

Lexical Pragmatic Processes Employed in International Commercial Adverts

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Abstract

This paper traces the processes of lexical pragmatics that are used in 14 international commercial advertisements that were published in 2004 in a magazine which targeted VIPs attending a universal festival which is ‘Dubai World Cup’, a horse racing international championship that is held in Dubai every year.

International commercial adverts included in the magazine entitled ‘Dubai World Cup’ are analyzed to trace the role played by lexical items in making different contributions to the interpretation of the expressions and utterances used in these adverts.

The study proved that the hyperbole process is the lexical pragmatic process that is mostly employed in commercial advertisements. It also proved that advertising is a fertile environment for the use of lexical pragmatic processes.

Keywords: Lexical pragmatics, Relevance theory, Narrowing and broadening

1. Introduction

Lexical Pragmatics is a new research field that has developed rapidly since 1990s. McCawley (1978) stresses that a lexical item might make systematic, predictable and different contributions to the interpretation of any utterance.

The current study aims at proving the role made by a lexical item in adjusting the literal meaning of an utterance to reach the ultimate interpretation that accomplishes the intended meaning of the speaker or writer.

It is hypothesized here that hyperbolic expressions within the process of broadening are the processes mostly employed in commercial advertisements as meanings are exaggerated to attract the attention of customers. This hypothesis is either proved or refuted at the end of the study.

The significance of this study lies in that the 14 adverts chosen to be analyzed target VIPs attending the ‘Dubai World Cup’ annual horse racing festival which is full of precious prizes. As the targeted class is a high one, then the language used in the adverts should suit the rank and should be unique. So, we expect to find a highly devoted attention and highly refined language to fulfill appropriateness with the event and the participants.

The questions raised in this study include what is the lexical pragmatic process that is mostly used in the adverts? Is advertising a fertile environment for the use of lexical pragmatic processes?

The study is confined to the lexical pragmatic processes used in the 14 international commercial adverts published in ‘Dubai World Cup 2004 Official Magazine’, the 500 copies of which are distributed amongst VIPs attending the event.

2. Literature Review

There is a good deal of literature on this topic and there are some researches that might be closely relevant to the subject matter of this paper.

Al-Hindawi & Ghayadh (2019) explore lexical pragmatic meaning, areas and its borders in a paper entitled ‘Lexical pragmatics’ and find that meanings of words are context-dependent.

A paper entitled “Inferences in advertisements: exemplifying with relevance theory” by da Silveira & Ibanos (2014) discusses the possibilities of analyzing advertisements with verbal and visual elements through relevance theory, particularly concerning what triggers inferential comprehension in such ads. They proved that relevance will stand out among other possible interpretations that lurk around.

Walker (1989) submitted a thesis to University of Calgary entitled “The consumption of ads: a pragmatic approach to the use of television advertising” in which he explores how viewers of TV ads identify them as meaningful or personally significant. The study proved strong evidence of the importance of studying adverts as being of powerful influence in social communication.

In lexical pragmatics, words’ meanings are pragmatically modified and fine-tuned in context, so that their contribution to the proposition expressed is different from their literal meaning. This field studies the processes that adjust lexically encoded meanings (literal meanings) in use.

Wilson and Sperber (1998) and Wilson (2003) identify two major processes; these are narrowing and broadening. Under the umbrella of broadening one may label the following processes: approximation, hyperbole, metaphor, category extension, neologism and word coinages, lexical blocking, pun like cases, and discourse particles. However, narrowing is no further sub-divided.

Relevance theory is a necessity in Lexical pragmatics as it asserts the relevance and the importance of context to decode the communicated meanings of the lexically encoded words. The main idea is that the linguistically encoded meaning of a word is only an indication to the actual interpretation or utterance meaning. Hence, the interpretation is not decoded but has to be inferred by a pragmatic process.

Wilson (2003: 352-3) states that relevance theory is based on a definition of relevance and its cognitive and communicative principles. Cognitive principle of relevance proposes that the human cognitive system tends to focus attention on maximizing the relevance of the inputs it processes. At the other end of the spectrum, communicative Principle of Relevance proposes that utterances create general expectations of relevance.

Wilson (2003: 354) specifies two important consequences for lexical pragmatics to utterance comprehension; first, a phrase or a sentence is no more than a clue to the speaker's meaning. Second, understanding any utterance; literal, loose or metaphorical, is a matter of seeing its intended or expected relevance and stopping when the expectations of relevance raised by the utterance are satisfied or abandoned. When there is connection between the linguistically encoded concept (input) and the contextual information, this means that the input is relevant.

Blutner (1998: 30-33) states five features of lexical pragmatics. They are as follows: Lexical pragmatics is systematic and explanatory, non-compositional, crucially involves non-representational means of manipulating representations, crucially involves economy principles and has to explain when conversational implicatures are cancelable and when not. Supporting this idea, Grice (1989) states explicitly that generalized conversational implicatures, those that have little to do with context, are cancelable.

Lexical items should be pragmatically inferred in context. The latter plays a pivotal role in shaping and constraining lexical pragmatics. So, the meanings of words are dependent on context. In other words, the meanings of words are pragmatically adjusted and fine-tuned in context, so that their contribution to the proposition expressed is different from their lexically encoded sense.

Lexical narrowing is a case where a lexical item is used in a more specific sense than the encoded sense, resulting in a narrowing of the linguistically specified denotations. In narrowing, what is arguably a single lexical item encoding a general concept gets specified, narrowed and fine-tuned in slightly different ways in different linguistic contexts. However, discourse context and pragmatic expectations strongly influence the direction in which narrowing takes place. The following example illustrates the process of narrowing:

- Lily has a temper

The encoded sense of the word ‘temper’ is that it is a general concept that might be seen as a good temper or a bad temper. However, it is through narrowing that we are able to decode the meaning as (bad temper). The same thing applies if we change ‘temper’ to other words such as ‘reputation’ or ‘temperature’ which would be decoded respectively as ‘bad reputation’ and ‘high temperature’.

Lexical broadening involves the use of a word or a phrase to convey a more general concept than the encoded meaning. There are situations where a word is understood in a broader meaning than the grammatical meaning which stands for the rules of standard use of words. The following is an example of lexical broadening:

- It took forever to finish that paper.

Here, ‘forever’ is naturally interpreted as meaning ‘much longer than expected or desired’.

Broadening is sub-divided into other processes namely approximation, categorical extensions, hyperbole, metaphor, neologism and word coinages, lexical blocking, pun like cases, and discourse particles.

Approximation is often treated as a case of pragmatic vagueness involving different contextually-determined standards of precision. The following example illustrates this process:

- The sea is boiling. (nearly boiling)

This is an approximation indicating that (the sea is close to boiling point).

Hyperbole is an expression that exaggerates and describes something as greatly magnified or diminished beyond the strict line of truth. (ifioque.com). hyperbole involves a further degree of broadening, hence a greater departure from the encoded meaning. Here are some examples to illustrate what is meant by hyperbole:

- I’m so tired; I could sleep for a week.
- I’m so hungry, I could eat a horse.

From a cognitive perspective, the understanding of metaphor is not realized at the level of the utterance, sentence or word, but at a much more fundamental cognitive level. Metaphors are seen as linguistic manifestations of underlying conceptual metaphors which are central to the way humans make sense of the world. (Norgaard, Montoro & Busse, 2010: 108).

Metaphor is a variety of broadening that is more radical than hyperbole, involving a greater departure from the encoded meaning. The following examples illustrate the role of metaphor:

- John’s critics are sharpening their claws.

In this example, the category of events that literally involve sharpening of claws may be extended to include other events such as being prepared to attack.

Category extension is another variety of lexical broadening in which prominent brand names such as (Xerox, Hoover, etc.) are used to denote broader categories (photocopier, vacuum

cleaner, etc.). Also personal names such as (Chomsky, Shakespeare, Newton, etc.) and common nouns both lend themselves to this variety (Glucksberg 2001). E.g. Here comes Mr. Newton.

‘Mr. Newton’ denotes that the person meant in this utterance belongs to a broader category of which Mr. Newton is a prominent member, which is the category of (genius scientists).

Lexical blocking means that the use of a given expression is restricted by the existence of a more lexicalized alternative. A case illustrating lexical blocking is suggested by Householder (1971). The adjective ‘pale’ can be combined with various color words: pale green, pale blue, pale yellow; however the expression ‘pale red’ is limited as being odd or confined to pink red.

Neologism is a process where a new lexical item comes into use in a language; or when a word acquired a new sense. According to Katie (2001: 265) neologism refers to newly invented words in a language. It is motivated by pragmatic need in the language. Warambo et al (2017) assert that neologism includes any newly formed linguistic expression recognized by the least part, if not all the language community.

Some verbs can be coined as derived from nouns as in the following example:

- The boy porched the newspaper. (porch [n] = entrance)

The apparent ease with which these neologisms are understood suggests that lexical pragmatic processes apply in a flexible, creative and context dependent way.

Pun like cases involve an element of word play

E.g. ‘Handsome is who handsome does.’

The play here is in the word ‘handsome’ which is once means a feature of a man and in the other case it means ‘good deed’.

Classes of words that are particularly context-dependent are discourse particles. They are lexemes or particles which have no direct semantic meaning in the context of a sentence but having a pragmatic function: they serve to indicate the speakers’ attitudes and interactions. Discourse particles are primarily a feature of spoken language as they indicate an informal tone in written language. Example:

- Well, look who is coming!
- It’s not as easy as that, y’know
- It can drive some parents, like, insane.

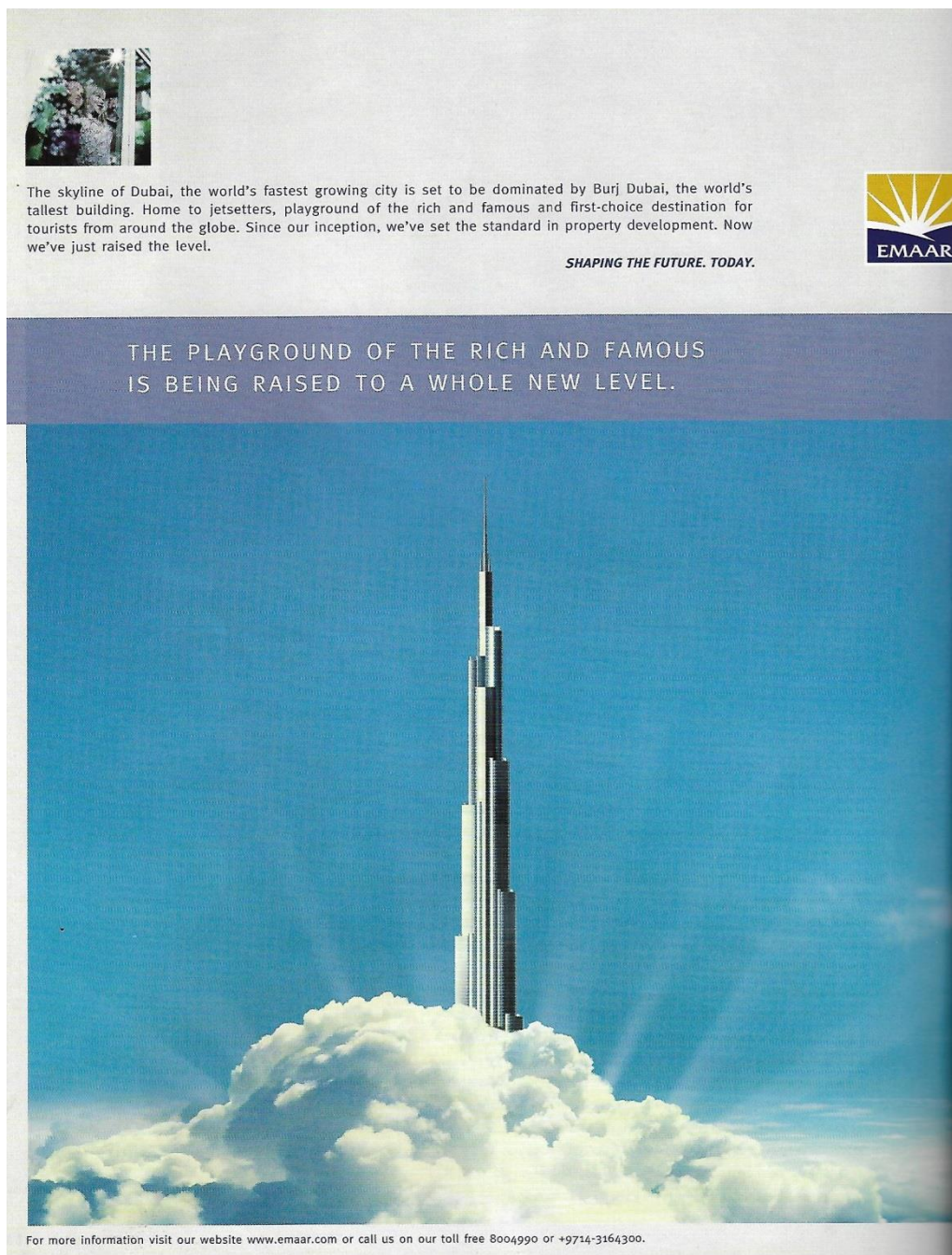
3. Methodology

Simply, in this paper, the corpus consisting of 14 international commercial adverts encompassing 16 utterances which are analyzed pragmatically; starting from the literal meaning and going through the inference stage where lexical pragmatic processes are employed to reach the ultimate appropriate interpretation.

Through primitive calculations, the frequency of each lexical pragmatic process is calculated to finally determine which process is the most frequently used in the selected adverts.

The data is collected from Dubai World Cup 2004 official magazine, published by Al-Nisr Publishing Group, Dubai, UAE. The magazine is specifically distributed amongst the VIPs attending Dubai World Cup annual championship and festival held in Dubai.

4. Data Analysis



The skyline of Dubai, the world's fastest growing city is set to be dominated by Burj Dubai, the world's tallest building. Home to jetsetters, playground of the rich and famous and first-choice destination for tourists from around the globe. Since our inception, we've set the standard in property development. Now we've just raised the level.

SHAPING THE FUTURE. TODAY.

THE PLAYGROUND OF THE RICH AND FAMOUS
IS BEING RAISED TO A WHOLE NEW LEVEL.

For more information visit our website www.emaar.com or call us on our toll free 8004990 or +9714-3164300.

Advert (1). EMAAR

This advert encompasses some texts; the most attractive of which are two that are analyzed underneath.


‘Shaping the future. Today.’

The literal meaning of this utterance is that ‘EMAAR’ group of companies is working today to shape the future. The idea is incomplete if we stop at the literal meaning, therefore the reader needs to infer this utterance and cognitively notices a pun like case in the two words ‘future’ and ‘today’. The reader finally reaches the ultimate interpretation that ‘EMAAR’ is one of the important players in the sustainable development of Dubai; as being planning today for the construction of fruitful projects of investment for the future generations of the city. So, the lexical pragmatic process employed here is a pun like case.

The second utterance in this advert is:


‘The playground of the rich and famous is being raised to a whole new level.’

The lexically encoded sense of this utterance is that there is a playground of the rich and famous people which is raised to a new level. Again the picture is not full here and the reader should infer and employ lexical pragmatic processes such as metaphor to grasp the ultimate meaning. The word ‘playground’ means the lifestyle of travelling and socializing of wealthy people and the word ‘raised’ is equivalent to the height of Burj Dubai; so the ultimate meaning is reached which is that ‘in such an enormous project, wealthy people can practice the privileges of their lifestyle at the highest standards’. Here, metaphor is employed.




PATEK PHILIPPE
GENEVE
Begin your own tradition.

You never
actually own a Patek Philippe.
You merely
look after it for the *next* generation.



Annual Calendar
by Patek Philippe

AHMED SEDDIQI & SONS  أحمد صديقي وأولاده
P.O.Box 2123, Dubai - U.A.E • Wafi Shopping Mall Tel: (04) 3246060
Twin Towers (04) 2215717 • www.ahmedseddiqui.com


Advert (2). PATEK PHILIPPE

'You never actually own a Patek Philippe. You merely look after it for the next generation.'

The literal meaning here does not show the complete picture. An inference is needed where a hyperbole process is employed to reach the ultimate interpretation which is 'this kind of watch does not stop operating or functioning for a long period of time; so it can be kept for the next generation.'

THE FINISHING LINE IS ALWAYS NEARER IN A BENTLEY.

An unrivalled ability to create world-beating cars isn't just in our history. It's in our blood. Experience Bentley. And set your emotions racing. For more information call +44 (0) 1270 535032 or visit www.bentleymotors.com



BENTLEY

Advert (3). BENTLEY

‘The finishing line is always nearer with a Bentley’

The lexically encoded meaning here requires inference to get a clear picture. An approximation process is employed here with the word ‘nearer’ and the ultimate interpretation would read ‘Bentley cars are very fast and swift’.

The advertisement features a red banner at the top with the text "Dubai Duty Free" in white. Below the banner, a large black and white baseball is shown on the right side. In the center, the text "...and everything in between..." is written in a cursive font. On the left side, a white golf ball with the number "3" is shown. At the bottom, a black banner contains the text "Full of surprises." in white. A small logo for Dubai Duty Free is visible in the bottom left corner of the black banner. The background is a light yellow color.

Call: (00 971 4) 216 2453 www.dubaidutyfree.com

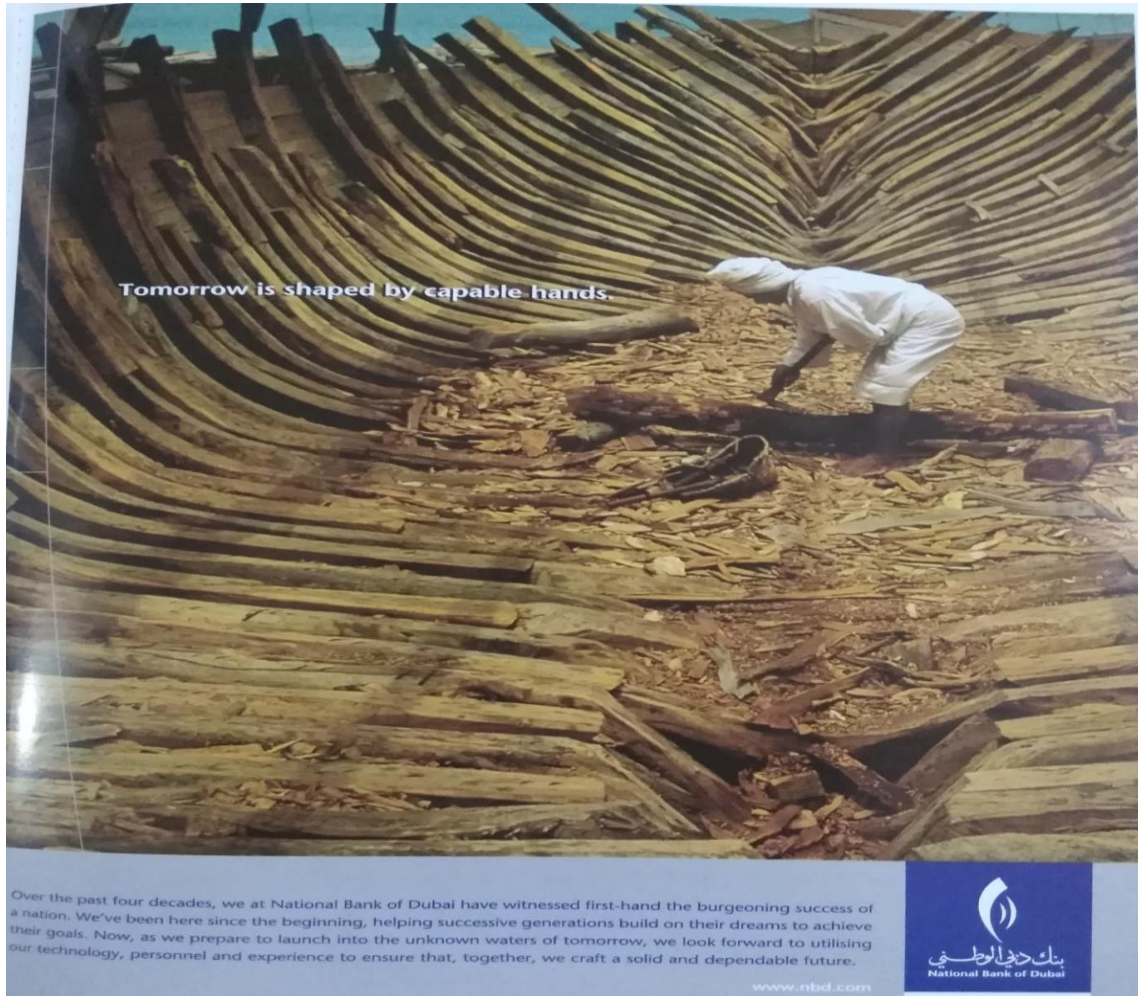
Advert (4). DUBAI DUTY FREE

‘...And everything in between...’

The literal meaning along with the guiding pictures of the baseball and football is not enough to get the full picture. The reader needs to infer the utterance with its surroundings to grasp the meaning. The word ‘everything’ can be considered exaggeration which is a hyperbole process. So, the ultimate meaning can be illustrated as follows ‘In Dubai Duty Free you can find everything you require’

‘Full of surprises.’

Here a process of approximation is employed in the word ‘surprises’ as the latter is a relative matter that differs from one individual to another.



Tomorrow is shaped by capable hands.

Over the past four decades, we at National Bank of Dubai have witnessed first-hand the burgeoning success of a nation. We've been here since the beginning, helping successive generations build on their dreams to achieve their goals. Now, as we prepare to launch into the unknown waters of tomorrow, we look forward to utilising our technology, personnel and experience to ensure that, together, we craft a solid and dependable future.

www.nbd.com

بنك دبي الوطني
National Bank of Dubai

Advert (5). National Bank of Dubai

'Tomorrow is shaped by capable hands'

The lexically encoded meaning is not quite enough to grasp the accurate interpretation of this utterance, therefore it is inferred and a word like 'tomorrow' is a metaphor of the future; 'capable' is not a regular collocation with the word 'hand' as we heard of skillful hands, powerful hands but not capable hands. Again here it is a metaphor to infer that 'National Bank of Dubai has the stable entity and the puissance to contribute to the sustainable development of Dubai.'


BAHAMAS
Race

UAE
Race

SPAIN
Race

Never underestimate the importance of local knowledge.

To truly understand a country and its culture, you have to be part of it.
That's why, at HSBC, we have local banks in more countries than anyone else. And all of our offices around the world are staffed by local people.
It's their insight that allows us to recognise financial opportunities invisible to outsiders.
But those opportunities don't just benefit our local customers.
Innovations and ideas are shared throughout the HSBC network, so that everyone who banks with us can benefit.
Think of it as local knowledge that just happens to span the globe.
Call 800 4440 for more details.

HSBC 
The world's local bank

Financed by HSBC Bank Middle East Limited

3518 DWC

Advert (6). HSBC

'Never underestimate the importance of local knowledge'

Here, the literal meaning and the pictures provided above may denote an advice not to neglect the unique traditions or cultures of each country where the bank invests. However, when this is inferred, the word 'knowledge' can be seen within a narrowing process to refer to 'human resources' and the ultimate meaning might be as follows 'We appreciate the importance of local human resources, that is why we are pioneers of localization or nationalization of jobs in our bank'.

Chopard

HAPPY SPIRIT

أحمد صديقي وأولاده
AHMED SEDDIQI & SONS

Wafi Mall Burj Al Arab
Tel: 04 3241010 Tel: 04 3489595
www.ahmedseddiqi.com

Advert (7). CHOPARD

'Happy spirit.'

The literal meaning here might be vague, however, when inferred passing through broadening processes, specifically metaphor, would connote the meaning of 'liveliness and vivacity'.



Advert (8). The Palm - Jebel Ali

'A destination like no other on earth.'

The lexically encoded meaning will not provide a clear-cut interpretation of the utterance, so, it is inferred via hyperbole process to the expression 'like no other on earth' to reach the ultimate meaning which is 'The palm is a unique destination in its luxury and glory'.

R PERFORMANCE

16 horses
out there.
400 in here.

Official Car

The 400bhp Jaguar XJR. For those accustomed to speed, grace, power and style

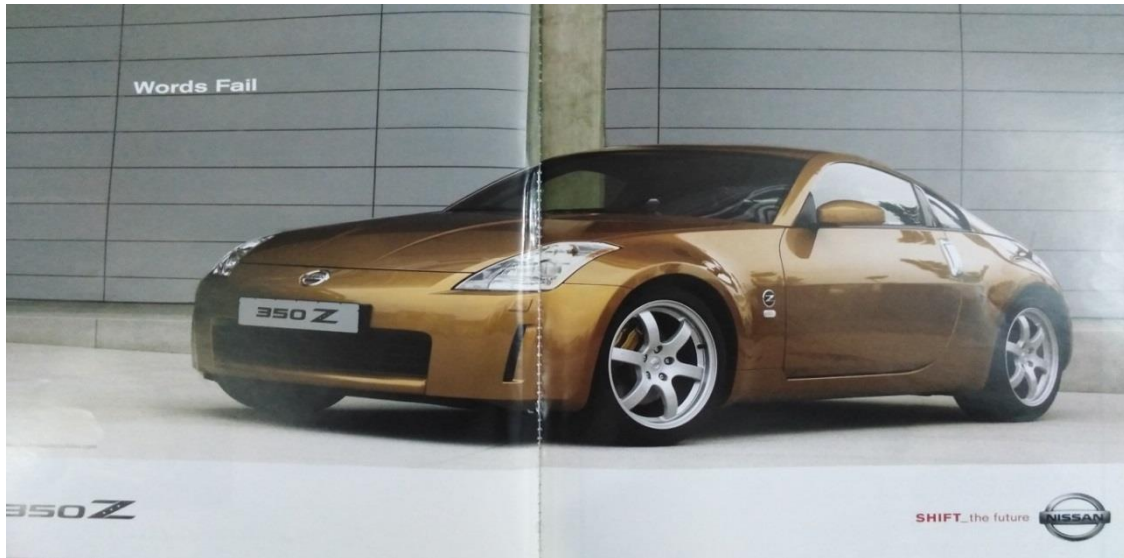
JAGUAR
Born to perform

Bahrain: 252866, Egypt: Cairo: 4017329, Jordan: Amman: 5536790, KSA: Riyadh: 2370901, Jeddah: 6402688, Dammam: 8592459, Kuwait: 800910, Lebanon: Beirut: 613670, 613671, Morocco: 22446400/0016/17, Oman: Muscat: 596560, Qatar: Doha: 4314887/8/9, Syria: Damascus: 5317200, Aleppo: 2690040, UAE: Dubai: 2666489, Abu Dhabi: 5588344.

Advert (9). JAGUAR

'16 horses out there. 400 in here.'

The reader will stand puzzled of the literal meaning of this utterance trying to know what is meant by 'there' and 'here' but the picture of the car might be taken into inference along with the pun like case in these two words to reach the ultimate intended meaning 16 horses are racing for Dubai World Cup and the engine of this Jaguar automobile contains a 400 dynamic horse capacity.'



Advert (10). NISSAN 350Z

'Words fail.'

Literally, this utterance contains untrue information, as it is known that words are always capable to express attitudes. When inferred, the word 'fail' undergoes hyperbole process to show that it is exaggerated to mean 'This car is superior to the extent that words fail to express the beauty and fascination of it'.

**Excellence stems from
uncommon commitment.**

Call on the commitment of a leading global financial services provider.

UBS AG Dubai, Peter Schaefer, Senior Representative
Dubai Creek Tower, 17th Floor, Baniyas Road, Deira
P.O. Box 4530, Dubai, Tel. +971-4-224 00 44, Fax +971-4-222 00 06

UBS AG Abu Dhabi, Beat Frey, Senior Representative
ADNIC Building, 5th Floor, Shaikh Khalifa Street
P.O. Box 3749, Abu Dhabi, Tel. +971-2-627 50 24, Fax +971-2-627 27 52

UBS AG Bahrain, Claus Buchli, Senior Representative
Bahrain Commercial Complex, (Sheraton Tower) 5th Floor
P.O. Box 5560, Manama, Bahrain, Tel. +973-533 303, Fax +973-524 224

UBS

To obtain information about our services from UBS AG, Switzerland, please contact our Representative Offices.

Advert (11). UBS

'Excellence stems from uncommon commitment'

The lexically encoded meaning might be misleading to the reader as 'uncommon' means 'strange'. However, when inferred and being subject to metaphor process to manifest the intended meaning which is 'Excellence of UBS services is due to the company's

incomparable commitment'. By the way UBS is an abbreviation for United Parcel Services, an international courier company.

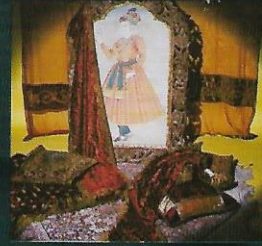


Advert (12). BOEING

'Ideas like people are best when they roam the world'

At first blush, it is understood from the literal meaning that ideas are best when they spread worldwide. However, an inference and category extension of the word 'roam' would lead to the ultimate interpretation that 'Boeing planes are the best means of air transportation for our valuable customers to travel all over the world.'

*The 2004 Spring/
Summer Selection*



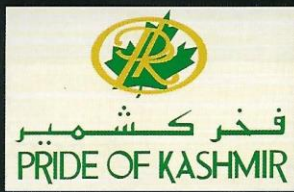
creative line • gpr

Enchanting, timeless & truly one-of-a-kind.

- Pashmina Shawls • Persian Carpets
- Authentic Furniture • Furnishings • Rare Artefacts

NOW OPEN
Al Quoz Showroom

- **Showroom:** Al Quoz, Sheikh Zayed Road, Dubai (Behind Traffic Dept.), Tel.: 04-3405343, Fax: 04-3405434.
 - **Deira City Centre:** Arabian Treasures, Dubai, Tel.: 04-2950655, Fax: 04-2950955.
 - **Mercato:** PVV 11, 1st Level, Jumeirah Beach Road, Dubai. Tel.: 04-3420270.
- Toll Free: 800 4997** Website: www.prideofkashmir.com



Advert (13). PRIDE OF KASHMIR

'Enchanting, timeless & truly one-of-a-kind.'

The above are exaggerated features for the products of the Pride of Kashmir showroom, when inferred and undergo hyperbole process, the interpretation would be ‘The products of Pride of Kashmir are excellent, long-lasting and unique’.


FRANCK MULLER
GENEVE

FRANCK MULLER
GENEVE

CRAZY HOURS

SWISS MADE

*Master
of
complications*

AHMED SEDDIQI & SONS  أحمد صديقي أولاده
WAFI SHOPPING MALL, TEL: 3246060
www.ahmedsiddiqi.com

Advert (14). Franck Muller

‘Master of complications’

From the first glance of this expression, the literal meaning denotes that this brand masters complications, but when inferred and undergoes hyperbole process, it will connote ‘the attentiveness to the minute details in the manufacturing of the Franck Muller watches’.

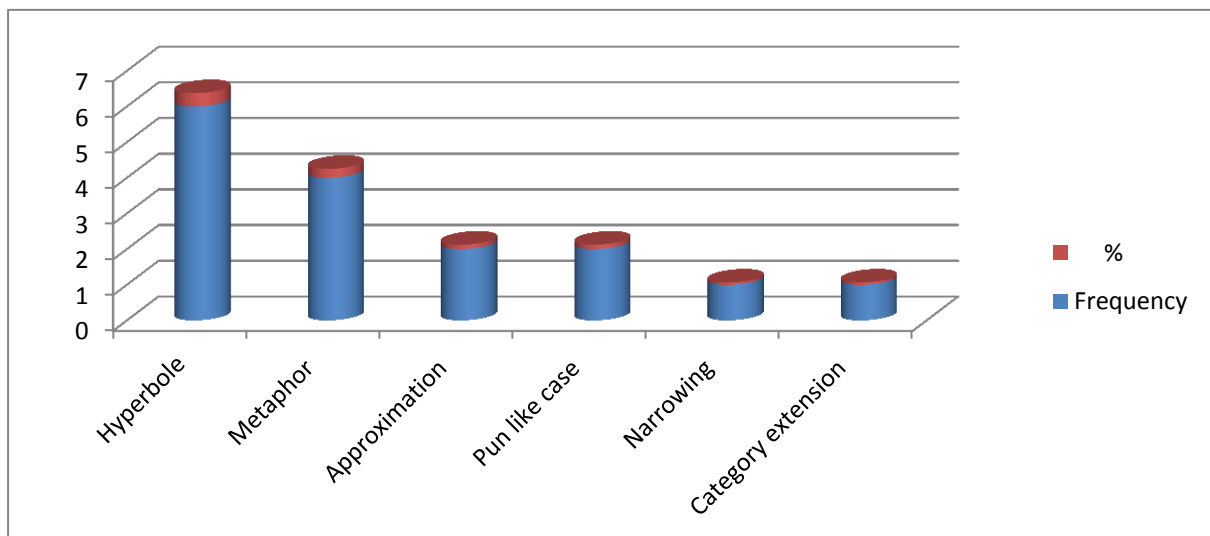
5. Results

The lexical pragmatic processes employed in the 16 utterances analyzed in the 14 adverts are divided as follows:

Lexical pragmatic process	Frequency	%
Hyperbole	6	37.5%
Metaphor	4	25%
Approximation	2	12.5%
Pun like case	2	12.5%
Narrowing	1	6.25%
Category extension	1	6.25%
Total	16	100%

Hyperbole was the mostly employed process and occurred six times, representing 37.5% frequency rate. Metaphor was used 4 times, representing 25% frequency rate. Approximation and pun like case processes are employed two times each, representing 12.5% frequency rate; whereas narrowing and category extension occur one time each, representing 6.25% frequency rate.

The results are clearly illustrated in the figure below:



6. Conclusions

The study proved its hypothesis that the hyperbole process is the lexical pragmatic process that is mostly employed in commercial advertisements. And also the above provides an answer to the first question that was raised in the introduction of this study about what is the lexical pragmatic process that is mostly used in the adverts?

Regarding the second question raised in this study which is: Is advertising a fertile environment for the use of lexical pragmatic processes? The answer, of course yes because as we have seen in our data analysis; there is a variety of lexical pragmatic processes used to reach the ultimate interpretation of the utterances used in the international commercial adverts. Six types of those processes are found and this can lead us to consider advertisements as a fertile soil for the use of lexical pragmatic processes.

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