in order to convey a different message to the audience. *World*, in this context, can be a synonym for “environment” (*Online Oxford English Dictionary*), it describes something which is *around you*; conversely, *vita* means “il vivere particolare di ogni individuo” (*Dizionario d’Italiano Garzanti Online*), it refers to something which is *part of you*. A product that changes your life goes a step further than something that changes your world: changing your world may imply changing how you see things, but changing your life also involves changing how the others see you. Although Airwick is just an air freshener in both countries, in the Italian slogan its effects are described as further-reaching than in the British one, suggesting greater sensitivity to the issue of odours in Italy (and, indirectly, also to that of cleanliness).

⁸² The terminology used in this work to refer to translation theory is borrowed from Joseph Malone’s *The Science of Linguistic in the Art of Translation*, in turn based on the translation theory classic *Stylistique Comparée du Français et de l’Anglais. Méthode de la Traduction* by Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet.

The ads for detergents tackle cleanliness more directly than the commercials from plughole un-blockers and air fresheners, and the very notion of *dirt* comes into question.



Snapshot 5.324



Snapshot5.325



Snapshot 5.326



Snapshot 5.327



Snapshot 5.328



Snapshot 5.329



Snapshot 5.330



Snapshot 5.331

Both the British (snapshots 5.324-5.327) and the Italian (snapshots 5.328-5.331) CillitBang commercials present the same visual structure. The Cillit Bang man shows the viewer the efficacy of the product in action in a number of situations where dirt is

the enemy. However, verbal language shows significant differences in the way in which dirt is dealt with in the two ads:

(1) Hi, Barry Scott here, asking whether you have *problems* with *soap scum, limescale, gound-in dirt*. They're a challenge for some house all-cleaners, but not for *Cillit Bang, the amazing new power cleaner*. Just spray it on and wipe that scum away. *Limescale is simply calcium carbonate that sticks. Look how Cillit Bang dissolves this solid chunk, so limescale is a no-problem anymore*. Look how clean it gets this old penny. New Cillit Bang Grime and Lime. Cillit Bang. The incredible cleaning sensation now comes in a squeezy bottle for larger areas. *On stubborn stains get a sparkling shine* with Cillit Bang. Bang! *And the dirt is gone*

(2) *Problemi con residui di cibo, incrostazioni di grasso, sporco ostinato o altre superfici unte? Nuovo Cillit Bang Sgrassatore elimina questi problemi*. Prova la sua efficacia: guarda come Cillit Bang sgrassatore scioglie persino quest'olio di cottura. *Rimuove difficili residui di cibo, incrostazioni di grasso, sporco ostinato*. Guarda come pulisce Cillit Bang sgrassatore. Puoi vedere subito la differenza. Cillit Bang. *L'esplosione contro lo sporco*.

I have italicised the phrases of the scripts that are relevant to my analysis. In both (1) and (2) the focus is on dirt, which appears quite predictable in a commercial for a multi-purpose cleaning product. Nevertheless, in the English version the approach is less abrupt: the fictitious, effusive endorser Barry Scott has the time to introduce himself before introducing the problems Cillit Bang can solve. In the Italian version the endorser remains unnamed and, by comparison, the script appears characterised by an urge to illustrate immediately the problems and the effective remedy. The different degree in urgency of the two scripts is also reflected at a stylistic level by the use of an

indirect question in (1) (“asking *whether* you have problems”) and a direct question in (2) (“Problemi con residui di cibo?”).

In both (1) and (2), the connection between *problems* and *dirt* is made quite clear. Nevertheless, the dirt problems presented in (1) appear less *serious* than those illustrated in (2). If we exclude the compound noun “ground-in dirt”, which gives the idea of difficult-to-remove dirt, the other two problems in the English script (“soap scum” and “limescale”) appear quite mild. This is not the case with the Italian script, where the dirt consists of “incrostazioni di grasso”, “sporco ostinato” and “superfici unte”. Adjectivisation here conveys ideas of difficult (and possibly smelly) filth: grease is ground in, dirt is stubborn, and surfaces are oil-stained. It is therefore not surprising that the action of the Italian Cillit Bang is to eliminate problems (“Cillit Bang sgrassatore elimina questi problemi”), unlike the British Cillit Bang, which is simply described as the “amazing new power cleaner”. In the Italian commercial we find that “The home is [...] presented as a space where dirt and bacteria proliferate and must be fought with aggressive cleaning, in a sort of extended war metaphor” (Torresi 2004: 278), and Cillit Bang becomes a powerful weapon that dissolves “persino questo olio di cottura”. The use of the adverb *persino* (= even) is in striking contrast with the use of the adverb *simply* in (1), where limescale is belittled and defined as “simply calcium carbonate that sticks”. Dirt is a tough enemy in the Italian commercial, and this is insistently reaffirmed. Cillit Bang “Rimuove *difficili* residui di cibo, incrostazioni di grasso, sporco *ostinato*” and you can immediately see the result (“Puoi vedere subito la differenza”). In the British commercial dirt is also a problem, but it is far from being an enemy to fight: a greater sense of proportion is maintained in English, and dirt remains dirt, a problem that Cillit Bang turns into a *no-problem*. Cillit Bang here dissolves limescale, cleans old pennies and, at most, shows its efficacy on “stubborn stains” through a “sparkling shine”.

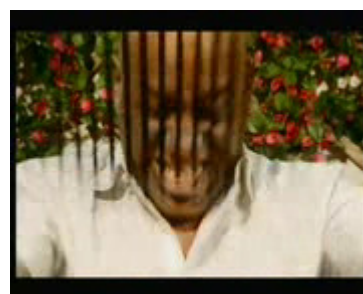
The two final slogans summarise these two different perspectives. The English uses the onomatopoeia of the brand name to form a pun (“Cillit Bang. Bang! And the dirt is gone”). The *bang* here resembles that of comic strips (also called to mind by the fuchsia bubble reading “New” next to the bottle in snapshot 5.327), and with it the dirt

is gone. The use of the adjective *gone* gives the idea of the efficacy of the product (“if something is gone, there is nothing of it left”, *Online Oxford English Dictionary*) without conjuring up images of combatants. The Italian ad disregards the pun implicit in the brand name, and sticks to the war metaphor describing Cillit Bang as a *blast* (“Cillit Bang. Un’esplosione contro lo sporco”), an extreme measure against dirt.

Dirt in the UK’s commercials is a nuisance, something that causes you trouble, in that you have to take time to clean instead of doing more pleasant things. This is evident in the commercial for the cleaning spray from Fairy (snapshots 5.332-5.337), the most popular British brand of washing-up liquids and household products.



Snapshot 5.332



Snapshot 5.333

In the commercial a man is relaxing in his deck-chair on his patio, next to a table with a cocktail on it (snapshot 5.332), but he has to break off and clean out the griddle from the previous night’s barbecue (snapshot 5.333):

Dinner barbecues are a *doddle* compared to cleaning the *blooming* thing.

Visual and verbal codes both indicate that dirt is not a problem in its own right here. The nuisance comes from the fact that the man has to take time away from his leisure on account of that dirt. I have italicised the two colloquialisms which are compared in the script to underline the trouble of the dirty griddle. There is no mention of stubborn dirt here, but the mild, slightly old-fashioned swear word *blooming* is used to qualify the act of cleaning, in comparison to which barbecuing is defined as a *doddle*, “something very easy to do” (*Online Oxford English Dictionary*).



Snapshot 5.334



Snapshot 5.335



Snapshot 5.336



Snapshot 5.337

The “blooming thing” becomes a “doddle” with the help of Fairy Power Spray (snapshot 5.334), which is shown in action (snapshots 5.335-5.337):

Now, it's *just* another greasy job. The Fairy Power Spray. *Simply* spray, wait, and wipe. *Easy-peasy*. Fairy Power Spray. Burnt-on food, be ware!

Semantically, *ease* becomes the the thread of the commercial. With Fairy Power Spray cleaning the griddle becomes a totally effortless job. The adverbs “just” and “simply”, and the childish (or very informal) adjective “easy-peasy” convey an idea of straightforwardness. Burnt-on food is just something to get rid of to go back to more pleasant activities, rather than an enemy to destroy.

Even when they do not advocate a war against dirt, Italian commercials for cleaning agents describe it as something supernatural, evil or dangerous. One may need magic to wipe out stubborn dirt, as is the case with MastrolindoSgrassatore Spray, whose jingle tells us that “La magia è il suo potere” (lit. *magic is its power*).



Snapshot 5.338



Snapshot 5.339



Snapshot 5.340



Snapshot 5.341

In the commercial for Nuovo Bref Power Sciogligrasso Universale, dirt is a devil (snapshot 5.338) lurking about every surface or object (snapshot 5.340), and it can only be crushed by the power of Bref (snapshot 339), a professional against the *dirt devil* (“Professionista contro quel diavolo di sporco”, snapshot 5.341). Drawing on Christian iconography, evil is represented through the image of the Devil, and dirt is made coincide with it, in the attempt to present it as wicked. Bref crushes the dirt devil almost in the same way as the Holy Virgin treads on the head of the serpent: thus, the action of cleaning takes on the same value as an exorcism or a cathartic action.

In the Chanteclair Sgrassatore Universale Disinfettante ad, dirt is presented in the form of bacteria infesting a chopping board.



Snapshot 5.342



Snapshot 5.343

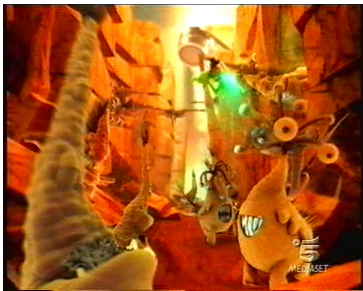
An elderly lady (M) is cleaning the board using an ammoniac-based detergent (snapshot 5.342), when her daughter (D) steps in pointing out that is not sufficient (snapshot 5.343):

D: Mamma, non basta un detersivo normale. Ti sembra pulito, però è pieno di batteri. Bisogna disinfettare.

M: Con che cosa?

D: Vieni con me!”

I have italicised the clauses which are relevant to my analysis. Dirt is treated almost obsessively: a “normal” detergent is not sufficient to eradicate it. What seems to be clean is actually crawling with bacteria, and therefore disinfection is the only solution. Here the threat does not come from visible ground-in dirt or grease: the enemy is invisible, lying beneath the surface of an apparently clean chopping board, and it is ready to cause diseases.



Snapshot 5.344



Snapshot 5.345



Snapshot 5.346



Snapshot 5.347

A spray of Chanteclair (snapshot 5.343) dematerialises the two women and takes them into the chopping board, where they find themselves depicted in a computer-generated science fiction sequence. Dressed in fluorescent green Lycra, they fly over colonies of bacteria that look like aliens (snapshot 5.344). The only weapon they have is

Chanteclair (snapshot 5.345), which is always there to take them out of difficult situations (snapshot 5.346). A male voice-over reminds the viewer, now engrossed in a sci-fi adventure, what the real purpose of Chanteclair is:

Il nuovo Chanteclair Sgrassatore Universale Disinfettante, grazie alla sua formula originale, disinfetta a fondo tutte le superfici, eliminando anche i batteri.

While the woman described the problem, the voice-over offers the solution. This solution is linguistically constructed, insofar as it is pivoted around a few phrases (see italics) which are semantically opposite to those found in the woman's speech above. In fact, if the problem was a "detergente normale" the solution is "una formula speciale"; if the problem was that the chopping board "sembra pulito, però è pieno di batteri", the solution is that Chanteclair "disinfetta a fondo tutte le superfici, eliminando anche i batteri". Eventually, the two women come back to the real world, but the elderly lady is so excited that she asks her daughter:

M: Lo posso usare anche in bagno?

D: Dappertutto!

Another spray and she is back into the world of Chanteclair, flying around the bathroom, while both the voice-over and the caption on the screen define Chanteclair as "Il futuro del pulito" (snapshot 5.347).

The coding orientation in both Bref and Chanteclair is naturalistic, and fantastic elements, like the Devil or sci-fi scenario, lower the overall modality of the two commercials. I think this choice can also be considered as strongly culture-bound. The stricter notion of cleanliness typical of high-UAI cultures also implies a higher degree of anxiety with respect to the problem of dirt. This means that commercials whose verbal language dramatises dirt to the utmost in order to show the efficacy of the cleaning products advertised, on the one hand appeal to high-UAI audiences through the presentation of apt solutions to eradicate a stubborn problem, but, on the other hand, risk increasing the levels of anxiety in viewers by presenting dirt as a danger or a threat. Lowering the modality by presenting dirt as a cartoonish devil and bacteria as computer-designed funny monsters minimises this risk.

Moving on to laundry products, the divergence between the British and Italian perspectives on dirt widens. Not only is the equation between dirt and evil absent from British samples, but sometimes it is completely reversed, as in Persil washing-up liquid commercials:



Snapshot 5.348



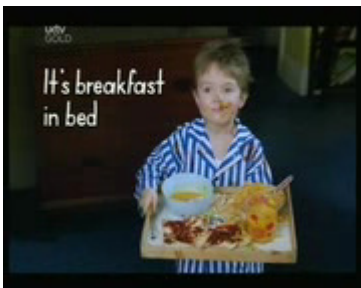
Snapshot 5.349



Snapshot 5.350



Snapshot 5.351



Snapshot 5.352



Snapshot 5.353



Snapshot 5.354



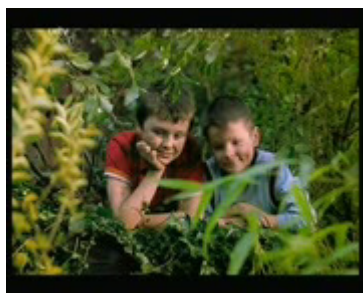
Snapshot 5.355



Snapshot 5.356



Snapshot 5.357



Snapshot 5.358



Snapshot 5.359

In the first ad (snapshots 5.348-5.353), a young boy makes the kitchen filthy and stains his pyjamas in the attempt to prepare breakfast for his parents. Captions appearing on the screen read that what we see is “not dirt” (snapshot 5.353), but “It’s breakfast in bed” (snapshot 5.354). In the second advert (snapshots 5.354-5.359), two young boys scramble up the fence dividing their back garden from the neighbours’, and then perch on it admiring the girl next door, who is relaxing on a deck-chair. Also here, the mud on their clothes is not dirt (snapshot 356) but “It’s the girl next door”. In both ads, a female voice-over says:

We see dirt differently. We believe dirt is good.

The slogan “Dirt is good” appears at the end of the two commercials, next to a stylised stain (snapshots 5.353 and 5.359); throughout the commercials, the accompanying music is “Be young, be foolish, be happy” by the 1970s American band Tams.

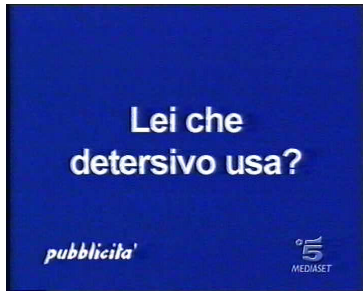
The metonymic relationship that exists between the visuals and the dialogue is very important to comprehend the spirit of these adverts. Dirt is good, not in its own right, but by virtue of its origin. In the case of the young boy serving breakfast in bed to his parents, stains of orange juice and egg cease to be dirt, and become an index of his affection. Similarly, the mud on the trousers and tops of the two young boys engrossed

in admiring the cute girl next door is not seen as filth, but it stands for the vital energy that is associated with the first crush in life. The physical component of dirt is completely overlooked, to emphasise instead the small joys with which it can be symbolically connected, through a cause-effect relationship. The high degree of commitment with which Persil express their different view on dirt (“we *believe* dirt is good”, my italics) only makes sense in the context provided by pictures and captions together⁸³. Nevertheless, choosing a slogan that apparently extols dirt does not imply belittling the product: in fact, presenting dirt as a non-problem from the very beginning implicitly highlights the cleaning power of Persil.

Last but not least, some attention has to be paid to the background music of the Persil commercials, which is not haphazard, but fits their overall carefree tone. Its core is happiness (“Be young, be foolish, but be happy” is the refrain), the glee of a breakfast in bed served by the little fellow in snapshot 5.352, or the foolishness of the two naughty boys spying on their neighbour’s cute daughter in snapshot 5.358. This is a joy that is not affected by dirty pyjamas, stained carpet or muddy trousers. The happiness appeal in advertising a washing liquid might seem quite unusual, but it can be explained quite satisfactorily if we look at it from a cultural perspective. Hofstede (2001) has explained that low-UAI cultures are characterised by a stronger subjective well-being and by shared feelings of happiness. Using the extensive collection of data compiled by Veerhoven (1993) about the “happiness of nations”, he has proved that in rich countries a negative correlation (i.e. an inverse proportion) exists between happiness and anxiety. As anxiety levels have been shown to be directly proportional to UAI (Hofstede 2001), it follows that there is also a correlation between happiness and UAI. This means that the lower the UAI of a rich nation, the more widespread a laid-back and optimistic attitude towards sundry aspects of life among its people. Now, if we think that in high-UAI cultures, deep cleanliness and disinfection are used as appeals to respond to high anxiety, it does not seem so strange that happiness may be used as an appeal in a washing liquid commercial in uncertainty-tolerant cultures.

⁸³ A narrower textual interpretation of the slogan, halfway between tongue in cheek and business-oriented, could be that dirt is good for Persil because without it noone would be buying washing liquids. Thus, from a corporate perspective (notice the use of a *corporate we*, see 4.2.6), Persil people have to believe that dirt is good, and can sarcastically declare it via the provocative slogan.

The Italian Dixan commercial (snapshots 5.360-5.368) combines housewives' endorsement – a very popular subcategory in Italy in the 1980s for this type of product⁸⁴ – with a voice-over commenting on a number of vignettes showing the impact of Dixan washing liquid in everyday life:



Snapshot 5.360

Lei che detersivo usa?



Snapshot 5.361

Io uso Dixan.



Snapshot 5.362

Dixan, da sempre.



Snapshot 5.363

Il mio è Dixan.

⁸⁴ Very popular examples are: the Dixan *fustone*, endorsed by Signora Giannini, a mother of sextuplets, who extolled the efficacy and good value of the product when interviewed by the TV presenter Enza Sampò (http://www.torinointernational.com/spot80/?carica=spot_detail&id=390); and the Dash *fustone*, where a housewife interviewed in a supermarket refused to swap her Dash drum with two unbranded drums claiming that Dash was unbeatable with whites (http://www.torinointernational.com/spot80/?carica=spot_detail&id=330).



Snapshot 5.364

Se Dixan è il detersivo di tutte queste consumatrici è per ciò che offre:



Snapshot 5.365

un bianco di cui puoi essere fiera...



Snapshot 5.366

...un pulito che ti mette in risalto...



Snapshot 5.367

e la freschezza per una splendida giornata.



Snapshot 5.368

Non ho dubbi: io scelgo Dixan.

Here, the outcome ensured by Dixan is not limited to laundry, but actually affects its users and the way in which they are perceived by others. The immaculate whiteness of a shirt washed with Dixan is something to be proud of and to show off (“un bianco di cui puoi essere fiera” snapshot 5.365). Similarly, the cleanliness of a tablecloth becomes a kind of personality added value that makes one stand out (“un pulito che ti mette in risalto”, snapshot 5.366). Finally, the fragrance of fresh-washed laundry can make every day a wonderful day (“e la freschezza per una splendida giornata”, snapshot 5.367). Like the Italian Airwick, Dixan also seems to change its users’ lives rather than simply accomplishing the purpose for which it was created; it not only leaves laundry spotless, but also improves the consumer’s public image. This symbolic added value of the product is important in the context of a high-UAI society, in which the “fear of failure” is higher than the “hope of success”, as shown by Hofstede’s data on motivation and achievement (2001: 169). Dirt is not only a problem *per se*, but also for the consequences it may have in terms of social acceptability and personal achievement in a culture governed by strict rules about what is dirty. A product that makes you proud of yourself and admired by the others is also a product that reassures you about your chance of success. Thus, the lady at the end of the commercial can express her unconditional preference for Dixan (“Non ho dubbi: io scelgo Dixan”, snapshot 5.368).

Another notable characteristic of the Dixan commercial is the fact that it is a product promoted by female represented participants for the sake of female interactive participants. All the endorsers featured in the visuals are women, and also the verbal language leaves no room for ambiguity. Dixan is “il detersivo di *tutte queste consumatrici*”, a product that gives you a whiteness “di cui puoi essere *fiera*”. The double-exophoric function (Cook 2001, see 4.2.1) of the second person singular pronoun implied in the verb (*puoi essere fiera*) provides the link joining the women in the pictures and those at home. There are only two men in the ad: the husband standing in his snow-white shirt, watched by his proudly smiling wife (snapshot 5.365) as she gives her testimonial, and the voice-over, who lists the reasons for which the women in the ad have chosen, and those at home should choose, Dixan. Women

choose Dixan and do the laundry; men benefit from clean shirts and explain to women the reasons for choosing Dixan. This patently unbalanced division of roles reflects the preference for “conventional gender roles in the family” (Hofstede 2001: 162) within high-UAI societies. The need for stability and the fear of ambiguity of uncertainty-avoidant cultures results in conservatism at the level of family inner structure, whereby the typical woman is represented as the one who slots into the housewife stereotype.

In conclusion, the Italian commercials for cleaning and laundry products have proved to convey a rather threatening view of dirt and quite a strict notion of cleanliness. By contrast, the corresponding British ads have highlighted a laid-back attitude towards dirt, mainly regarded as a nuisance, and a more relaxed relationship with the concept of cleanliness. The analysis conducted has shown that such culture-bound distinction persists also in the case of apparently identical or very similar ads present in both cultures (e.g. Airwick or Bref commercials).

5.3 Conclusions

Despite the great variety of products and topics encompassed by the macro-category of *convenience goods*, the analysis conducted in this chapter has brought to light similar values underlying different commercial categories.

From a cultural-dimensions perspective, UAI has proved to be the main correlating dimension in all commercial categories across the two cultures. Opposite pairs of appeals – corresponding to the opposite UAI scorings of the UK and Italy – have been identified in the groups of ads analysed: British convenience and/or cost effectiveness (low UAI) versus Italian quality (high UAI) in the supermarket and foods sections; British preference for time effectiveness and life enjoyment (low UAI) versus Italian need for profound cleanliness and clear-cut gender roles (high UAI) in the section of cleaning and laundry products. Stylistically, the British uncertainty tolerance has also become apparent in the larger use of verbal and visual humor, a sub-category not often utilised in the uncertainty-avoidance-imbued Italian commercials.

Different degrees of PDI between the UK and Italy can be assumed to have influenced the different emphasis on tradition shown in the commercials. Particularly in the supermarket and food sections, tradition has emerged as a paramount value in the Italian commercials, whereas in the English samples it has often been overlooked in preference for the prevailing appeal of convenience, and sometimes it has been praised tongue in cheek (e.g. in the Twinings tea commercial).

The idea of time as a value *per se*, omnipresent in the British commercials analysed in this chapter, is a pointer to the high IDV of British society, and clashes with the emphasis on the collectivistic values of dedication and family noticed in most Italian commercials, especially at a visual level.

British and Italian mutual representation in TV advertising has been shown to be influenced by national cultures, although in different ways. On the one hand, the British portrayal of Italians and Italy through the extension of British cultural stereotypes (e.g. Dolmio Sauce and Nestle Baci commercials); on the other hand, the Italian relocation of Italian values in the depiction of England and English people (e.g. the Italian Twinings commercial).

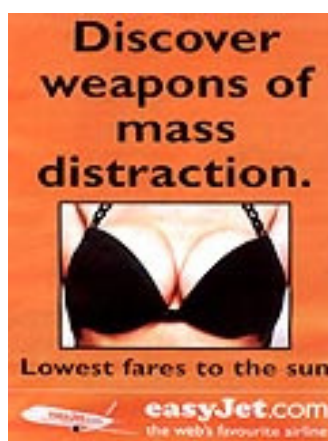
On the whole, national cultural dimensions have proved to have greater impact on convenience goods than on BFPS advertising, and this is easily explained in the light of the previously mentioned positive correlation between the age of a product and the influence of culture on its consumption (see 2.1 and 5.2.1). I believe another reason is the considered difference between high- and low-involvement products (see footnote 27). Unlike mortgages and loans, supermarkets, foodstuffs, washing liquids and cleaning products are a constant part of everyday life. Everyone buys pasta, noodles, liquid soaps or multi-purpose sprays frequently and regularly, and they are cheap enough to be *low-involvement products*, of the *feel-do-learn* sort. If we think of culture as a *collective programming of mind* (see 1.3), it is obvious that it is cultural schemata that give consumers their main impetus to buy a *feel-do-learn* product. Consequently, the culture-bound nature of convenience goods advertising becomes a natural extension of documented consumer behaviour within a specific market segment.

CHAPTER VI

TO GET AND TO BEGET: THE USE OF SEX IN BRITISH AND ITALIAN TV ADVERTISING

6.1. Preliminary Remarks

In a recent campaign aimed at promoting new routes to summer holiday destinations, the popular Irish low-cost carrier EasyJet played with the assonance of the words *destruction* and *distraction* to make a pun based on *weapons of mass destruction*, a noun phrase which has sadly been in fashion since the 9/11 attacks in New York.



Snapshot 6.1

The apparently obscure slogan, *Discover weapons of mass distraction*, was anchored by the picture accompanying it, a close up of a buxom-breast line in a tight bikini. In a humorous way, the company was inviting consumers to treat themselves to a relaxing holiday on a sunny beach, and to get distracted from work and humdrum life by the sight of large-breasted girls.

EasyJet's ad is only one example of a large array of printed or televised adverts making use of sex in visual or verbal language. There has been, and there still is, a bitter controversy about whether sex is effective or whether, as they say in specialised jargon, *sex sells* in advertising. Advertising Professor Jef I. Richards from Austin

University (1996) has claimed that sex only sells if you are selling sex; conversely, the literary and drama critic John Lahr has acknowledged sex as the real essence of advertising, saying that “society drives people crazy with lust and calls it advertising”⁸⁵. It is difficult to assess what the real impact of sex on advertising is, but what is plain is that sex does play a role in advertising. Tom Reichert (2003: 13) has noted that an encompassing definition of sex in advertising is not easy, because it is often a coalescence of elements which are very different from each other:

[...] ads can contain images of attractive people clothed in revealing or tight-fitting clothing, or contain verbal elements such as double-entendres and sexually suggestive words or phrases. Often, both elements coalesce to create sexual meaning in ads. Aside from simply containing sexual content, sexual information in ads can be integrated within the message to greater or lesser degree. For example, some ads contain images of blatant nudity or models engaged in erotic liaisons. On the other hand, some ads contain only a hint of sexual suggestion, perhaps a subtle innuendo or play on words. In many cases, people consider images of fully clothed, physically attractive women and men to be sexually attractive, and thus, a subtle instance of sex in advertising.

In this last chapter, I do not discuss sex in advertising from a marketing perspective, because such an analysis would lie out of the scope of my research. Given commercials where the use of sex appeal is more or less unmistakable, my purpose has been to determine the extent to which culture influences the use of verbal and visual sex-related elements, and the way in which they combine with each other. The cross-category nature of sex in advertising implies that virtually any commercial for any product category can avail itself of sex appeal as a selling technique. This also means that in a cross-cultural analysis, it is not always possible to compare samples from one product category in a certain culture with samples from exactly the same product category in another culture. In the present study, for example, products which are advertised through the use of sex in the British sub-corpus have very frequently proved to be unrelated to sex in the Italian sub-corpus, and vice versa. Consequently, in this chapter the focus has been on sex as an advertising technique across cultures rather than on specific product categories. Obviously, I have favoured the British sub-corpus, selecting three commercial categories (products for personal use, beer, and cars)

⁸⁵ <http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Advertising>

characterised by a more substantial and more frequent use of sex appeal. Whenever samples of sex advertising have been found in the corresponding Italian product categories, a comparison has been established; otherwise, Italian samples of sex advertising taken from different categories have been provided for analysis.

6.2. The Analysis

6.2.1 Sex Appeal in Personal Use Products Advertising

In this section, I utilise the general label of *personal use products* to refer to a macro-category including four product categories: 1) body and hair care products (for example, shower gels, shampoos, toothpastes, and deodorants); 2) beauty products (for example, anti-wrinkle creams and cosmetic items); 3) sanitary and intimate products (for example, sanitary towels, tampons, and personal lubricants); and 4) perfumes. The element linking all these groupings together is the human body, which is cleaned, taken care of, embellished or simply pleased through the use of the various products advertised. It is probably by virtue of their close correlation with the body that personal use products in the UK are advertised through a larger number of sexual references than other categories.

BRITISH SUB-CORPUS – BODY & HAIR CARE PRODUCTS			
ANDREX TOILET PAPER	GILLETTE MP3 POWER NITRO DISP. RAZORS	L'OREAL PURE ZONE FACE CLEANSING KIT	RADOX SHOWER GEL FOR WOMEN
CHARMIN TOILET PAPER	GILLETTE SENSOR 3 DISPOSABLE RAZORS	L'OREAL SPRAY MIST SUN LOTION	REACH FRESH BREATH TOOTHBRUSH
CLAIROL NEW NICE 'N EASY HAIR COLOUR	HEAD AND SHOULDERS COOL MENTHOL	LYNX DEODORANT FOR MEN	REACH FRESH BREATH TOOTHPASTE
COLGATE MICRO-SONIC TOOTHBRUSH	HEAD AND SHOULDERS OCEAN SPA	LYNX EXFOLIATING SCRUB SHOWER GEL	RIGHT GUARD DEODORANT FOR MEN
COLGATE PERSONAL WHITENING TOOTHPASTE	HERBAL ESSENCES FEARLESS COLOUR HAIR COLOUR	LYNX UNLIMITED DEODORANT FOR MEN	SCHOLL ODOUR CONTROL FOOT SPRAY

BRITISH SUB-CORPUS – BODY & HAIR CARE PRODUCTS			
COLGATE SENSITIVE TOOTHPASTE	HERBAL ESSENCES RAINFOREST FRAGRANCES SHAMPOO	LUX SHOWER GEL	SCHOLL PARTY FEET SHOE CUSHIONS
COLGATE 360 TOOTHPASTE	HERBAL ESSENCES SHAMPOO	MC LEANS TOOTHPASTE	SENSODYNE TOOTHPASTE
DOVE BODY CARE CREAM	HERBAL ESSENCES SHAMPOO AND CONDITIONER RANGE	NEUTROGENA VISIBLY CLEAR 2 IN 1 WASH AND MASK	SHOCK WAVES HAIRGEL
DOVE BODY WASHES	IMPULSE DEODORANT FOR WOMEN	NIVEA ANTI-AGEING HAND CREAM	SUNSILK PRODUCTS
DOVE CARE AND RADIANCE SHAMPOO AND CONDITIONER	JOHN FRIEDA HAIR DYE	NIVEA BODY CREAM	SURE DEODORANT FOR MEN
DOVE ESSENTIAL CARE CONDITIONER	JOHNSON'S EYE MAKE-UP REMOVAL PADS	NIVEA INVISIBLE PROTECTION DEODORANT FOR WOMEN	SURE DEODORANT FOR WOMEN
DOVE ROLL-ON DEODORANT	JOHNSON'S HAIR MINIMISING BODY LOTION	NIVEA SCULPTING AND SMOOTHING CREAM	TRESEMMÉ HAIR PRODUCTS
DOVE SILK DRY DEODORANT	JUST FOR MEN HAIR DYE	NIVEA VISAGE YOUNG WASH OFF CLEANSING GEL	VEET SMOOTHNESS HAIR REMOVAL CREAM
ELVIVE ANTI-DANDRUFF SHAMPOO	KLEENEX ANTI-VIRAL TISSUES	ODOR-EATER SHOE SOLES	VEET WAXING STRIPS
ELVIVE COLOUR PROTECT SHAMPOO	LISTERINE COOL CITRUS MOUTHWASH	OLAY DAILY FACIALS	VELVET TOILET PAPER
ELVIVE NUTRI GLOSS CONDITIONER	LISTERINE MOUTHWASH	PALMER'S COCOA BUTTER FORMULA MASSAGE CREAM AND LOTION FOR STRETCHMARKS	VENUS DIVINE DISPOSABLE RAZORS
GARNIER BELLE COLOUR HAIR DYE	L'OREAL ELVIVE COLOUR REFRESH MASK	PANTENE PRO-V FULL AND THICK SHAMPOO	VO5 HAIR GEL
GARNIER FRUCTIS REPAIR AND SHINE SHAMPOO	L'OREAL EXCELLENCE CRÈME HAIR COLOUR	PANTENE PRO-V REPAIR AND PROTECT SHAMPOO	WILKINSON QUATTRO DISPOSABLE RAZORS
GARNIER MULTI-LIGHT KIT	L'OREAL FERIA HAIR COLOUR	POLIGRIP DENTURE ADHESIVE CREAM	
GARNIER 100% HAIR COLOUR HAIR DYE	L'OREAL HOT AND STRAIGHT STRAIGHTENING CREAM	RADOX SHOWER GEL FOR MEN	TOT: 78

Table 6.1 Body and hair care products adverts in the British sub-corpus

ITALIAN SUB-CORPUS – BODY & HAIR CARE PRODUCTS		
ANTICA ERBORISTERIA SHAMPOO	GARNIER BELLE COLOUR TINTURA PER CAPELLI	MENTADENT WHITE SYSTEM DENTIFRICIO
AUDISPRAY PULIZIA PER ORECCHIE	GARNIER FRUCTIS IDRALISS CREMA LISCIANTE	NEUTRO ROBERTS DEODORANTE
AZ PROTEZIONE FAMIGLIA DENTIFRICIO	GARNIER NUOVA CREMA NUTRIENTE LISCIANTE	NIVEA DEO PURE DEODORANTE
BADEDAS DOCCIASCHIUMA	GARNIER NUTRISSE CREMA TINTURA PER CAPELLI	NIVEA MASSAGGIO RASSODANTE DOCCIASCHIUMA
BIONSEN DOCCIASCHIUMA	GRAZIE ECO-LUCART CARTA IGIENICA	NIVEA STYLING CREAM GEL
BOROTALCO DEODORANTE	INFASIL INTIMO ATTIVO DETERGENTE INTIMO	PANTENE ANTI-ROTTURA SHAMPOO E BALSAMO
DOVE INTENSIVE CREMA PER IL CORPO	INFASIL NO-GAS DEODORANTE	PANTENE PRO-V BALSAMO
ELVIVE NUOVA MASCHERA RIPARATRICE	INTENSIVE LINEA CAPELLI	SILVER CARE SPAZZOLINI
FELCE AZZURRA PAGLIERI DOCCIASCHIUMA	L'OREAL ELVIVE NUTRI GLOSS SHAMPOO E BALSAMO	TAMPAX COMPAK ASSORBENTI INTERNI
FOXY SETA CARTA IGIENICA	MENTADENT AMDI	TESTANERA BRILLANCE TINTURA CAPELLI
		TOT: 30

Table 6.2 Body and hair care products adverts in the Italian sub-corpus

BRITISH SUB-CORPUS: BEAUTY PRODUCTS				
BOSS SKINCARE RANGE FOR MEN	L'OREAL AGE PERFECT ANTI-WRINKLE CREAM	MAX FACTOR LIP FINITY LIPSTICK	OLAY COMPLETE MOISTURISING CREAM	RIMMEL FULL VOLUME LIQUID LIPSTICK
BOURJOIS MASCARA	L'OREAL HYDRA ENERGETIC ANTI-WRINKLE CREAM	MAYBELLINE DREAM MOUSSE	OLAY COMPLETE MULTI-RADIANCE FACE CREAM	ROC PROTIENT FORTIFY ANTI-WRINKLE CREAM
CLEVER WHITE TOOTH WHITENING KIT	L'OREAL RENOVISTE GLYCOLIC PEEL KIT	MAYBELLINE NEW YORK XXL MASCARA	OLAY REGENERIST FACE CREAM	ROC RENEWEX MICRODERMABRA SION EXPERT KIT
GARNIER NUTRITIONIST ANTI-WRINKLE CREAM	L'OREAL REVITALIFT DOUBLE LIFTING CREAM	MAYBELLINE SUPERSTAY LIPSTICK	OLAY TOTAL EFFECT ANTI-AGEING BLEMISH CARE	STAY PERFECT MAKE-UP
GARNIER SKIN NATURALS PURE A FACE CREAM	L'OREAL TWO-STEP VOLUME-SHOCKING MASCARA	MAYBELLINE 12-HOUR-WEAR NEW SUPERSTAY LIPSTICK	PEARL DROPS NEW HOLLYWOOD SMILE TEETH WHITENER	SUNSIK PRODUCTS
GARNIER ULTRALIFT FIRING ANTI-WRINKLE CREAM	MAX FACTOR COLOUR PERFECTION LIPSTICK	NIVEA HAND CREAM	RIMMEL FRENCH MANICURE WITH LYCRA	TOT: 29

Table 6.3 Beauty products adverts in the British sub-corpus

ITALIAN SUB-CORPUS: BEAUTY PRODUCTS		
CORPORACION DERMOESTETICA CENTRO ESTETICO	L'OREAL REVITALIFT DOPPIO LIFTING CREMA ANTI-RUGHE	TESTMED ELETTROSTIMOLATORE
DOVE CREMA INTENSIVE	MAX FACTOR FLAWLESS PROTECTION FONDOTINTA	TESTMED MAX ELETTROSTIMOLATORE PORTATILE
EUCERIN MODELLANCE CREMA VISO	NIVEA ANTIRUGHE Q10 PLUS	VICHY LIFACTIV PRO CREMA ANTI-RUGHE
GARNIER ULTRALIFT OCCHI CREMA CONTORNO OCCHI	RIDCELL RULLO ANTI-CELLULITE	VICHY NORMADERM ZINCADONE A
L'OREAL DECONTRACT CREMA ANTI-RUGHE	RIMMEL RECOVER FONDOTINTA	
LOREAL NUOVO GLAM SHINE CREAM ROSSETTO	SUPERSTAY MAYBELLINE NEW YORK	TOT: 16

Table 6.4 Beauty products adverts in the Italian sub-corpus

BRITISH SUB-CORPUS: SANITARY & INTIMATE PRODUCTS	BRITISH SUB-CORPUS: PERFUMES - UK		
ALWAYS LINERS	ARMANI CODE FOR MEN	HUGO DEEP RED FOR WOMEN	PRADA FOR WOMEN
ALWAYS LINERS AND FRESHELLE WIPES	CHANEL N. 5 FOR WOMEN	HUGO ENERGISE FOR MEN	PURE POISON DIOR FOR MEN
BODYFORM PANTY LINERS	CHANEL SPRAY FOR WOMEN	HYPNOSE LANCÔME FOR WOMEN	RALPH LAUREN'S ROMANCE FOR WOMEN
KY WARMING LIQUID	CINEMA PERFUME FOR WOMEN BY YVES SAINT-LAURENT	J'ADORE DIOR FOR WOMEN	SARAH JESSICA PARKER FOR WOMEN
POISE LINERS	CK FOR WOMEN	JEAN-PAUL GAULTIER NEW FRAGRANCE	STELLA PERFUME FOR WOMEN
TAMPAX COMPAK	DNKY FOR WOMEN	LACOSTE FOR MEN	TRUE STAR TOMMY HILFIGER FOR MEN
	EMPORIO ARMANI FOR MEN AND WOMEN	LACOSTE FOR MEN AND WOMEN	TRUE STAR TOMMY HILFIGER FOR WOMEN
	ESTÉE LAUDER PLEASURES FOR WOMEN	LACOSTE TOUCH OF PINK FOR WOMEN	
	EUPHORIA CALVIN KLEIN FOR WOMEN	LIVE BY JENNIFER LOPEZ FORWOMEN	
TOT: 6	FAHRENHEIT FOR MEN	POLO BLACK RALPH LAUREN FOR MEN	TOT: 27

Table 6.5 Sanitary & intimate products adverts and perfume adverts in the British sub-corpus

ITALIAN SUB-CORPUS: SANITARY & INTIMATE PRODUCTS	ITALIAN SUB-CORPUS: PERFUMES - UK		
INFASIL INTIMO ATTIVO	ARMANI CODE FOR MEN	EUPHORIA CALVIN KLEIN	ROBERTO CAVALLI SERPENTINE
LINES PERLA	CACHAREL PROMESSE	HUGO ENERGISE FOR MEN	ROMA DI LAURA BIAGIOTTI
LINES PETALO BLU	CHANEL NR. 5	J'ADORE DIOR	SICILY D&G
LINES SETA ULTRA	CHEAP AND CHIC MOSCHINO	LACOSTE ESSENTIAL FOR MEN	TRÉSOR LANCÔME
TAMPAX COMPAK	CITY GLAM EMPORIO ARMANI	LANCÔME MIRACLE	TRUE STAR MEN TOMMY HILFIGER
	DNKY FOR MEN AND WOMEN	PRADA PERFUMES	TRUE STAR WOMEN TOMMY HILFIGER
TOT: 5	EAU FRAÎCHE VERSACE MEN	PURE POISON DIOR	TOT: 20

Table 6.6 Sanitary and intimate products adverts and perfume adverts in the Italian sub-corpus.

Tables 6.1-6.6 summarise the total number of adverts for personal use products I have found in the two sub-corpora. Quantitatively, the most puzzling data is the huge discrepancy between the number of body and hair care products and beauty products in the UK (respectively 78 and 29) and in Italy (respectively 30 and 16). In this case, cultural differences do not seem to provide any apparent reason that may explain such a significant difference between the two countries in terms of commercials for shampoo, shower gels, hair dyes and anti-wrinkle creams. On the contrary, the higher UAI of Italy, and the consequently higher importance given to a well-groomed appearance (De Mooij 2005: 180-181) would make it legitimate to think that a higher consumption of this kind of products should imply more competition and, therefore, more advertising. Conversely, we might also assume a lower consumption of these products in British society and a consequently greater use of advertising to boost sales, but I have no data concerning the actual consumption of body and hair care and beauty products in the UK, nor is there evidence of a connection between a neater aspect and a higher use of toiletries. Bearing in mind the fact that the reflection of culture on marketing is not the purpose of this work, the point to be made here is that Hofstede's cultural dimensions cannot explain everything. They are not mathematical formulae

which can be applied to any aspect of culture with the certainty that they will work; instead, they describe cultures on the basis of statistical data concerning many, but not all aspects of people's lives.

More similar in numerical terms are the commercials for sanitary and intimate products (6 in the UK and 5 in Italy) and those for perfumes (27 in the UK and 20 in Italy). Certain characteristics of the latter product, the perfumes, are identical in both countries: they have a frequency peak around Valentine's Day and Christmas and they are always associated with the cultural values of their countries of origin (most often France) rather than being adapted to the values of the country where they are advertised. Very frequently, perfume commercials travel across cultures unchanged, as is the case with most of the samples I have found in my two sub-corpora. In the light of this weak culture-boundness, I have decided to exclude this ad category from my analysis.

6.2.1.1 The Smell of Sex: The Use of Sex Appeal in Toiletry Ads

The use of sex appeal for advertising products such as deodorants, shower gels, shampoos and the like has turned out to be quite frequent in my British sub-corpus. One of the most significant examples is the ad for Herbal Essences shampoo and conditioner (snapshots 6.2-6.12):



Snapshot 6.2



Snapshot 6.3



Snapshot 6.4



Snapshot 6.5



Snapshot 6.6

In the commercial, a sexy young woman is shampooing her hair using Herbal Essences (snapshots 6.2-6.3). A female voice-over, resorting to the *double-exophoric you* (see 4.2.1), addresses her and the female viewers and says:

With Herbal Essences shampoo you've always been guaranteed one totally organic experience.

The young woman moans with pleasure in the shower ("Ooh, yes", snapshot 6.5); at this point, the camera crabs left, into the bedroom of the elderly couple living next door. A medium close-up of the lady (snapshot 6.4) shows her astonishment at hearing her neighbour groaning, and both her husband and she (snapshot 6.6) think the girl must be up to something more than just a shower!



Snapshot 6.7



Snapshot 6.8



Snapshot 6.9



Snapshot 6.10



Snapshot 6.11



Snapshot 6.12

However, shampoo is just one of the two steps through which Herbal Essences can give pleasure to its users:

Now, with our creamy protein-enriched conditioner you get a second one.

The young woman moans even more loudly (“Yes, yes, ooh! Yes!” snapshots 6.7-6.8) as she experiences the fragrance explosion of Herbal Essences conditioner (snapshot 6.9). On hearing this *second one*, the elderly neighbour becomes green with jealousy (snapshot 6.10) and exclaims: “I’d be happy with just one!” a clear cutting remark at her husband, who is reading in the bed (snapshot 6.11). The picture of the young woman with beautiful, silky hair appears on the screen and the voice-over concludes:

Herbal Essences shampoo and conditioner. A multiple organic experience.

Humour and sex are evidently the two main appeals in this commercial.

Humour is present in the form of irony, arising from the gap between the real situation (the young woman who is shampooing and conditioning her hair) and the imagined situation (the elderly couple of neighbours who think that the young woman is having sex). The contrast between the distinguished aspect of the elderly lady (snapshots 6.4, 6.6 and 6.10) and the unseemliness of her thoughts makes the whole

situation even more amusing. Into this divided context, the advertiser inserts sex appeal, which is created by means of ambiguous words and visuals.

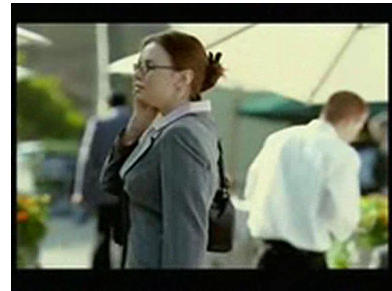
Verbally, figures of speech like *pun* and *ellipsis* serve to achieve this. The strength of Herbal Essences shampoo consists in giving its users a “multi-organic experience”. In the specific context of the advert, with the young woman moaning with pleasure (“ooh, yes!”), the adjective *multi-organic* becomes a clear double-entendre calling to mind the more explicit *multi-orgasmic*. Equally insinuating is the voice-over’s next line, telling the viewers that with Herbal Essences conditioner “you get a second one”. The elliptical style of the clause, determined by the use of the indefinite pronoun *one*, might be understood to primarily avoid the repetition of the previously used *multi-organic experience*. However, its particular collocation within the script (immediately followed by the young woman moaning: “Yes, yes, ooh! Yes!”) makes it apparent that the context-based sexual ambiguity of the expression is being exploited, and entitles the viewer to think that *one* refers to something else than a stimulating conditioner. In the end, the old lady uses the same elliptic form (“I’d be happy with just one!”) to give vent to her envy of the girl, who is believed to have done twice that which she wishes she could do just once. Sex in the commercial is only imagined: no explicit sexual references are made, and it is left to the viewers to infer what the hidden qualities of Herbal Essences shampoo and conditioner are from the naughty insinuations of the voice-over and the old lady.

At a visual level, the use of sex is not that apparent. It revolves solely around the naked figure of the young woman, which is shown just once in the shower from behind, and with the lower part of her body completely shaded (snapshot 6.3). Actually, the most sexually insinuating visual is not related to her naked body, but to the bottle of the Herbal Essences product. In snapshot 6.9 we see the bottle of shampoo or conditioner squirting flowers, just after the young woman has reached the apex of pleasure massaging her head (“Yes, yes! Ooh, yes!”, snapshots 6.7-6.8). In the context of the *multi-organic/multi orgasmic experience* shampoo, the spurting bottle can be easily interpreted as a simulation of an orgasm. Nonetheless, the decrease in modality performs, at the visual level, the same function as the innuendo at the verbal

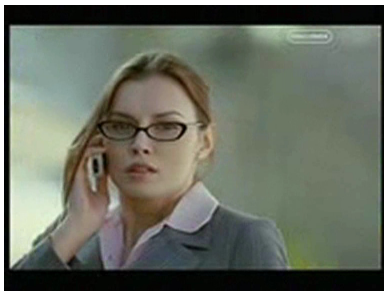
level. In fact, in a commercial dominated by a naturalistic coding orientation, the picture of a bottle of shampoo spurting flowers is clearly unreal, and therefore the overall realism of the commercial is lowered. Arguably, the choice of low modality is motivated by the particularly equivocal context: in fact, a bottle squirting “creamy, protein-enriched conditioner” instead of flowers would have been much less ambiguous in a sexual way. Low modality, therefore, becomes a device at the advertiser’s disposal, used to let the audience *imagine* rather than *see*.



Snapshot 6.13



Snapshot 6.14



Snapshot 6.15



Snapshot 6.16



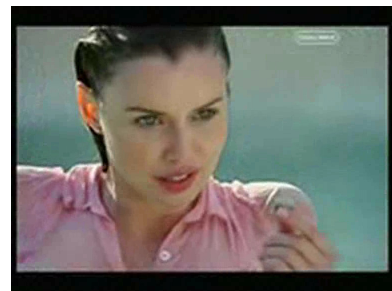
Snapshot 6.17



Snapshot 6.18



Snapshot 6.19



Snapshot 6.20



Snapshot 21



Snapshot 22

A similar balance between humour and sex appeal is found in the Lynx deodorant for men commercial (snapshots 6.13-6.22). A young man is sitting on the rim of a fountain, and is spraying Lynx deodorant on a coin (snapshot 6.13). A beautiful young woman passing by smells the irresistible fragrance of Lynx (snapshot 6.14), and starts looking for the source of the perfume (snapshot 6.15). She spots the young man, twiddling with the coin in his fingers (snapshot 6.16), and starts running towards him, while taking off her clothes (snapshots 6.17-6.18). The young man, unsure whether she is attracted by him or by the perfume, tosses the coin into the fountain. The young woman splashes into the water (snapshot 6.19), picks the coin up and ogles him, while holding it between her fingers (snapshot 6.20). Once he has understood the *miraculous* effects of Lynx, the young man rips his shirt off, and sprays his chest with deodorant before joining the girl in the fountain (snapshot 6.21). The last snapshot (6.22) shows the slogan of the advert (“Spray more. Get More”), while a female voice-over repeats it out loud.

As in the Herbal Essences ad, irony springs from the sharp contrast between the puny young man and the beautiful woman who is suddenly attracted to him after he has used Lynx. The brand name of a deodorant for men becomes a metaphor to describe women: in fact, a lynx is a feline renowned for its acute sight, and the deodorant Lynx turns the young woman into a quasi-animal of prey, as she spots the young man from afar and *attacks* him. Lynx is presented as a man’s real essence, effective also in apparently desperate cases such as that of the funny man sitting on the fountain.

Sex appeal is undoubtedly at the core of this advert, but once again it is used in a way I would define as *reticent*. Nothing sexually explicit is shown or said, but instead

everything is left for the viewers to deduce. In a commercial for a men's deodorant, the *object of desire* is the beautiful girl passing by. This notwithstanding, there is no exploitation of the female body, as the girl remains dressed from the beginning to the end of the ad (snapshot 6.14-6.15, 6.17-6.20). Actually, it is a man who becomes an object of the female gaze in this ad. The girl provocatively looks at man (and, indirectly, at all the male interactive participants, snapshots 6.15 and 6.20), and he bares his chest and joins her in the fountain following her seductive stare (snapshot 6.21)

Another paralinguistic element used to enhance the sex appeal of the ad is the alternation of different coding orientations. The beginning of the commercial follows a naturalistic coding orientation: initially, the main purpose is to acquaint the viewer with the whole situation of the man sitting on the fountain and trying to attract the beautiful girl with a puff of Lynx deodorant (snapshots 6.13-6.16). However, the sensory coding orientation prevails in the rest of the ad, where the aim becomes to please the male viewer by making him feel desired, and to promote Lynx deodorant as a bait for beautiful women. This change in coding orientation is marked by the introduction of slow-motion: from the moment when the girl starts running (snapshot 6.17) to the moment when she emerges from the water of the fountain and casts her sexy look at the young man (snapshot 6.20), the speed of the action is reduced.

Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996: 169) have pointed out that in the sensory coding orientation the pleasure principle is the ruling one, and “[...] the more a picture can create an illusion of touch and taste and smell, the higher its modality”. In fact, an image where everything is done to appeal to sensory qualities has its credibility enhanced by any *trick* that intensifies the viewer's pleasure in looking at the image. In the case of moving pictures, slow-motion is one of these tricks, because it permits the viewer to linger over the source of pleasure for longer.

In the Lynx commercial, slow-motion raises the sensory modality of the pictures (that is, it makes them more sexually appealing) without showing any sex at all. It prolongs the display of the source of pleasure, and creates a sort of dreamlike atmosphere, which is further intensified by the accompanying oriental jingle. In the

end, regular speed is resumed and the advert moves back to a naturalistic coding orientation when the man sprays his chest with Lynx (snapshot 6.21): this confirms the strategy of the ad to use slow-motion as a modality raiser to target a heterosexual male audience.

Verbal language is a minority feature in this ad, being confined solely to the slogan:

Spray more. Get more.

Once again, ellipsis is used to create a sexual innuendo. The two verbal clauses which form the slogan are open-ended: in fact, the pronoun “more” used after the verbs “spray” and “get” cannot refer to any previously used noun(s), as there is no other verbal text in the commercial. This means that two empty slots are left for the viewer to fill in on the basis of inferences from the visuals. As a matter of fact, if the brand name *Lynx* fits the first one (“Spray more [Lynx]”), the word *sex* is, pragmatically, the most suitable to the second one (“Get more [sex]”). Once again, the use of the double exophoric second person singular performs an inclusive function, whereby it is not only the young man in the advert who will get more by spraying more, but also all the men in the audience. Words, like visuals, insinuate sex, and let viewers complete what needs completing.

Sexual innuendo does not seem to characterise the verbal language of Italian toiletry advertising.



Snapshot 6.23



Snapshot 6.24

In most cases, Italian commercials for toiletries stress the effectiveness of the product in solving the problem it is supposed to fight. For example, in the Neutro Roberts deodorant commercial (snapshots 6.23), the voice-over claims that it guarantees day-long freshness even to those who sweat a lot, and says that the deodorant is specially

made for whoever feels targeted by the double exphoric *te* in the slogan (“Fatto apposta per te”, snapshot 6.23). In the Infasil deodorant commercial (snapshot 6.24), the product assures its users of efficacy against sweat while being gentle on the skin, and is recommended for those who love feeling protected (“Amore per la protezione”).



Snapshot 6.25



Snapshot 6.26



Snapshot 6.27



Snapshot 6.28



Snapshot 6.29



Snapshot 6.30

In the commercial for Borotalco Deo-Vapo deodorant (snapshots 6.25-6.30), the verbal language focuses on the effects of the product, but it is combined with pictures which are mildly sexual:

Borotalco, altolà al sudore. Borotalco Deo-Vapo, senza gas e senza alcool, controlla il sudore senza irritare. Altolà al sudore! Borotalco: riconoscersi a pelle.

I have italicised the parts of the transcription that are relevant to my analysis. The voice-over says that Borotalco deodorant keeps sweating under control (“altolà sudore”, “controlla il sudore”) without irritating skin, thanks to its alcohol-free and

gas-free formula (“ senza gas e senza alcool”, “senza irritare”). Visually, the qualities of Borotalco deodorant are confirmed by snapshot 6.27-6.28, but the rest of the pictures seem to focus on the young man and woman (snapshot 6.26) who are attracted to each other by virtue of their mutual fresh smell (snapshot 6.29). It seems that in the pictures, the main acknowledged effect of Borotalco is to help people recognise instinctively and from the smell of their skins (the Italian idiom “riconoscersi a pelle” exploits the double meaning of the word *pelle* in this context) the possible sexual or romantic partners. The kiss between the boy and the girl is very chaste, and it may be an overstatement to define it a form of sexual appeal; yet, it is noticeable that it has no relation whatsoever with the verbal language of the ad, where there is no trace of sex appeal.

A similar discrepancy between written and visual modes is found in the Bionese shower gel commercial (snapshot 6.31-6.36):



Snapshot 6.31



Snapshot 6.32



Snapshot 6.33



Snapshot 6.34



Snapshot 6.35



Snapshot 6.36

A young woman strips naked (snapshots 6.31-6.32) and soaps her body using Bionsen shower gel in the open-air by the sea. The pictures are accompanied by a tango-like original jingle, and there is no verbal language at all, except for the slogan read out by a male voice-over: “Bionsen. Una doccia lunga un sogno”.

Undoubtedly, the female body is used as a source of sex appeal in the ad. The camera lingers over it rather than showing the shower gel, and although the woman’s nudity is partly covered by foam and water (snapshots 34-36), it remains visible. The situation itself is quite intriguing: the woman stops in her car by the sea and starts showering outdoors, careless of the possibility of being spied on. It almost seems as if the pictures aim to foster voyeurism in the audience, offering nudity to their eyes.

Words define a shower with Bionsen as a *dream-long shower* (“Una doccia lunga un sogno”), and the noun “sogno” gives the slogan an ambiguous meaning. On the one hand, it may describe the whole situation of a shower in the nude by the sea as a dream, possibly dreamt by the woman in the ad or by the viewers at home. On the other hand, it may be a positive term of comparison used to describe the pleasantness of the shower (let us think of the word *sogno* as a synonym for something wonderful). The wavy layout of the letters in the slogan (snapshot 6.36) and the bright white light prevailing in the pictures also contribute to enhance the dream-like atmosphere evoked by the words. Anyway, verbal language in the Bionsen commercial does not appear as overtly sexual as that in the Herbal Essences and Lynx ads: sex is shown, but not spoken about.

In conclusion, the samples analysed above suggest that sex appeal is more frequently used in British than Italian toiletry advertising. Sexual innuendo seems to characterise both the verbal and visual codes in the British commercials seen above. It

is manipulated and toned down through the use of figures of speech at a verbal level and modality at a visual level.

Conversely, sex appeal is infrequent in the verbal language of the Italian commercials analysed, and instead what occurs more frequently are mildly equivocal visuals that are often unrelated to the verbal language.

6.2.1.2 Taboo Products and Sexual Innuendo

A *taboo* is defined as “a cultural or religious custom that forbids people to do, touch, use or talk about a certain thing” (*Online Oxford English Dictionary*). This definition highlights the fact that different cultures can (and usually do) have different taboos. Nonetheless, practice shows that many functions related to the human body (e.g. excretion, sex, death) are equally perceived as taboos across most cultures, although with different levels of acceptance.

Advertising for sanitary and intimate use products is, by definition, quite likely to deal with functions of the human body that may be labelled as taboo. Greg Myers (1994: 86) defines “sanpro ads” (from *sanitary product ads*) as ads with a problem, insofar as “[...] they have a mass market product to sell, but can’t talk about what it does”. With this definition, Myers specifically refers to adverts for sanitary towels and tampons, two products which are perceived as too personal to be spoken about in a linguistically and visually straightforward way. However, such a definition may be general enough to be applicable also to other controversial categories of products, such as, for example, those pertaining to sexual life. In fact, items like condoms or enhancers of sexual pleasure are too subversive to be advertised in a *normal* way. If speaking overtly about a woman’s period on a TV commercial might make viewers feel uneasy, tackling sexual relations and enjoyment directly in TV ads would be at the least unseemly, and lead to the company responsible being caught up in the net of regulations laid down by TV advertising self-regulatory bodies. In such a scenario, the

use of sexual innuendo in the TV promotion of such articles would appear to be the most relevant and safest practice available.

Unfortunately, I have not found any samples of ads for intimate products in the Italian sub-corpus. The British sub-corpus has only yielded one example, a commercial for KY warming liquid (snapshots 6.37-6.45), but the way sexual innuendo has been exploited in the ad may be significant in illustrating the use of sex in advertising such products.



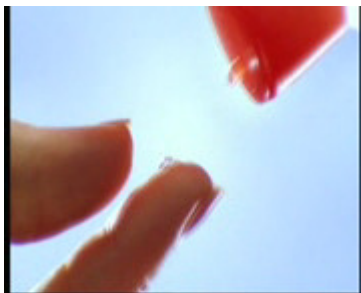
Snapshot 6.37

(Woman speaking) Keeping our relationship alive?



Snapshot 6.38

It takes work.



Snapshot 6.39

(Female voice over speaking)
Introducing something unique.



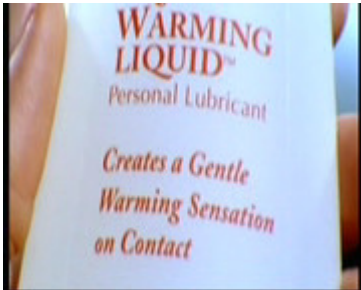
Snapshot 6.40

New KY warming liquid.



Snapshot 6.41

(Woman speaking) Cre-ates a gentle...



Snapshot 6.42

...warming sensation...



Sapshot 6.43

...on con-tact...



Snapshot 6.44



Snapshot 6.45

(Female voice over speaking) There's never been anything quite like it. For a free sample go to our website or call this number. (Giggles in the background, piece of clothing being thrown onto the sofa). KY warming liquid.

In the transcription I have used the hyphen to indicate the separate pronunciation of the syllables of a word, and the underline to mark syllables that are stressed. This commercial exemplifies a sort of paradox: whereas most of the time sex advertising is deliberately used to promote products which bear no relation to sex, here any explicit or implied reference to sex is intentionally avoided, despite the fact that what is being advertised is a product which is meant for one's sexual life! In fact, neither the words nor the pictures can be considered as sexually-insinuating. There are neither double entendres nor equivocal visuals: the sexual innuendo of the ad derives from a subtle interplay between body language and prosodic features.

The commercial begins with the picture of a man engrossed in reading a newspaper; his wife, sitting in front of him, says that it takes work to keep their relationship alive (snapshot 6.37-6.38). The word *relationship* is not further defined: we do not know whether she is talking about their love relationship, their marriage or their sexual relationship. Consequently, the predicate adjective *alive* also lends itself to different interpretations: a love relationship within a marriage may benefit from talking, whereas something more *creative* might be necessary to keep a sexual relationship going. Virtually, all these options are possible, but, as a matter of fact, we can infer that what she is speaking about is their sex life. The cut from the eyes of the man, glued to the newspaper (snapshot 6.37), to the beautiful woman sitting unnoticed in front of him (snapshot 6.38) conveys the idea of a wife who is revealing a trick used to rekindle a husband's fading passion. Then, the voice-over takes the floor and introduces the product as a warming liquid. The item is described as "something unique", but it is not further defined. An attentive viewer can read it is a personal lubricant by focusing on the close up of the bottle (snapshot 6.40). The camera cuts back to the woman, who is still sitting where she was, but is now holding a bottle of KY (snapshot 6.41). The language she uses to describe the effects of the product is absolutely neutral from a purely semantic perspective. In fact, many other products can create "a gentle, warming sensation on contact". It is only through the verbal-visual interaction in the specific context that we understand the naughtiness of her words. Linguistically, we notice a deviation from the standard prosody of spoken language:

the woman speaks slowly, pausing between the two syllables of the verb “creates” and the two of the noun “contact”, and putting extra stress on them (“cre-ates a gentle warming sensation on con-tact”). Visually the camera cuts from the woman looking down at the bottle of lubricant (snapshot 6.41), to the label on the bottle describing the properties of the product (snapshot 6.42), to a rapid sequence between the woman casting a furtive sideways look on the man and the man raising his eyes from the newspaper with a smile (snapshots 6.43-6.44), which coincides with the lengthened, stressed, syllabified pronunciation of the noun *contact*. The female voice-over concludes the advert with a line that, once again, does not reveal anything about the nature of the products (“There’s never been anything quite like it”), but by then the viewer has inferred what the product is, and has their impression confirmed by the giggles audible in the background and by the garment that is thrown onto the sofa visible despite the blurred background (snapshot 6.45).

Once again sex appeal occurs in English advertising in the form of sexual innuendo, this time exclusively built upon paralinguistic features.

6.2.2 Beer Advertising and Sex

Beer advertising is undoubtedly one of the most distinctive genres of British advertising. As the national drink of the country, beer is often promoted through situations which could be defined as quintessentially British, and is often associated with a quality for which Britons are renowned all over the world: their sense of humour. In fact, previous studies in advertising (Myers 1994; De Mooij 2004, 2005) have highlighted the extensive use of humour in printed ads and commercials for beer, with a prevalence of satire. This humour is often combined with the values of male solidarity and male companionship, whereby men are featured in men-only group activities, such as playing snooker, watching rugby, and, of course, drinking beer.

The male target audience and the reliance on humour in beer advertising represent a fertile soil for the utilisation of sex appeal. The fact that a product category is mostly

targeted at one gender makes a degree of sexual reference unsurprising, and in such a context irony can be used to tone down sex (as is the case with the Herbal Essences and Lynx ads).

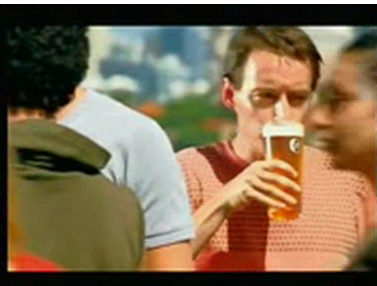
BEER ADVERTISING			
<i>BRITISH SUB-CORPUS</i>			<i>ITALIAN SUB-CORPUS</i>
BODDINGTONS	CARLSBERG EXPORT	GUINNESS EXTRA COLD	CERES
BUDWEISER	COORS	HEINEKEN	NASTRO AZZURRO
CARLING	FOSTER'S	JOHN SMITH EXTRA SMOOTH	PERONI
CARLING EXTRA COLD	GROLSCH	STRONGBOW	
CARLSBERG BEER	GUINNESS	TETLEY'S	
TOT: 15			TOT: 3

Table 6.7 Beer adverts in the British and Italian sub-corpora.

Table 6.7 summarises all the beer commercials found in the British and the Italian sub-corpora. It does not seem surprising that there are five times as many brands marketed in the UK than in Italy. In fact, the UK and Italy are by no means comparable in terms of the popularity and consumption of beer. A qualitative analysis of the ads has proved that the contents of the commercials are also remarkably divergent, especially as far as sex appeal is concerned.



Snapshot 6.46

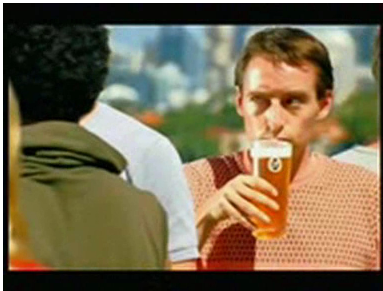


Snapshot 6.47

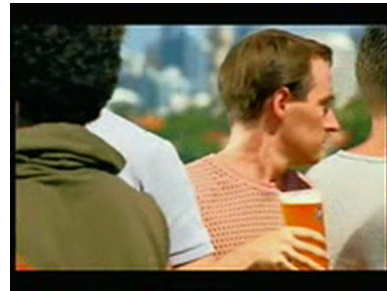


Snapshot 6.48

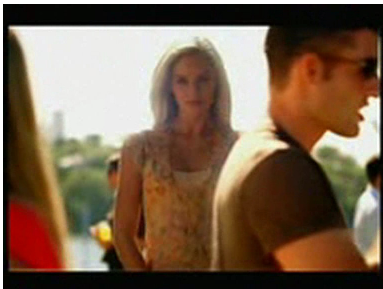
In the Foster's Super Chilled commercial (snapshots 6.46-6.62), the old, commonplace quandary as to whether a woman or a cold pint is better is humorously exploited. The setting is that of a barbecue party (snapshot 6.46), where a young man sipping his pint of Foster's (snapshot 6.47) notices that a gorgeous blonde is ogling him (snapshot 6.48).



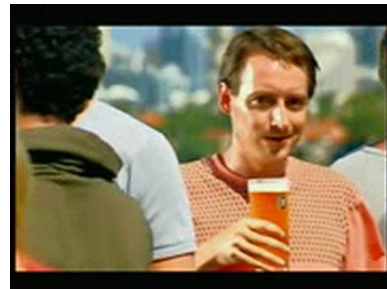
Snapshot 6.49



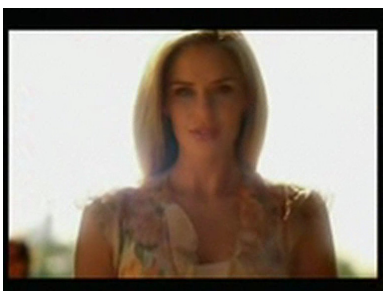
Snapshot 6.50



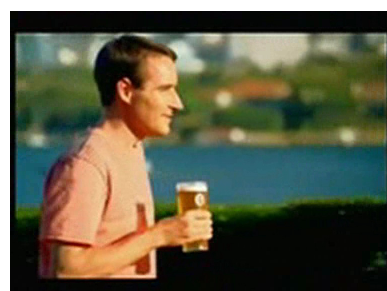
Snapshot 6.51



Snapshot 6.52



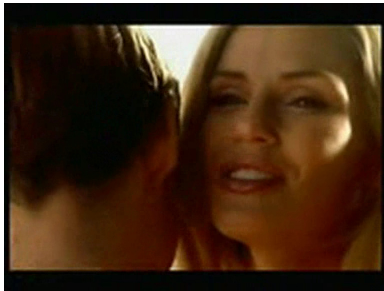
Snapshot 6.53



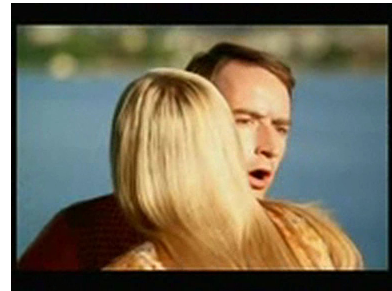
Snapshot 6.54

The man turns around (snapshots 6.49-6.50), suspecting that the woman may be looking at someone else behind him, but he realises that her interested, insistent look is just for him (snapshots 6.51-6.53). Thus, he reciprocates her smile (snapshot 6.52), and starts toddling off towards her. Thus far we have no dialogue at all: the body language of the man and the woman is only accompanied by a sensual jingle that seems to pace the approach between the two. Visual irony springs from the incongruous situation,

showing a majestic and beautiful woman on the prowl hooking a tiny unappealing man, and it serves to soften the sexual build up between the two.



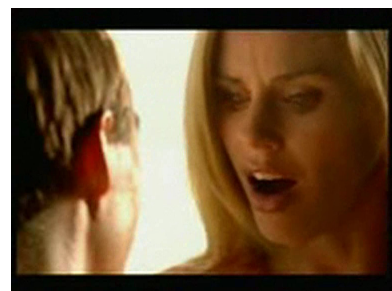
Snapshot 6.55



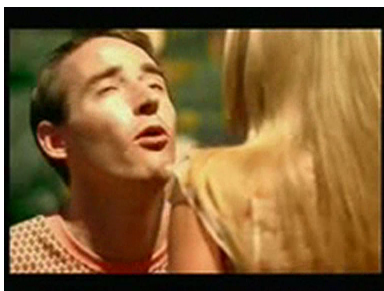
Snapshot 6.56



Snapshot 6.57



Snapshot 6.58



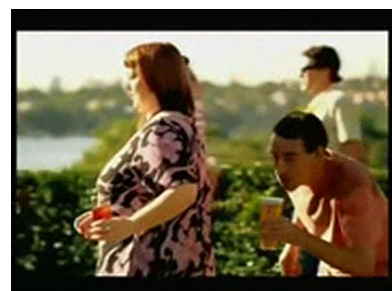
Snapshot 6.59



Snapshot 6.60



Snapshot 6.61



Snapshot 6.62

The man (M) and the woman (W) finally come to a speaking distance and they have the following short conversation (snapshots 6.55-6.56):

M: Hi, how are you doing?

W: (*whispering into his ear*) Shall we go somewhere a little...quieter?

M: Oh, no, no, standing here would be good.

While the man starts with a typical ice-breaking question, the woman immediately comes to the point, suggesting that they go to a more discreet place, a proposal that is very revealing about her intentions. The man's definite refusal is unexpected both for the viewer and for the girl: only in the end do we understand that the only reason he has approached the tall woman is to shade his cold Foster's under her breasts (snapshot 6.57)! On finding that out, the infuriated woman kicks him in the groin and walks away (snapshots 6.58-6.59). The sex appeal, which had become increasingly tangible through the eye-contact and the woman's naughty proposal, dissolves into laughter once we make out the man's real intentions. The whole situation becomes jocular, and the slogan pronounced in the end by a male voice-over ("You wouldn't like a warm beer, would you?) is a punchline that works as a verbal anchorage for snapshot 6.57. The initial quandary about women and beer is finally solved: cold Foster's is far better than a woman, and the last snapshots (6.60-6.62) show the man still trying to find rather unlikely ways to shade his beer from the sun. The sex appeal is ridiculed here, playing sarcastically with the stereotype of British males as *cold fish*, who have no doubts when it comes to choosing between women and beer.

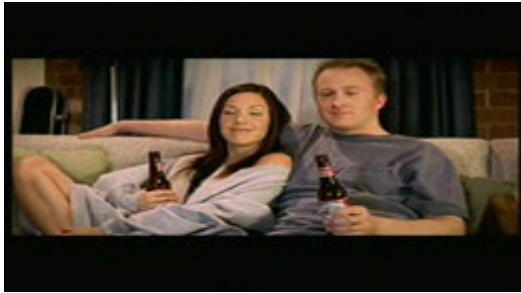
Another masterpiece of sexual innuendo and irony is the Budweiser commercial (snapshots 6.63-6.68):



Snapshot 6.63



Snapshot 6.64



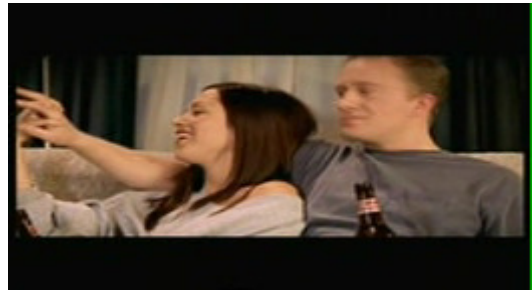
Snapshot 6.65



Snapshot 6.66



Snapshot 6.67



Snapshot 6.68

In this advertisement, a man (M) is sitting on a couch watching TV when his girlfriend (W) walks in from the kitchen carrying two Budweiser bottles (snapshot 6.63). She hands the man one of them and sits down next to him (snapshot 6.64). At this point, a man's remark on her t-shirt starts off a very equivocal conversation about *size* (snapshot 6.65-6.66):

M: Where did you get that shirt? It's huge

W: It was my old boyfriend's.

M: He must have been huge.

W: (*smiling*) He was.

M: (*also smiling*) Why don't you change into one of mine?

W: Nah, yours are kind of small.

M: (*frowning*) So?

W: Well, smalls are ok, huge ones just feel better.

Initially, the dialogue clearly revolves around the size of the t-shirt the girl is wearing: the man notices it is very big and the girl replies that it belonged to her former boyfriend. The man's second line introduces the first element of ambiguity: "He must

have been huge”, he observes, most probably referring to his body, but the girl’s smiling reply (“He was”) immediately instils, in the man’s and in the viewers’ minds, the suggestion that she may be speaking about something else! The slightly annoyed man smiles faintly, and suggests that she changes into one of his T-shirts, but that is an occasion for the girl to bring the conversation back on the track of sexual innuendo. “Yours are kind of small,” she observes, and a frown appears on the man’s face: he looks down (snapshot 6.66), a funnily ambiguous gesture that may suggest his increased annoyance, but also his involuntary looking at what he (and the viewers) think the girl might be implying. The possessive pronoun (“*Yours* are kind of small”), and the consequent omission of a disambiguating noun, foster the double entendre of the girl’s words. The mortified man asks the girl what she means (“So?”), and her reply is the epitome of sexual innuendo: “Well, smalls are ok, but huge ones just feel better”. The adjective pair *small/huge* becomes the pivot of the sexual innuendo in the ad. Ellipsis (“*smalls* are ok, *huge ones* just feel better”) makes the woman’s language naughty and equivocal, so by the end no one thinks that small and huge are qualities of the T-shirt anymore. As true as the beer she is drinking (“True” is the tag line we see in snapshot 6.67), the girl is implying that size matters and big is better. The clever exploitation of the equivocal potential of the adjectives in the context gives the ad an overall ironic twist, avoiding the risk of vulgarity. “You have the tiniest little hands,” says the girl to a visibly outraged man in the end, playing with his hand (snapshot 6.68), a sentence that sounds like a final tongue-in-cheek comparison with her *huge* ex-boyfriend.

Sex appeal does not, at least at first, seem to be a major feature of beer advertising in Italy. The only ads I have found are both for Italian beers (Peroni and Nastro Azzurro), and in both Italianicity is underlined in connection with award-winning national sports that foster Italians’ national pride and sense of belonging.

In the Peroni ad (snapshots 6.69-6.76), the setting is a bar where a group of people are watching a match played by the national football team, a quintessentially Italian get-together. Peroni is defined as “Una di noi”, a beer that shares the group’s feeling of being part of the same nation.

Similarly, in the Nastro Azzurro ad, the main character is the motorcycle racer and multi Moto GP world champion Valentino Rossi⁸⁶. In a New Yorkese setting (Nastro Azzurro is also Peroni's export brand), Valentino Rossi drinks Nastro Azzurro and says that "C'è più gusto ad essere italiani".

Nonetheless, despite the sport connection, a mild sexual innuendo is present in the Peroni commercial:



Snapshot 6.69



Snapshot 6.70



Snapshot 6.71



Snapshot 6.72



Snapshot 6.73

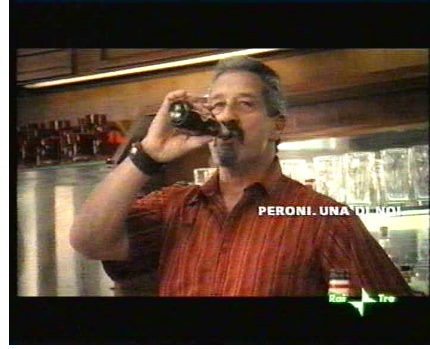


Snapshot 6.74

⁸⁶ At the time of the ad recording (2005), Nastro Azzurro was also Valentino Rossi's sponsor at the Moto GP.



Snapshot 6.75



Snapshot 6.76

There are two parallel situations ongoing in the ad: on one side, the group of fans watching the match on TV (snapshots 6.69-6.70), on the other side, the shy little man staring at the beautiful brunette standing next to him (snapshot 6.71-6.72). When the national team scores a goal, the little man gets an extra reward: a hug and a kiss on the cheek by the sexy woman (snapshots 6.73-6.74). A male voice-over says:

Se c'è una cosa che la nazionale ci ha insegnato è che bisogna *provarci*, fino al novantesimo.

Relating to the football match, the verb *provarci* (italicised in the transcription) means to keep trying to score until the end. Yet, in the light of the second situation represented in the ad, the verb becomes a pun by virtue of its slang meaning, which translates as the expression *to make a pass at someone*. Of course, the pictures show that our man does not make a pass at the girl, but just has the sheer luck of being in the right place at the right moment. Nevertheless, the bartender drinks a toast to the national team and to him (snapshots 6.75-6.76), and the final slogan, “Peroni. Una di noi”, comes to refer to both the beer and the girl. As compared to the British beer ads, however, sexual innuendo in the Peroni commercial is, on the whole, really slight, and other aspects are foregrounded, such as sociability and national pride through sport.

In conclusion, the pairing of irony and sexual innuendo has proved to be a constant in the British beer commercials. However, unlike in the ads analysed in the previous section, humor and sex appeal have turned out to be prevalently verbal.

6.2.3 Driving Buyers Wild: The Use of Sex in Car Advertising

In modern western societies, cars are perceived as an expensive necessity, but also as a symbol connoting one's personality. Guy Cook (2001: 106) writes that “[m]ore than other products, they [cars] are both marketed and perceived as expressions of the self and of sexuality [...]”.

The fact that *erotism sells cars* has been a marketing tenet for decades. If in the 70s erotism mainly coincided with female nudity, mirroring a car market which was dominated by men, these days it has become more subtle and refined, to respond to a rapidly evolving demand, but also to cope with the increasingly stricter regulations applied to advertising.

BRITISH SUB-CORPUS: CARS				
AUDI A6	FORD MONDEO	MAZDA 3	RENAULT MEGANE SCENIC	TOYOTA VERSO
AUDI R54	FORD SUMMER OF LOVE	MAZDA 5	RENALULT MEGANE OASIS	TOYOTA YARIS
AYGO CAR	FORD TRANSIT VANS	MERCEDES B CLASS	RENAULT MODUS	VAUXHALL ALL NEW ZAFIRA
BMW 1 SERIES	HONDA -THE POWER OF DREAMS	MINI	ROVER FREELANDER	VAUXHALL CORSA
CITROEN C3	HONDA DIESEL	NISSAN	SAAB 93 SPORT SALON	VAUXHALL NEW ASTRA SPORT
CITROEN C4	HYUNDAY CARS	PEUGEOT 1007	SEAT IBIZA	VOLKSWAGEN GOLF PLUS
CITROEN PICASSO	HYUNDAY COUPE'	PEUGEOT 307	SKODA FABIA VRS	VOLKSWAGEN GOLF GTI
FORD BYE BYE BABY PROMOTION	JAGUAR X- TYPE	PEUGEOT 407	SMART 4X4	VOLKSWAGEN PASSAT
FORD FIESTA	KIA 4X4 SPORTAGE	RENAULT CLIO DCI	SUZUKI JIMMY	VOLKSWAGEN POLO
FORD KA	LEXUS CARS	RENAULT MEGANE GRAND SCENIC	TOYOTA AVENSIS	TOT: 49

Table 6.8 Car adverts in the British sub-corpus

ITALIAN SUB-CORPUS: CARS			
ALFA ROMEO 147	FIAT GROUP	KIA RIO	RENAULT CLIO
ALFA ROMEO OPERAZIONE ZERO PENSIERI	FIAT PUNTO E SEICENTO	LANCIA Y	RENAULT MODUS
BMW SERIE 1	FORD FIESTA TDCI	MAZDA 3	SKODA OCTAVIA WAGON
CHEVROLET	HYUNDAI GETZ	OPEL ASTRA STATION WAGON	
CITROEN C1	HYUNDAI	OPEL ZAFIRA	TOT: 18

Table 6.9 Car adverts in the Italian sub-corpus

Tables 6.8 and 6.9 summarise the car commercials found in the two sub-corpora analysed. At a glance, we can see that there are nearly three times as many British ads as Italian ones, but, in this case, a reflection on the relationship between car purchase and culture does not appear very appropriate. Nasir Shah, International Sales and Marketing Director for JATO, the world's leading provider of automotive data, has pointed out that the European car market is a very complex one, influenced by economic and legislative forces, and any generalisation concerning the sales trend risks being partial and unsatisfactory. Shah says:

Various economic and legislative forces in individual markets have helped to shape the figures for the first half of 2007 and we continue to see wide variances in the fortunes of particular countries. Germany and Italy are two of the major European markets for new cars in Europe, and whilst the German market has been depressed by changes to the taxation system, Italy has benefited from recently introduced scrapping incentives. For reasons such as these, it's dangerous to generalise about the state of the market⁸⁷.

As of January 2006, the United Kingdom was reported as being the third largest car market in Europe (after Germany and Italy) and, in spite of the frequent advertising also documented by my sub-corpus, it was in deficit:

The United Kingdom was one of the few losers during 2006, slipping from second in the rankings to third, posting sales of 2,344,864 - a drop of 3.9%⁸⁸.

⁸⁷ <http://www.jato.com/extFrameSet.asp?page=54>, press release 17 July 2007.

⁸⁸ <http://www.jato.com/extFrameSet.asp?page=54>, press release 22 January 2007.

It is therefore evident that quantitative remarks on car advertising frequency cannot be based exclusively on cultural fact, but must also consider data of an economic nature.

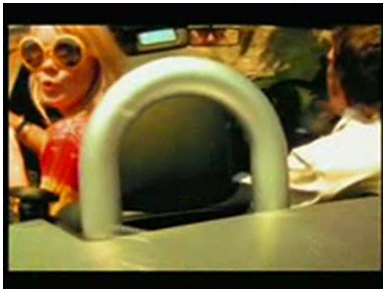
The qualitative analysis of the samples has proved that sex still has a strong appeal in selling cars across cultures, with instances being found in both the British and the Italian sub-corpora.



Snapshot 6.77



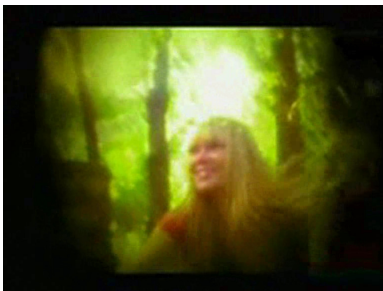
Snapshot 6.78



Snapshot 6.79



Snapshot 6.80



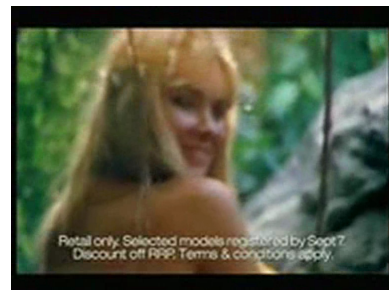
Snapshot 6.81



Snapshot 6.82



Snapshot 6.83

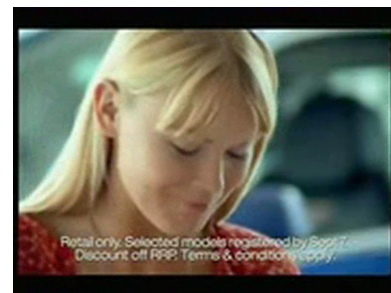


Snapshot 6.84

The British Ford commercial for the *Summer of Love* sales promotion (snapshots 6.77-6.88) takes the viewers back to the years of hippy culture. In fact, the ad opens with *Acquarius*, the Fifth Element's popular song and soundtrack to the hippy musical *Hair*. The song plays as the pictures show a beautiful blonde, dressed like a hippie, driving a Ford car and blowing kisses to the camera from behind her flashy sunglasses (snapshot 6.77-6.79). Then the camera cuts to the car parked, and we see the girl forcing out of it the man she had been travelling with, by pulling his necktie (snapshot 6.80). She takes him to the nearby fields (snapshot 6.81), fastens his necktie around his head (snapshot 6.82), lies on the grass next to him (snapshot 6.83) and in the end, looking back over her naked shoulders, she nods at him in the camera, as an invitation to come closer (snapshot 6.84).



Snapshot 6.85



Snapshot 6.86



Snapshot 6.87



Snapshot 6.88

The music stops, and the camera cuts to a different setting, a car dealership. We see again the blonde girl from the car: she is still wearing the same hippyish dress, but she has no sunglasses on now (snapshots 6.85-6.86). She is sitting very coyly opposite the man who was with her in the car. The latter, while still putting his necktie in order (snapshot 85), asks the girl:

So, Miss Buxton, did you enjoy your test drive?

The girl nods, laughing slightly, and then the initial song resumes. The pictures go back to showing the girl dancing in the sun, and the caption “The Ford Summer of Love” appears on the screen, printed in fonts that are reminiscent of the headings present on the LP cases of the hippy music of the 60s (snapshot 87). The last snapshot (6.88) shows the Ford logo, and the most relevant piece of information to the sales promotion advertised (“Up to £2500 off this summer while stocks last”).

The nature of the advert is primarily connotative: the purpose is not to define features of a specific product, but to stimulate in the viewers’ minds an association between the make being advertised and qualities which are not specific (and probably even unrelated) to cars. This ad is not advertising one single Ford car, but is an example of what Vestergaard and Schrøder (1985: 1) define as “[...] goodwill advertising, where firms advertise not a commodity or a service, but rather a name or an image”. In sum, the pivot of the advert is Ford as a name, and the purpose is to convey an idea of distinctive personality, which rubs off from the car onto its buyers. Sex appeal is presented as the core of this personality, mainly through non-verbal elements, such as music and sound.

The soundtrack *Acquarius* bears connotations of transgression and sexual freedom, two renowned features of the hippie lifestyle. These two signifieds of the sound – which may be not apparent to everyone – are anchored by the pictures of the transgressive girl. In fact, the camera lingers over her unmistakably hippie attire, as well as her sexually provocative behaviour: her bare legs (snapshot 6.78), the kisses to the camera (snapshot 6.79), and the flirtatious behaviour towards the man (snapshots 6.80-6.83), ending with the equivocal eye-contact and nodding in snapshot 6.84. The hippie way of living shares only an incidental association with Ford by way of a common origin, but it is not portrayed for its own sake. *Hippieness* here is an index of sex, a covert way of exploiting sex appeal within the limits which are characteristic of British advertising. In the absence of irony, the hippie lifestyle becomes a sort of cultural metaphor to refer to sex without being too explicit.

In this first exclusively paralinguistic part of the ad, sex appeal is also curbed through the regulation of modality. In an ad permeated by a naturalistic coding

orientation (the overall situation portrayed is that of a test drive), the increase in brightness and illumination in snapshots 6.77-6.84 beyond the naturalistic threshold determines a reduction in modality, which implies a decrease in the realism of the pictorial statement (see 1.1.2.3). The blurring of the pictures, so that they resemble sequences of old-looking amateurish footage, gives them a dreamlike quality: that is, it makes them appear less real. This means that sexually equivocal situations are contextualised in a more illusory space, which makes them less strong. They may have actually happened or may have not: viewers are left in doubt, and this eventually results in an effect similar to sexual innuendo.

The introduction of verbal language marks a rise in modality at the visual level, with the girl and the man sitting together in the dealership (snapshot 6.85-6.86), as well as and a shift to a verbal sex appeal based on the well-known pair sexual innuendo-irony. The question posed by the car dealer with great professionalism and a very upper-class accent (“So, Miss Buxton, did you enjoy the test drive?”) ironically clashes with his tousled hair and his undone necktie, which belie the detour in the fields. The combination of the verbal language and visuals results in an innuendo about the real nature of the giggling girl’s test drive.

Another subtle example of sexual innuendo obtained through the combination of different semiotic modes is given by the British ad for Smart Forfour (snapshots 6.89-6.92):



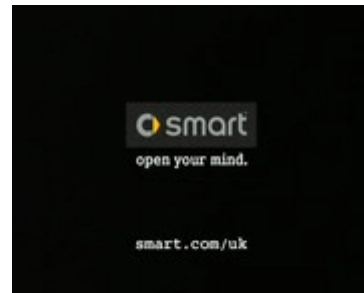
Snapshot 6.89



Snapshot 6.90



Snapshot 6.91



Snapshot 6.92

As the camera zooms in progressively on the Smart Fourfour to show its glass panoramic roof (snapshot 6.89-6.90), an intense male voice-over says:

Young lovers, glass panoramic roof and lounge seating. Meet the Smart Forfour, the most romantic car in the world.

The seethrough sunroof reveals a couple seating on the rear seat (snapshot 6.89). Then a caption containing the brand name of the car appears (“the new Smart forfour”, snapshot 6.91) followed by the logo and the slogan (“Open your mind”, snapshot 6.92).

In the transcription I have italicised the phrases relevant to the linguistic analysis. The basic message is that the Smart Forfour is the most romantic car in the world by virtue of three features: *young lovers*, *glass panoramic roof*, and *lounge seating*. Nonetheless, the causal relation between the features of the car and its added quality of romance is left for the viewer to infer. The first nominalised sentence (“Young lovers, glass panoramic roof and lounge seating”) and the second one, introduced by the imperative *meet* (“Meet the Smart Forfour, the most romantic car in the world”), are asyndetically linked together. Arguably, the use of a more explicit causal connector may have been deliberately avoided here.

The adjective *romantic* is defined as “relating to love or a close loving relationship” (*Online Oxford English Dictionary*). Here, its association with young lovers and a glass roof falls within the repertoire of love *topoi*, with young lovers snuggling in the moonlight. However, the combination of romance and the third feature of the car bears a certain ambiguity. In fact, the concept of *lounge seating* Smart Forfour prides itself on is actually a pretentious way to say that the seats fold down, and the association

between a love relationship and the folding down seats of a car seems to call to mind sex rather than romance. Such an interpretation could be reinforced by the aerial view of the couple in the car (snapshot 6.90): they are seated in the rear, and the man's hand is resting on the woman's leg. In other words, the apparently innocent script offers, at a more in-depth reading, a second interpretation, whereby the wider space of Smart Forfour (also underlined by the slogan, "Open your mind") and its folding-down seats become perfect for lovers in search for intimacy. The adjective *romantic* becomes a more socially acceptable substitute for *erotic* or *sexual*, and Smart ForFour an eccentric exciting alternative to bedroom.

The background music further increases the idea of something both forbidden and stimulating: in fact, it is the track *Hernando's Hideaway*, a show tune from the musical *The Pajama Game* the lyrics of which describe a dark and secretive 1920s speakeasy.

A similar commercial correlating proper features of the car with love and sex is the Italian one for Citroën C1 (snapshots 6.93-6.102):



Snapshot 6.93

Più C1...



Snapshot 6.94

...più parcheggio.



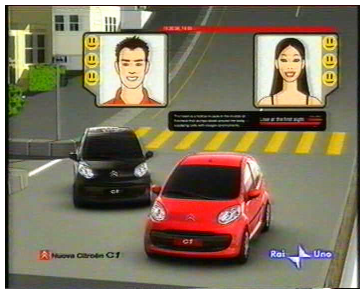
Snapshot 6.95

Più parcheggio, meno stress.



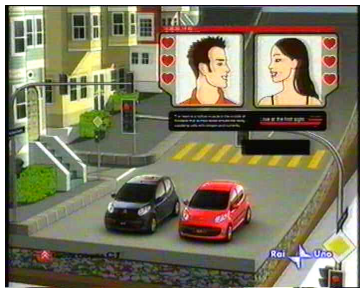
Snapshot 6.96

Meno stress, più sorrisi.



Snapshot 6.97

Più sorrisi...



Snapshot 6.98

...più amore.



Snapshot 6.99

Più amore...



Snapshot 6.100

...più C1.



Snapshot 6.101

E con l'operazione *Je t'aime*...



Snapshot 6.102

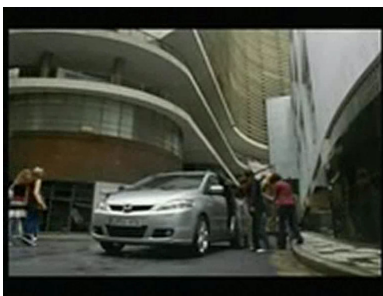
...la paghi da gennaio 2006. Vieni a trovarci venerdì e sabato.

The only information relevant to the *Je t'aime* sales promotion (echoed by the repetitive background tune sung by Federica Felini) is the fact that the car can be paid for in instalments starting from January 2006, and that more information can be obtained by visiting the car dealership at the week-end. As for the rest, the commercial is an attempt to establish more or less logical relationships between one main aspect of the car – its manageability – and characteristics of the people who drive it. Easy parking is certainly a good reason to be less stressed and to smile more, so the initial reasoning (“Più C1, più parcheggio. Più parcheggio, meno stress. Meno stress, più sorrisi”, snapshots 6.93-6.95) has an internal coherence. However, a logical gap exists between this first part of the ad and the second part, in which C1 becomes a sort of match-finder, and smiling becomes a reason to have more love (“Più sorrisi, più amore”, snapshots 6.97-6.98). Even less consequentiality exists between the two noun

phrases in the following statement, “Più amore, più C1” (snapshots 6.99-6.100), which seems to suggest that being in love increases the use of the car.

The apparent nonsense of the verbal language can be explained if we look at the pictures. The smiles which the voice-over mentions are those the boy and the girl in snapshot 6.97 exchange when their cars come to be next to each other (snapshot 6.99). Eye-contact turns into attraction, and attraction means that the two of them use the car more often to get to a motel for their sex encounters (snapshot 6.100). Even more explicitly than in the British Smart ad, the visual language exploits sex appeal while the verbal language focuses on love. According to the words, C1 enhances feelings of love; according to the visuals, C1 increases the chances of picking up a partner. A discrepancy exists between the two semiotic modes, with words being more reticent than images, and more being shown than being said. Such a solution relies on the audience’s shared knowledge of visual signs and saves putting into words an idea which might stretch the limits of decency or, even worse, of the law.

If, in the Smart and the C1 commercials, sex appeal in visuals occurs in the form of innuendo (the lounge seat and the motel are signs that need interpreting by the viewers), in other cases it is more explicit, and modality is used to keep it under control. This is the case with the British ad for Mazda 5 (snapshots 6.103-6.116) and the Italian one for Lancia Y (snapshots 6.117-6.126).



Snapshot 6.103



Snapshot 6.104



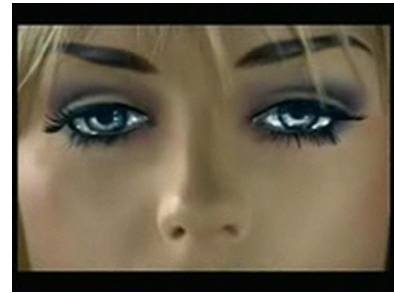
Snapshot 6.105



Snapshot 6.106



Snapshot 6.107



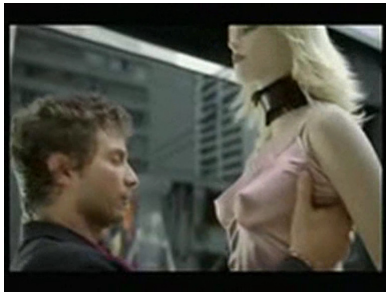
Snapshot 6.108



Snapshot 6.109



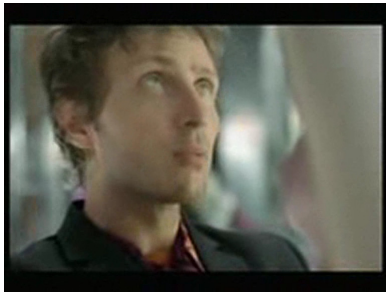
Snapshot 6.110



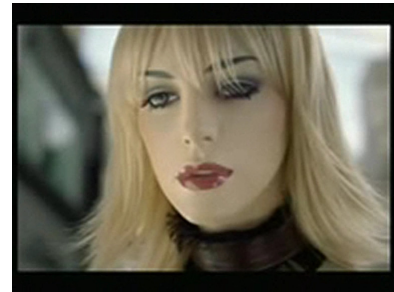
Snapshot 6.111



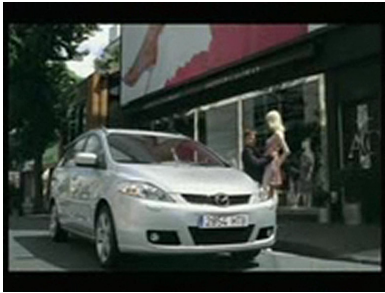
Snapshot 6.112



Snapshot 6.113



Snapshot 6.114



Snapshot 6.115



Snapshot 6.116

The Mazda 5 commercial was the fourth most complained about ad in the UK in 2005⁸⁹. It attracted 425 protests for being offensive and demeaning against women and unsuitable for children, but was eventually cleared of causing offence by the ASA⁹⁰. The ad is almost exclusively visual and quite explicit. A man sits some female mannequins in the rear of a Mazda 5 (snapshots 6.103-6.104). During the drive, one of them seems to come to life, and starts flirting with the unaware man: its eyes stare at him through the rear mirror (snapshot 6.105) and glisten (snapshot 6.106, 6.108); its hand moves to pull up its skirt, thus showing a white lace garter (snapshot 6.107). The man does not realise what is happening until he stops the car, and takes the mannequin out of it (snapshots 6.109-6.110). Only then does he notice, to his astonishment, that the dummy has erect nipples (snapshots 6.111-6.112)! He looks at the mannequin, which seems to look back (snapshot 6.113-6.114); then he turns his eyes to the car, and the *Zoom Zoom* original jingle which had been playing throughout the commercial is interrupted by the male voice-over saying:

The all new Mazda Five. Surprisingly stimulating

In this case, the adjective *stimulating* is more than a simple innuendo, as the visuals make it an evident sexual reference. The univocal message here is that a Mazda 5 drive is such a sexually exciting experience that even a mannequin cannot remain insensitive to it. The only element that mitigates the explicitness of the visuals is the low modality: the fact that the woman aroused is a mannequin makes the whole situation unlikely, less real, and therefore more portrayable on TV.

⁸⁹ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2006/apr/26/advertising.uknews2>

⁹⁰ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2005/nov/02/advertising>



Snapshot 6.117



Snapshot 6.118



Snapshot 6.119



Snapshot 6.120



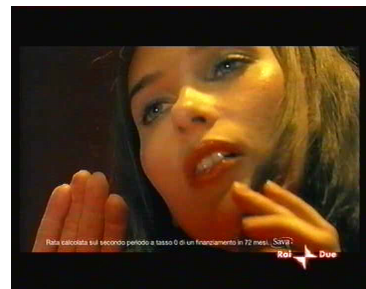
Snapshot 6.121



Snapshot 6.122



Snapshot 6.123



Snapshot 6.124



Snapshot 6.125



Snapshot 6.126

A very similar structure is that of the Lancia Y ad. We see a young man going into a peep show club (snapshots 6.117-6.120), but when the show begins we realise that the protagonist is not a scantily dressed person, but a Lancia Y (snapshots 6.121-6.122). The clubbers' lustful looks (snapshots 6.123-6.125) are on the car, and a female voice-over says:

Sulla *seducente* gamma Y fino a 1.500 euro di valutazione dell'usato, rata da 153 euro al mese. Lancia Y, da 10.300 euro. *Eccitante*.

I have italicised the adjectives relevant to my analysis. The car is defined as *seducing* and the purchasing terms as *exciting*. The language of sex is used to describe a car which is presented exclusively in terms of sexual arousal of the people who drive it. The erotic potential of the car is compared to that of an x-rated show and, actually, the car becomes the very protagonist of this show, with the real and figurative levels overlapping. The superimposition of the denotative and connotative levels of representation involves a decrease in modality (a peep show starring a car is evidently unreal) and permits the ad to get away with its sexual content.

Finally, the British sub-corpus has shown how sex appeal can sometimes be ridiculed and used for humorous purposes in advertising. An example is the commercial for Mini Cooper (snapshots 6.127-6.132):



Snapshot 6.127



Snapshot 6.128



Snapshot 6.129



Snapshot 6.130



Snapshot 6.131



Snapshot 6.132

The word “Warning” appears in red block letters on the screen (snapshot 6.127) followed by a caption informing the viewers that the ad contains violence and nudity from the very beginning. It is the sort of initial notice found in films reserved for adults, which creates expectations for sex- and cruelty- related pictures. Then the commercial begins, and we see two elderly people in a yellow Mini. They are both topless (snapshots 6.129); the woman is driving and the man sitting in the passenger’s seat. They approach a naked man walking on the side of the road (snapshot 6.130), and the elderly man leans out of the car window and hits him with a folded up newspaper. Then they drive away giggling, with the woman commenting: “It was a good one!” The caption “It’s a Mini adventure” appears on the screen, next to the Mini logo.

The incongruity between the overstated warning in the opening and the actual contents of the ad gives rise to humour. The nudity in the advert turns out to be rather unconventional, consisting of the chests of the two occupants of the car and the buttocks of the pedestrian. Similarly, the violence proves to be no more than the two mature people’s prank on the nude walker. Admittedly, in this commercial images are not aimed at arousing or shocking the audience: the purpose is to present the Mini as a fun car, in which every drive is like an adventure. There is no logical explanation for the use of *nudity* and *violence* here: it is only a spoof of two broadly used appeals in advertising, obtained through what I would call a *visual understatement* featuring inoffensive sex and harmless violence.

In conclusion, two different typologies of sex advertising have emerged from the analysis of the British sub-corpus.

The first typology is characterised by the usual combination of sexual innuendo and irony found in the other product categories analysed above, with the only difference that here sexual innuendo is mostly obtained through visuals and other paralinguistic elements, while verbal language is almost exclusively used as anchorage in the Barthesian sense.

The second typology displays a more explicit use of sexual visuals, with modality being decreased in order to maintain the sex appeal within the limits of social (and legal) acceptability, or with ludicrousness and incongruity being used to ridicule the sex appeal. Verbal language is very much reduced here, and it does not normally add anything significant, in terms of information, to the visual statement.

Sex advertising has proved to be less varied in the Italian sub-corpus, where all the samples considered seems to fall within the second typology presented above.

6.2.4 Sex in Italian commercials

In the previous three sections, I identified sex advertising patterns within British commercials for personal use products, beers and cars, and, where possible, I tried to establish a comparison with Italian homologous categories. However, sex advertising did not always prove to be product-consistent across cultures: for example, sex appeal in Italian toiletry and beer adverts turned out to be very mild if not completely absent as compared to their British counterparts.

Sex in the Italian sub-corpus has shown itself mostly unrelated to specific products: in fact, isolated samples have been found scattered across very diverse categories.



Snapshot 6.133



Snapshot 6.134



Snapshot 6.135



Snapshot 6.136



Snapshot 6.137



Snapshot 6.138

The commercial for 1254, the number for Telecom Italia's directory assistance (snapshots 6.133-6.138), opens with the picture of the cleavage of a beautiful girl (snapshot 6.133). In the following snapshot (6.134), the lower part of the girl's body is shown her legs parted and with the number 1254 written on her left thigh. The next sequence portrays a middle shot of the mouth of another girl, who is lusciously sucking and licking a lollipop on which the directory number is written (6.135-6.136). The sequence has an undeniable sensual force that seems to lack a logical explanation in a commercial for a directory service. Tricks are used to lower the modality of the images (the first girl and her body parts are in black and white, the second one has the top part of her head cropped so that we cannot see her eyes), but, despite that, they retain a high erotic charge, which gives them an undoubted visual sex appeal to a male heterosexual audience. Only in the end do we learn that the first girl's thigh and the second one's lollipop are quite weird places to write the directory service number. The penultimate snapshot, showing a baby on all four with the number 1254 written on his nappy (so sex has completely disappeared from the visual statement) is accompanied by a caption inviting the audience to write the number wherever they want, as long as they write it ("Scrivilo dove vuoi, ma scrivilo", snapshot 6.137). This final catchphrase anchors the images, and the following snapshot (6.138) gives, in small print, all the

necessary information about costs and conditions. Sex appeal is exploited initially to attract attention, but it is then gradually diluted through the use of more ordinary pictures and a verbal language that tries to *normalise* it.



Snapshot 6.139



Snapshot 6.140



Snapshot 6.141



Snapshot 6.142



Snapshot 6.143



Snapshot 6.144

In the Le Fablier furniture commercial (snapshots 6.139-6.144), visuals portray the rather bizarre situation of four women lying on pieces of furniture and kissing them passionately, as if they were their lovers (snapshots 6.139-6.142). Their horizontal position and their languid movements are clearly reminiscent of sexual intercourse. The red lipstick mark near the brand name carved into the furniture top is a western erotic symbol that contributes to the build up of the overall sensuality of the ad. As in the Telecom ad, low modality is used to curb the sex appeal: images are not contextualised, as we only see the profiles of the women's heads rather than their entire figures (see 2.1.2.3 on background and contextualisation).

Towards the end of the ad, the scant verbal message is provided by a male voice-over:

Le Fablier augura un nuovo anno d'*amore*

Disregarding the season's wishes due to the period when the ad was broadcast (New Year's Eve), I have italicised the noun "amore", which seems to be interesting for the purpose of analysis. Like the adjective *romantic* in the Smart Forfour ad analysed in the previous section, the noun *amore* is also exploited by virtue of its inherent ambiguity. The *Dizionario d'Italiano Garzanti Online* defines *amore* as "inclinazione forte ed esclusiva per una persona, fondata sull'istinto sessuale, che si manifesta come desiderio fisico e piacere dell'unione affettiva". Evidently, both the erotic and the affective dimensions are encompassed by the word. Thus, wishing "un anno d'*amore*" appears relevant to both the sexually insinuating visuals and to the final verbal slogan "Valori per sempre", which appears as a caption in the last snapshot (6.144) portraying the interior of a house. As in the previous Telecom ad, the initial sex appeal is *normalised*: through the bridging provided by the ambivalent word *amore*, it is turned into a value, the love underlying a household, symbolised by the interior furnished with Le Fablier items.

Arguably, when verbal language plays with sex appeal, visuals do not normally contain any references to sex. The Müller yoghurt ad (snapshots 6.145-6.154) is one such example:



Snapshot 6.145



Snapshot 6.146



Snapshot 6.147



Snapshot 6.148



Snapshot 6.149



Snapshot 6.150



Snapshot 6.151



Snapshot 6.152



Snapshot 6.153



Snapshot 6.154

The advert is staged as if it were a theatre play with Müller yoghurt as the main protagonist⁹¹. The curtain rises (snapshot 6.145), and a spoonful of yoghurt cream and chocolate corn flakes is closed in on by the camera (snapshot 6.146). A male voice-over says:

Muller presenta: fiocchi di cioccolato più crema di yogurt Müller, due delizie da mixare

⁹¹ The theatrical staging is also reminiscent of the traditional *Carosello* structure.

The camera cuts to the tilted close up of a beautiful woman, enjoying a spoonful of Muller (6.147). The pleasure she feels is evident in the following snapshot (6.148), where the camera zooms in on her eye, and through her iris we *see* the sensations the woman is feeling. She is lying on a shell-shaped inflatable armchair in the middle of a swimming pool (snapshot 6.149). Golden men dive into the water and turn into dolphins when they touch its surface (snapshot 6.150), which refracts the sunlight. The camera cuts again to the dreaming face of the woman, and then to a long shot of her in the middle of the pool (snapshots 6.151-6.152). The male voice-over concludes:

Due delizie da mixare, il piacere elevato al piacere. Muller: fate l'amore con il sapore.

A tub of Müller yoghurt cream is shown floating over the swimming pool (snapshot 6.151); then the curtain falls, and the slogan "Fate l'amore con il sapore" is superimposed on the blue of the curtain (snapshot 6.152).

I believe the whole advert is pivoted around *synaesthesia*. In rhetoric, *synaesthesia* is a figure of speech which serves to represent a sensation belonging to a specific sensory sphere in terms of a different one. For example, *a loud colour* is a synaesthesia, because it combines an adjective describing a hearing phenomenon with a noun defining a quality perceived through sight. It seems to me that the Müller yoghurt advert is based on a *synaesthetic chain*, both visually and verbally.

The pleasure of Müller is obviously experienced through taste; nonetheless, pictures convert it into a visual stimulus, with the portrayal of the woman's daydream to which we are introduced through the extreme close up of her iris (snapshot 6.148). At the verbal level, the phrase "due delizie da mixare" denotes the product as a combination of yoghurt cream and chocolate corn flakes, but also connotes the double sensory nature through which Müller is described in the pictures. Doubleness characterises the whole verbal message: Müller is "fiocchi di cioccolato più crema di yogurt", "due delizie da mixare", "il piacere elevato al piacere", and this recurrence of number two is a pointer to the different sensory levels related through synaesthesia.

The second part of the verbal message shifts the sensory level from taste to touch and introduces the sex appeal. The repetition of the phrase "due delizie da mixare"

works as a link to the next one, “il piacere elevato al piacere”. The word *piacere* introduces ambiguity into the advertising discourse: in fact, pleasure is “enjoyment, happiness or satisfaction, or something that gives it” (*Online Oxford English Dictionary*). Unlike *delizia*, which defined something very good to eat, that is, something inherent in the sense of taste, *piacere* is more vague and applicable to all five senses. The final slogan disambiguates the noun: “Fate l’amore con il sapore” narrows the sensory and semantic scope of *pleasure* to taste and touch, combining them synaesthetically. The pleasure of eating Müller yoghurt is compared to the pleasure of making love: food and sex are combined into a unique source of pleasure affecting different sensory spheres, and the yoghurt is nearly represented as an aphrodisiac.

However, pictorially we find no reference to sex: the shift from food to sex and from taste to touch, which takes place in the verbal language, is not found in the pictures, except for the sensual look on the face of the woman eating the yogurt. The explicit reference to sexuality in words results in the absence of insinuating or equivocal elements from the visuals.



Snapshot 6.155



Snapshot 6.156

The combination between sex and food, which is rooted in Adam and Eve’s original sin described in the Bible, is a linguistic *topos* in many Italian food-and-drink adverts found in my corpus. For example, Auricchio cheese (snapshot 6.155) is described as “Piccante come l’amore” by the grocer who daydreams of being in a gondola, snuggled up to a foreign beauty who mispronounces the adjective *piccante*, tangy. Again, in the Nestea commercial (snapshot 6.156), iced tea quenches the thirst, but also stirs up the marital passion of Antonio’s wife. In an advert for Togo biscuits

screened in 2007 (and therefore not included in my corpus), a beautiful woman eats the biscuits while a male voice-over says: “Togo, il solo peccato è resistergli”. This does not seem to be the case with food-and-drink adverts from the British sub-corpus, where sex appeal is not the main feature. An interesting example is given by the homologous British ad for Müller products.



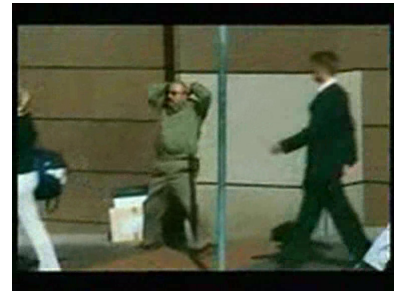
Snapshot 6.157



Snapshot 6.158



Snapshot 6.159



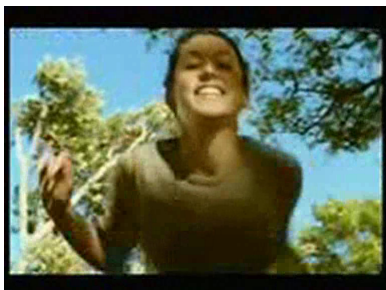
Snapshot 6.160



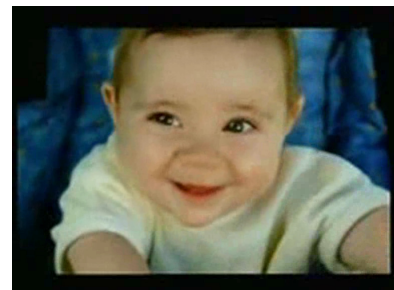
Snapshot 6.161



Snapshot 6.162



Snapshot 6.163



Snapshot 6.164



Snapshot 6.165



Snapshot 6.166



Snapshot 6.167



Snapshot 6.168



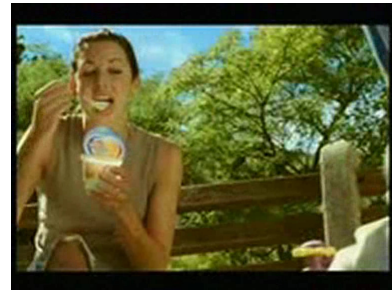
Snapshot 6.169



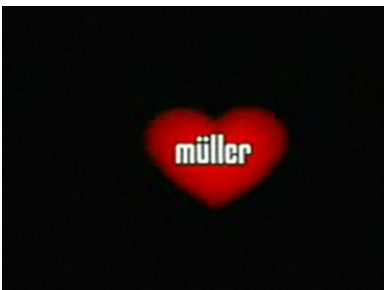
Snapshot 6.170



Snapshot 6.171



Snapshot 6.172



Snapshot 6.173



Snapshot 6.174

The core of the advert is its enthralling soundtrack, the famous *Ain't got no/ I got life* by the soul singer Nina Simone. The lyrics contrast the lack of a long list of material things with the possession of physical health and freedom, which are portrayed as the only things really necessary to live life to the full. The health and joy of living celebrated by the song characterise all the people depicted in the visuals (snapshots 6.157-6.167), whose life-affirming dancing during their daily activities is an index of the good which Müller yoghurt-based products does to them (6.168-6.172). Thus, the final slogan “Lead a Müller life” (snapshots 6.173-6.174) becomes a synonym for leading an active and healthy life.

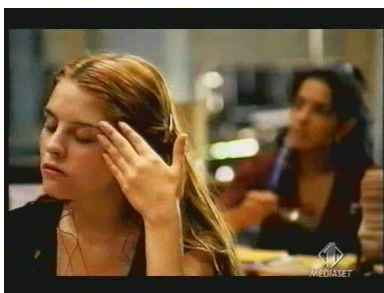
The pairing of sexual innuendo and humour has proved to characterise many of the British adverts analysed in this chapter, but it has not emerged as a feature of the samples from the Italian sub-corpus. The Vigorsol chewing-gum ad (snapshots 6.175-6.190) seems to be an exception in this sense.



Snapshot 6.175



Snapshot 6.176



Snapshot 6.177



Snapshot 6.178



Snapshot 6.179



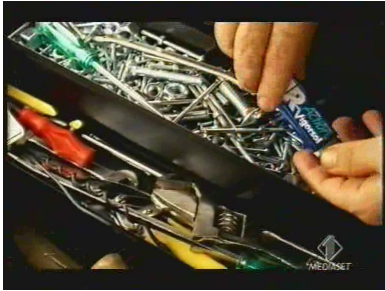
Snapshot 6.180



Snapshot 6.181



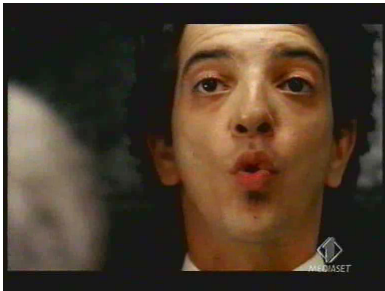
Snapshot 6.182



Snapshot 6.183



Snapshot 6.184



Snapshot 6.185



Snapshot 6.186



Snapshot 6.187



Snapshot 6.188



Snapshot 6.189



Snapshot 6.190

The advert has the structure of a mini-drama. In an all-women office, the air conditioner stops working, and the beautiful employees sweat and suffer from too much heat (snapshots 6.175-6.178). A change of scene takes the viewer to the same office in a different moment: two technicians have been called to repair the air conditioner (snapshot 6.179). One of them removes the griddle from the conditioners and a man appears from behind it (snapshot 6.180). The *conditioner man* furtively looks at the cleavage of one of the girls (snapshots 6.181-6.182), but he does not resume his work of blowing cold air into the office. Then the technician finds the solution: he gives the *conditioner man* a Vigorsol Air Action gum (snapshots 6.183-6.184), and the man starts blowing cold air again, refreshing the girls with “a cold air explosion” (snapshots 6.185-6.190).

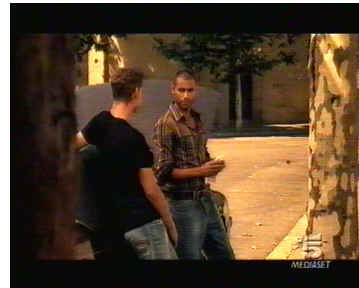
This ad, created by the London BBH advertising agency for the Italian leading sugar confectionery manufacturer Perfetti-Van Melle, represents a clear example of cultural hybridisation in advertising, combining the British taste for irony and verbal innuendo with the Italian visual representation of sex appealing elements. The ad begins with a long-middle shot of a curvy woman swishing in her tight-fitting skirt (snapshot 6.175). Then the camera shows a sequence of the sweaty faces and cleavages of the beautiful occupants of the office (snapshots 6.176-6.177), lingering in particular over the leading actress, the beautiful Latino girl in her skimpy lace top (snapshots 6.182, 6.187-6.188). The portrayal of a harem-like office undoubtedly represents a sex appeal for the male heterosexual audience, but, apparently, not for the man in the conditioner, who has lost his power to please the girls with breaths of cold air. When the conditioner is opened, he looks at the Latino girl’s cleavage (snapshot 6.181), but the grimace on his face says that that is not sufficient to get him *blowing* again. Sexual innuendo and humour are merged in this figure: in fact, the situation of a man working as a cold-air blower in an all-women office is ludicrous and laughter-provoking, but also sexually insinuating at the same time. The man in the conditioner is the male eye spying on a group of sexy women, a condition which is envied by many male viewers, but right now he seems to be *out of order*. The solution comes in the form of a chewing gum, Air Action, which gives the man back his strength to

please the women with “a cold air explosion”, as the male voice-over says at the end. The sexual innuendo is reinforced here by the very name of the brand: in fact, “air action” sounds like a quasi-homophone of the word *erection*, and the chewing gum becomes a sort of *love pill* that rekindles the passion of the conditioner man and restores his ability to satisfy the *hot* women in the office. The use of English for an advert broadcast in Italy permits a greater freedom in the creation of verbal puns: the similarity between *air action* and *erection* is obvious only to those viewers with a deeper knowledge of English, and is likely to pass unnoticed by the majority of the Italian audience. This permits a combination of visuals and words the full potential of which is only partially exploited, thus avoiding the risk of going beyond the limits of public acceptability.

Sometimes Italian ads use provocative images with no spoken or written language at all, for the sole purpose of drawing attention to the product by means of situations that are perceived as interesting or shocking. This is the case with the D&G wristwatch line commercial (snapshots 6.191-6.197):



Snapshot 6.191



Snapshot 6.192



Snapshot 6.193



Snapshot 6.194



Snapshot 6.195



Snapshot 6.196



Snapshot 6.197

A young man puts a bag full of bottles on the car which another man is trying to repair (snapshots 6.191-6.192). The latter stops, looks at the first man, and with a gesture of his hand asks for something back (snapshot 6.193). Then the camera cuts to the first man's wrist, and we see he is wearing two D&G wristwatches, supposedly also the one his friend had to take off to repair the car (snapshot 6.194). The first man gives the second man his watches back, and then kisses him on the lips (snapshot 6.196). In the end, the camera cuts to a D&G hoarding seen through a car window, probably the car of the two men.

The featuring of a gay kiss in this ad is an example of what Cortese (1999: 38) calls "Gay-or-Lesbian-Image Advertising", "types of ads [which] display same-sex couples or groups rather than heterosexual couples". A triple purpose can be detected in such a homoerotic commercial: firstly, to attract gay- and bisexual- viewers; secondly, to present D&G, as *gay chic* to heterosexual viewers; thirdly, to shock that part of the audience that holds more conservative views with respect to sex and society. In all three cases D&G is foregrounded, whether in a positive or negative way. From a social perspective, Cortese (1999: 41) also points out that "Targeting gays and lesbians, however, cannot be said to stem from possible growing approval of homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle. It is really all a matter of money".

In conclusion, sex appeal in the Italian sub-corpus appears less product-bound than in English, even if it seems to be quite consistently used in food-and-drink commercials.

Sex in the Italian samples is mostly visual, with modality being lowered to reduce its impact factor when necessary. Verbal language bears no connection with sex when it is matched with sexually-charged visuals, and it is often used in an attempt to normalise images. If sex appeal is present in the verbal language, no reference to sex is found in pictures.

6.3 Conclusions

In this last chapter, I have analysed sex advertising as a cross-product and cross-cultural technique. Three main categories have been considered for analysis (personal use products, cars and beers), as they have proved to display a more recurrent use of sex appeal within the British sub-corpus. More miscellaneous categories of ads have been examined in the section devoted to the Italian sub-corpus, where sex advertising has shown itself to be scattered across a wider variety of different product categories.

Despite the diverse nature of the samples studied, overall conclusions can be drawn on sex advertising, based on one main similarity and some basic differences which have emerged from the comparison between the two sub-corpora. Sex advertising has proved to be a feature of both the British and the Italian commercials analysed. Culturally, this data is hardly surprising if we think that both the UK and Italy are countries which score high on Hofstede's MAS index. Hofstede (2001: 330) has noted that, in high-MAS countries, "sex and violence are very frequent in media". In fact, the stronger taboo on discussing sex-related issues in masculine societies as compared to feminine ones seems to increase the attraction of sexual themes in publicity, thus explaining the often strongly eroticised advertising we have found in commercials from the masculine British and Italian cultures.

Nonetheless, the rendering of sexuality in the British and Italian sub-corpora has turned out to be quite different. The more product-bound sex appeal of British ads has proved to be mainly verbal and to exploit a subtle form of sexual innuendo. It has fairly consistently been combined with ironic, ludicrous or sarcastic elements, with the purpose of conveying an overall humorous overtone. In comparison to the words, the pictures have appeared to be less sexually charged, and whenever more equivocal visuals have been used, they have been dampened through a decrease in modality.

On the other hand, in Italian commercials sex appeal has mainly been conveyed through visuals, and has proved to be less confined to product typologies, with the exception of the food-and-drink category. Various degrees of explicitness have been detected in the visuals, with low modality being used as a curb, but sensuality has almost always emerged as the main feature connoted the pictures. Much less significant has proved the use of sex references in verbal language, which has either acted as a normaliser of the images or has referenced them through mildly ambiguous words with a broad meaning (e.g., the word *amore* in the Le Fablier ad). More explicit sexual references at the verbal level have been counter-balanced by their total absence at the visual level.

Verbal and ironically insinuating versus visual and pictorially sensual: these two pairs of adjectives could respectively describe the overall features of sex advertising in the British and in the Italian sub-corpora. From a cross-cultural perspective, can these differences find an explanation in Hofstede's cultural dimensions?

The greater stress put on the verbal code in British commercials as compared to the preference for the visual code in the Italian samples mirrors the different degrees of individualism inherent in the two societies. As we saw above (3.2.1), Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey's (1988) study on communication across cultures has shown a relationship between individualism and communication style, pointing out, on the one side, the connection between high-IDV cultures and direct verbal style and, on the other, the relation between low-IDV cultures and indirect visual style.

Nonetheless, sex is not an advertising appeal like any other. However direct a culture can be, sex remains a delicate topic, whose public facet falls more within the

domain of *don't* than that of *do*. This is especially true of high-MAS cultures, where sex is closely related with mainstream religions, which hold different but equally conservative views..

This also means that in more verbal cultures, like the British one, sex cannot be treated explicitly, but needs to be maintained within certain limits. Innuendo and irony perform this function, insofar as they permit advertisers to speak about sex half in jest, exploiting the great potential which humour has in low-UAI cultures and, in particular, in British society.

Conversely, sex is something to be treated seriously in Italian culture. Hofstede (2001: 329) has written that “[m]asculine Roman Catholicism has from its beginnings been uneasy about sex and rejected its use for pleasure [...]”. This implies that the sin component is very strong in the Catholic perception of sex, even stronger than in masculine Protestant cultures like the UK’s⁹². In advertising, where sex has to be appealing and stimulate pleasure, the best way to represent sin is through sensuality. In other words, sin is visually sublimed in an idea of pleasure that is enhanced by its forbidden nature.

⁹² In this respect, Hofstede (2001) points out the institutionalisation of priests’ celibacy in Catholicism as opposed to the absence of such a rule in Christian Protestant churches.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND FURTHER STUDIES

In this study I have investigated the relationship between national cultures and the language of TV advertising. Starting from the postulate of cross-cultural marketing and consumer behaviour whereby the different cultures of markets and nations greatly affect the target audiences' responses to advertising stimuli, I have tried to answer two questions: 1) if and to what extent the linguistic and semiotic aspects of a TV commercial interact to convey a message that is relevant to the target culture; 2) what "cultural dimensions" (Hofstede 2001) underpin different choices in British and Italian television advertising.

The analysis has been conducted on two comparable subcorpora of commercials, recorded from the main British and Italian TV channels in 2005. The multimodal nature inherent in TV commercials has suggested a two-pronged methodological approach, consisting of *discourse analysis* (Brown and Yule 1983; Stubbs 1983; Yule 1996) for the study of verbal language and *social semiotics* (Hodge and Kress 1988; Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996, 2006; Van Leeuwen 1999) for the analysis of other non-verbal aspects. The linguistic and semiotic findings have been culturally interpreted within the framework provided by Hofstede's theory of *dimensions of national culture* (2001). Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey's theory of *cross-cultural interpersonal communication* (1988) and de Mooij's closely related observations on *advertising style across cultures* have provided a valuable link between the linguistic and the cultural dimensions of the research work.

Time and space constraints, and the nature of the methodological approach, unsuitable for the analysis of large corpora of data, suggested the selection of some samples for in-depth analysis. Three groups of adverts have been chosen, the first two coinciding with specific product categories (*Banking and Financial Products and Services* and *Supermarkets and Convenience Goods*), and the third including miscellaneous adverts sharing *Sex Appeal* as an advertising technique.

Chapter four has dealt with Banking and Financial Products and Services (BFPS) advertising. The samples have been categorised and analysed on the basis of the

advertising form (celebrities' endorsement, comparative advertising, special effects, representation of personal life and emotions) or the linguistic/rhetoric categories preferred (figures of speech, humour, personal pronouns).

Hofstede's IDV has emerged as the main correlating dimension from the analysis of the BFPS commercials. British samples have appeared to be characterised by a direct and exact communication style, typical of highly individualistic societies. Products and services have been advertised by stressing facts or foregrounding personal choice via an *I*-oriented verbal language. Verbal and visual rhetorical tropes have always been used in an unequivocal way, with disambiguation achieved by means of explanations, anchorage and relay.

Conversely, in the majority of the Italian commercials, communication style has proved to be less direct, and language less informative. In most cases, verbal language has been used in a clearly affective way, with the goal of establishing an emotional bond with the target audience. Similarly, images have often been used to personalise the company-customer relationship. On the whole, communication has shown to be "high context" (Hall 1976) in that it relies on what is beyond the explicit message, and it appeals to the "We consciousness" and "membership ideal" (Hofstede 2001: 227) of collectivistic societies.

MAS-oriented values have emerged more steadily in British advertising, with the presence of famous endorsers and the use of a verbal language focussed on success, victory and competitive spirit. In the Italian samples, masculinity has been reflected in the endorsement by isolated powerful presenters (e.g. Banca Mediolanum), but it has not appeared to notably affect the verbal language.

Low UAI has been reflected in both stylistic and communicative choices within the British samples. The choice of figures of speech and jocular schemes (e.g. the rhyme in the APS commercial) has not precluded the use of relevant language presenting the product/service-related risks as part of the uncertainty inherent in everyday life. In the Italian adverts, high-UAI has been mirrored by the deliberate exclusion of language or visuals stressing anxiety and anguish, and by the preference for a language foregrounding the hassle-free nature of the product/service advertised.

Hofstede's PDI scores have not proved to correlate significantly with the findings derived from the analysis of the British BFPS commercials. In fact, samples characterised by verbal and/or visual language minimising PDI differences have alternated with others connoting high PDI. This has resulted in a multi-faceted picture unable to be explained within Hofstede's unitary socio-cultural framework classifying the UK as a low-PDI country. I have therefore hypothesised that the notions of *discourse community* (Swales 1990) and *small culture* (Holliday 1999) could be more useful to explain the particular discorsal practice detected in the British BFPS commercials with respect to power distance. By contrast, findings concerning the Italian samples have shown a close relationship with the Italian high-PDI score.

Chapter five has dealt with supermarket and convenience goods advertising. The latter have been further divided into two sub-categories, *foodstuffs* and *cleaning and laundry products*. Despite the great variety of products and topics encompassed by the macro-category of *convenience goods*, the analysis conducted in this chapter has brought to light similar values underlying different commercial categories.

UAI has proved to be the main correlating dimension in all commercial categories across the two cultures. In the supermarket and food section, the British appeals of convenience and/or cost effectiveness (low UAI) have appeared to be in contrast with the Italian focus on quality (high UAI). In the cleaning and laundry products section, the British stress on time effectiveness and life enjoyment (low UAI) has proved to be absent from the Italian commercials, where the need for profound cleanliness and clear-cut gender roles (high UAI) have been highlighted. Stylistically, the British uncertainty tolerance has also become apparent in the larger use of verbal and visual humour, a sub-category not often utilised in the uncertainty-avoidance-imbued Italian commercials.

The different degree of PDI within the British and the Italian societies has been reflected in the different stress on tradition, presented as a paramount value in the Italian commercials for supermarkets and foods, but overridden by the prevailing appeal of convenience in the British samples.

The idea of time as a value *per se* has been regarded as a pointer to the high IDV of British society, and has clashed with the emphasis on the collectivistic values of dedication and family noticed in most Italian commercials, especially at a visual level.

British and Italian mutual representation in TV advertising has also been shown to be culture-bound. On the one hand, the British portray Italians and Italy through their own cultural stereotypes; on the other hand, Italians relocate Italian values in the depiction of England and English people (see the Twinings commercial).

On the whole, national cultural dimensions have proved to have a greater impact on convenience goods than on BFPS advertising. This finding has been explained in the light of the positive correlation between the age of a product and the influence of culture on its consumption (see 2.1 and 5.2.1), but also on the basis of the *low-involvement* nature of convenience goods as compared to the *high-involvement* nature of BFPSs.

Chapter six has dealt with miscellaneous commercials sharing sex appeal as an advertising technique. Three main product categories have been investigated in this chapter: *personal use products*, *beers*, and *cars*. The cross-product nature of sex in advertising has precluded a consistent comparison between homologous adverts from the two sub-corpora. For example, sex appeal has proved to be a steady feature of British commercials for personal use products and beers, but it has not been a factor in the same product categories within the Italian sub-corpus. Therefore a section of the chapter has been devoted to exploring the use of sex appeal in the miscellaneous Italian commercials where it has been found

Sex advertising has proved to be a feature of both the British and the Italian commercials analysed. This data has been explained in the framework of the high MAS measure by Hofstede for both the UK and Italy. In fact, the stronger taboo on discussing sex-related issues in masculine societies increases the attraction of sexual themes in publicity (Hofstede 2001).

Nonetheless, the rendering of sexuality in the British and Italian sub-corpora has turned out to be quite different. The more product-bound sex appeal of British ads has proved to be mainly verbal and in the subtle form of sexual innuendo. Often, it has

been combined with ironic, ludicrous or sarcastic elements, with the purpose of conveying an overall humorous overtone. Pictures have appeared to be less sexually charged, and whenever more equivocal visuals have been used, they have been damped down through a decrease in modality. By contrast, in the Italian commercials sex appeal has appeared to be mainly conveyed through images, and has proved to be less confined to product typologies, with the exception of the food-and-drink category. Different degrees of explicitness have been detected in the visuals, with low modality being used as a curb, but almost always sensuality has emerged as the main feature connoting the pictures. Sex references in the Italian verbal language have appeared to be less frequent and always counter-balanced by their total absence at the visual level.

The difference between a mainly verbal sex appeal in British commercials as compared to the preference for sex-charged visuals in the Italian samples has been explained as a consequence of the different degree of individualism inherent in the two societies. Nonetheless, it has been observed that sex is not an appeal like any other in the advertiser's arsenal. This is especially true in high-MAS cultures, where the cultural response to sex is closely related to the conservative views held by mainstream religions. Consequently, even in verbal cultures, such as that found in the UK, sex cannot be outspoken, and is curbed by means of innuendo and irony – two well-received tricks in low-UAI societies. Conversely, in visual cultures characterised by a high-UAI and imbued with Catholicism, like Italy, sex is a synonym for sin, and sensuality becomes the only publicly acceptable way to disguise it.

In conclusion, the aggregate findings yielded by the samples analysed have indicated a steady relation between the linguistic and semiotic modes of TV advertising and the specific national culture wherein or for which it is produced. Hofstede's indices of cultural dimensions, and their related societal norms and key values, have proved to be a useful framework to interpret many distinctive linguistic and semiotic patterns in British and Italian TV advertising. Both in the UK and in Italy, the target audience's mainstream cultural values have appeared to shape the verbal and visual language of TV commercials. The recourse to *cultural paradox* has been, as expected, rare in comparison, and it has proved to be absent in the Italian

samples – a possible pointer to the greater conservatism of Italian culture. The Italian Virgorsol commercial, meant for an Italian audience but pivoted around British values, might be considered as an isolated example of interference between the addresser of the advertising message (the British agency BBH) and its receiver.

However, it would be naïve to think that national cultures and Hofstede's dimensions can provide a satisfactory interpretation for every single verbal or visual choice within a multimodal text. Culture can explain many but not all aspects of people's lives, and Hofstede's theory is like a pattern book of cultural templates to describe and make sense of people's behaviour. Other forms of affiliation can influence people's conduct and the ways they interact with each other, and the construction of power distance in the British BFPS commercials is an example in this direction.

As for the specific cultural dimensions underlying linguistic and semiotic choices in the two sub-corpora analysed, findings have shown that IDV and MAS are the main correlating factors in the British commercials, as opposed to UAI and PDI in the Italian samples.

The size and the assortment of the corpus and the diversity of topics treated in this thesis offer wide scope for further studies.

Firstly, the same methodology could be applied to other commercials for different product categories. For example, a comparative study of *advocacy advertising* in the British and Italian sub-corpus could integrate these findings with others concerning the language of non-commercial advertising.

Secondly, the same methodology could be applied in a *diachronic analysis* taking into consideration the same categories analysed here, but with a view to examining the evolution and possible changes between the past and the present.

Thirdly, the same methodology could be applied in a more extensive investigation into the use of sex in advertising. To this purpose, a collection of new samples aimed at creating a mini-corpus of sex advertising samples only would be necessary.

Finally, a restricted selection of the most interesting samples from the present corpus could be analysed with the aid of *multimodal transcription* (Baldry and

Thibault 2006), with an aim to collecting further data concerning the description and interpretation of multimodal texts.

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