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*Joking apart: humour in advertising and its translation are a serious matter*

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## **Riassunto**

La presente tesi propone, attraverso l'analisi di alcuni studi di caso, un'esplorazione delle strategie traduttive dello humour in pubblicità. Ogni giorno siamo circondati da materiale pubblicitario che, per sua stessa natura, ci spinge ad acquistare un determinato prodotto. La traduzione in questo campo assume di conseguenza un'importanza che va oltre la mera resa linguistica: la qualità della traduzione avrà delle conseguenze economiche per l'azienda di riferimento. A questa peculiare situazione si aggiunge, in alcune pubblicità, una caratteristica ancora più specifica su cui ci si concentra in questo studio: l'umorismo. L'umorismo in pubblicità è una strategia piuttosto recente, con il grande vantaggio di attirare l'attenzione e garantire un maggior impatto sui potenziali consumatori. Pertanto, tradurre l'umorismo presente in pubblicità diventa un'operazione da eseguire con grande consapevolezza e competenza: innanzitutto, è necessario conoscere la cultura (e non solo la lingua) della popolazione a cui la pubblicità in questione si rivolge, per preservare l'effetto umoristico ed evitare di introdurre elementi offensivi, uno dei rischi di cui si parlerà nell'elaborato.

La presente tesi inizia con una parte teorica, che si articola in quattro capitoli dedicati rispettivamente alla storia e al linguaggio della pubblicità, alla storia e alle teorie dell'umorismo, all'umorismo come strategia in pubblicità, e alla traduzione dell'umorismo in pubblicità (con particolare riferimento a esempi di traduzioni creative che dimostrano una padronanza della lingua e una conoscenza della cultura target). La sezione analitica è affidata al quinto capitolo, dedicato all'analisi di materiale pubblicitario a sfondo umoristico. Al fine di preservare la coerenza dello studio di caso, sono state scelte campagne pubblicitarie internazionali di una sola tipologia di prodotto (birra).

## **Résumé**

Cette thèse propose, à travers l'analyse de nombreux études de cas, une exploration des stratégies de traduction de l'humour dans la publicité. Chaque jour, nous sommes entourés de matériel publicitaire qui nous incite à acheter un certain produit. La traduction dans ce domaine revêt donc une importance qui va au-delà du simple rendu linguistique : la qualité de la traduction aura des conséquences économiques pour l'entreprise. À cette situation particulière s'ajoute, dans certaines publicités, une caractéristique encore plus spécifique à laquelle nous nous intéressons dans cette étude : l'humour. L'humour dans la publicité est une stratégie plutôt récente qui présente le grand avantage d'attirer l'attention et d'assurer un plus grand impact sur les consommateurs potentiels. Par conséquent, traduire l'humour dans la publicité devient une opération à réaliser avec beaucoup de conscience et de compétence : il faut tout d'abord connaître la culture (et pas seulement la langue) de la population à laquelle s'adresse la publicité, afin de préserver l'effet humoristique et d'éviter d'introduire des éléments offensants, l'un des risques qui seront discutés dans ce document.

Cette thèse débute par une partie théorique, divisée en quatre chapitres consacrés respectivement à l'histoire et au langage de la publicité, à l'histoire et aux théories de l'humour, à l'humour comme stratégie dans la publicité et à la traduction de l'humour dans la publicité (avec une référence particulière à des exemples de traductions créatives qui démontrent une maîtrise de la langue et une connaissance de la culture cible). La partie analytique est confiée au cinquième chapitre, qui est consacré à l'analyse du matériel publicitaire basé sur l'humour. Afin de préserver la cohérence de l'étude de cas, les campagnes publicitaires internationales d'un seul type de produit (la bière) ont été choisies.

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## **Introduction**

Advertising is everywhere. It frequently happens that, while watching a movie on TV, a collection of commercials appears on screen; it is not so rare to listen to a song followed by advertisements, and the same occurs when reading a newspaper; advertisements are increasingly present on social media as well, although preserving previous forms such as billboards. In this scenario, with people being surrounded by ads released by companies in order to improve their sales, advertisements need to put in place some strategies in order to stand out and to be remembered.

Among other strategies, the one of including humour in advertising is found. Humorous traits clearly catch the attention of potential customers and contribute to the recall of advertisements; therefore the product and the brand are remembered, and this can have an impact on purchase choices. However, humour in advertising is a quite recent strategy and it can be controversial: the perception and reception of humour depends on culture but also on individual features.

Simultaneously, globalization and the advent of social media have blurred geographical boundaries: nowadays it is impossible to foresee who is going to read, watch or listen to a specific advertisement. This scenario clearly has some advantages: people from all over the world can discover or recognize a product and a brand, and the company can reach a greater number of potential customers. Nevertheless, advertisements that include culturally specific elements could lead to some issues in terms of reception if the same ad is watched, read, or listened to by a member of another culture. Humour in this sense is a double-edged sword, since it provides a light-hearted approach, but the risk of offending a group of people needs to be deeply considered.

Under these circumstances, translation becomes essential for the advertising domain. Despite the fact that translators are not often asked to translate advertising texts, awareness and knowledge of language and culture of the target audience are crucial. This trait is furtherly exacerbated when humour is included in advertisements: knowing the target culture is fundamental in order to establish whether the original ad could be appreciated by the target audience or whether they could feel offended. Companies carefully consider this aspect, since the perception of the advertisement has an impact on the perception of the brand and the product, and this could lead to economic damages and consequences.

The first two chapters of this work will provide an overview on humour and on advertising: Chapter 1 will present an historical perspective on advertising and a description of its discourse, starting from Cook (2001); Chapter 2 will focus on the history and theories of humour starting from Attardo (1994). In Chapter 3 these two elements will interact, since humour in advertising will be described.

Chapter 4 will provide a general description of translation of humour in advertising. Finally, Chapter 5 will be composed of an analysis of a sample of humorous advertisements: in order to keep this study coherent, a single product was chosen and the strategies employed to advertise that product were observed. After some research, it seems that beer advertisements are often likely to contain some humorous traits: this product was chosen as the constant of all the advertisements analysed and several international brands were taken into account for this study.

## Chapter 1 History and Language of Advertising

In this section the main features of advertising language will be discussed. Firstly, a brief historical outline of advertising will be presented. Secondly, a definition and description of this peculiar textual genre will be provided.

The history of advertising can be traced back to ancient times, even if not in the forms that are known today. The first form of advertising related to a product consisted in the figure of the crier, a figure that was present in ancient civilizations such as Egyptians, Greeks and Romans (Presbrey 1929:13). The criers were often chosen among men with a pleasing voice and elocutionary abilities, and they were responsible for announcing the arrival of ships containing specific items or for advertising auction sales of slaves and animals. Another form of ancient advertising consisted of signboards, invented by the Romans: they were symbols that indicated the presence of a specific shop in the surroundings. For instance, a signboard depicting a bush was the symbol of a winery (ibid.).

Obviously, the first step towards print advertising as it is understood nowadays was the invention and development of printing between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century advertisements started appearing on weekly newspapers: it was the beginning of a new era. That moment marked the beginning of modern advertising, a domain that quickly adapted to all technological developments and inventions. As a result, instances of radio advertising and TV commercials started appearing throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. More recently, advertising entered the world of social media, adapting its features to the new channel once again.

What is peculiar about the history of advertising is that throughout its evolution, there weren't forms that were replaced or completely disappeared: new forms were added to the batch of possibilities, but this did not mean abandoning the previous forms. Technological developments played and still play the role of enriching the available channels through which advertising can circulate.

Advertising is a peculiar textual genre. The object of studies, research and evolutionary paths, it is usually something that we do not look for, but that we are exposed to. The general perception of advertisements is far from being positive: ads are mostly perceived as interruptions (e.g., interruptions of a movie, the reading of an article). Despite this negative general perception, advertisements are created by experts and high-skilled practitioners, whose main objective is to convince people buying the good or service they are promoting. All these elements are contained in the description of advertising as a genre quoted here below:



Advertising is one of the most controversial of all contemporary genres, partly because it is relatively new, but also because it is closely associated with the values of the competitive high-growth global market economy in which it thrives.

(Cook 2001: 1-2)

Advertising is a genre that involves different domains and that can be observed under different perspectives: in this paper, the linguistic approach will be preferred, but some perspectives coming from the marketing domain will also be considered.

From a linguistic point of view, in order to define advertising as a textual genre, it can be useful to start from the model of communication elaborated by the linguist Roman Jakobson (1960). According to this model there are six elements that are necessary for communicative acts to occur: furthermore, each of these six elements is associated with a communicative function, which defines the focus of the communication. For Jakobson, the elements of communication are:

- Sender;
- Receiver;
- Message;
- Contact;
- Common Code;
- Context.

Jakobson also suggests six functions of language that focus on each of the six elements, and these are:

- the emotive function, that focuses on the feelings of the sender (or addresser) of the message;
- the conative function, that focuses on the intended reaction of the receiver (or addressee) of the message;
- the poetic function, that refers to the message and its own characteristics;
- the phatic function, whose objective is to enable and preserve interaction, therefore it focuses on the contact;
- the metalingual function, that describes language through language, therefore it focuses on the code;
- the referential function, that refers to the context of the communication.

Each type of discourse shifts its focus on different functions, in order to achieve its communicative purpose(s). Considering Jakobson's functions of language, it is widely known that the discourse of advertising focuses on the conative function: the communication has the main objective of causing an action or a reaction by the addressee of the message. This does not mean that in this particular type of discourse all the other functions are not activated: the poetic function can also be exploited when building slogans, especially when they contain wordplays. In the advertising field, the final objective is that the target audience, composed of potential customers, actually choose to buy the advertised goods. However, it is important to remember that there are many advertisements, of various types, that do not sell any product: among others, there are campaigns about and against smoking habits and drink-driving, who do not sell anything but encourage healthy and safe behaviours. Nevertheless, these campaigns share the same objective as the ones selling actual products: a reaction, convincing the target audience of what should be avoided and what should be encouraged. And this is what the conative function is about.

When considering the elements that form an advertisement, Cook (2001:4) provides a useful description on components of an ad. In his view, linguistic and non-linguistic components interact with each other, and therefore they cannot be considered in isolation. An ad is therefore composed of:

- text, referring to any form of verbal language used in the ad;
- contexts, that include
  - o substance;
  - o music and pictures;
  - o paralinguistic;
  - o situation;
  - o co-text;
  - o intertext;
  - o participants;
  - o function.

Obviously, whether these elements are actually present in an ad highly depends on the medium and channel each advertisement is designed for: print advertising cannot include music, as well as radio advertising cannot focus around an image. Awareness and knowledge of the constraints and features of the various media that are nowadays available for ads is fundamental for practitioners and researchers. For this reason, an ad does not necessarily need all these elements to be considered as

such, but a combination of at least some of them is crucial. In the following paragraph, a description of these elements will be provided.

Substance is defined by Cook (ibid.) as “the physical material which carries or relays text, music and pictures”; it can be considered a possible synonym for ‘medium’ or ‘channel’ in this case. Paralanguage refers to the non-verbal and non-linguistic features that do have an impact on the communication: some examples could be gestures of the characters or the type and the size of the font chosen for the slogan of the ad. Participants are divided in *senders* and *receivers*. Senders do not necessarily coincide with the addresser: the actors addressing the audience in the ad are not the senders of the campaign (the advertising agency is the actual sender). *Receivers* likewise include unintended audiences, and not only the intended addressee of the ad. This concept is taken into account when creating any campaign: it is important to know the target audience but it is also crucial to foresee unintended addressees and their potential reaction to the ad, in order to prevent some negative circumstances, which will be presented in the next sections of this paper. Moreover, *situation* is defined as everything that is perceived as next to the text by the participants, including objects and relations between people (ibid.). *Co-text* refers to texts that do not belong to the ad, but that are found right before and after it. This trait cannot always be predicted but it can affect the ad credibility or generate unintended (yet positive, or negative) effects. One of the examples reported by Cook (2001:35) explains the risks of co-text, or accompanying discourse: a Max Factor make-up ad was printed on a wall, right next to pictures of amputee children from Sierra Leonean civil war. Obviously, the potential customer could feel uncomfortable when exposed to a make-up ad next to the image of amputee children, and this could lead to consequences in terms of purchase intentions. These kinds of accidents are quite unpredictable and seem to happen more frequently on TV commercials, but this does not mean that other media are exempt. Therefore, this aspect might not be underestimated. Co-text does not only refer to the relationship between different ads, it can also involve other textual genres: in July 2000, as reported by Cook (ibid.), the commercial of a silver Ford Mondeo appeared immediately before the news about a child being kidnapped in a silver Ford Mondeo. In this case, the effect is negative and unintended, but also unpredictable: still, economic consequences could be substantial for the underlying company. Co-text can also be exploited in a positive way, to amplify the effects of the ad: it is the case of an ad on a magazine article about photography, where the ad’s pictures were even better than the awarded photography (ibid.). Co-text is therefore a risk, but it can also become a source of power and enrichment for the brand. The *intertext* instead concerns all those texts that the audience associate with another specific text genre: this obviously has some consequences in terms of memorability and interpretation of the audience. This kind of strategy is also called ‘parasite discourse’, since the advertisement relies on other

discourses and on intertextuality for its reception and perception. Finally, *function* refers to the objective of the ad or the one perceived by the audience: these two elements may not coincide. The functions of an ad could be essentially two: promoting a product (in the case of product ads) or promoting certain behaviours (in the case of non-product ads).

As it can be understood, in most cases advertisements are multimodal, since they are composed of verbal and visual features. As previously mentioned, this feature depends on the media the advertisement is designed for: radio advertising and print advertising are only composed of verbal and visual features respectively (that could still show a certain degree of multimodality), whereas commercials are intrinsically multimodal. The most recent media for the advertising domain comes from social media, where other forms of advertising have been implemented, as will be discussed in the next sections of this paper.

Advertising techniques differ not only because of the different media that are available nowadays, but also from one culture to another. More specifically, countries and cultures are divided in two groups, according to the dominant advertising technique:

- hard-sell;
- soft-sell.

There are cultures that tend to prefer hard selling approaches in advertising, namely the American people. Hard selling techniques refer to an explicit act of advertising, directly addressing the potential consumer of the product. On the contrary, soft selling techniques are preferred in other countries, such as China, where people tend to prefer advertisements with implicit references to the act of buying (Cook 2001:15).

Another possible distinction among different countries and their approach to the advertising techniques relies on the relationship of advertisements and the context. Two categories are found:

- low-context cultures;
- high-context cultures.

This concept was introduced by anthropologist Edward T. Hall in 1959: high-context cultures tend to communicate more implicitly, whereas low-context cultures rely on the explicitness of communication (Hall 1976:111). If this concept is applied to the advertising field, low-context cultures seem to prefer advertisements that are not linked to the context of production (Laroche et al. 2014). When considering humorous advertisements, it is found that Americans tend to prefer jokes that are not linked to the American context. Instead, high-context cultures, such as Italians,

tend to appreciate references to their context. This distinction clearly has some consequences in terms of advertising techniques that are implemented.

However, it should be stated that through globalization the lines between these prototypes are progressively blurred, and cultures have become increasingly tolerant towards advertisements that do not embody their cultural tendencies.

## Chapter 2 History and Theories of Humour

In this chapter a definition of humour and a brief historical outline about theories and research will be provided. First of all, it is crucial to understand what is meant when referring to ‘humour’: as explained by Attardo (1994:3), “it is impossible to define ‘a priori’ the category of humour”. This means that the definition of humour is highly connected with the context of its production.

Humour has always been a source of interest and the first instances of research on humour come from the Greek philosophers, namely Plato and Aristotle. More specifically, Plato is considered to be the first theorist of humour: he defines humour as a ‘mixed feeling’, that evokes both positive and negative feelings. This definition of humour as the product of contrasting feelings is still very popular today, in the form of aggressive humour. Indeed, in this specific type of humour, two agents can be identified, one of them stronger than the other. Therefore, humour becomes a mixture of both aggression and pleasure deriving from it: the weaker character becomes the ridiculous source, whereas the stronger character is responsible for the aggression. In order to clarify Plato’s position on this topic, an extract from *Philebus* is reported here below:

Our argument declares that when we laugh at the ridiculous qualities of our friends, we mix pleasure with pain, since we mix it with envy; for we have agreed all along that envy is a pain of the soul, and that laughter is pleasure, yet these two arise at the same time on such occasions.

(*Philebus*, 4<sup>th</sup> century BC 50A, quoted in Attardo 1994:18)

Aristotle (384 BC-322 BC) likewise considers humour in combination with harm, creating the archetype of superiority theories. Interestingly, the theories of the two philosophers do not share common features only: if Plato condemned laughter, Aristotle conveys a more positive view and only condemns excesses of laughter (Attardo 1994:20). Moreover, Aristotle considers humour as a source of stimulation for the soul, exploring its practical use in the *Rhetoric* (4<sup>th</sup> century BC). According to Aristotle humour is a useful tool for the orator, but it should be handled carefully: irony is far better than buffoonery. Aristotle also introduced theories that later on would be named ‘incongruity theories’ and ‘theories of the resolution of the incongruity’ (ibid.). These theories will be discussed later in this work.

After Plato and Aristotle, many other philosophers and intellectuals studied the phenomenon of humour, in all historical periods, from the Roman Empire to the Renaissance. Even if theories on

humour developed and expanded in terms of knowledge and available tools, Plato and Aristotle were always the starting point, an authoritative voice that influenced thinkers.

In the modern era, the extant humour theories were grouped in different categories that are still accepted nowadays:

- incongruity theories;
- hostility/disparagement theories;
- release theories.

In the next paragraphs these groups of theories will be discussed. Firstly, the group including incongruity theories is often associated with Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860). This association occurs despite the fact that the first instances of incongruity theories can be traced during the Renaissance period, and derive from Aristotle's thought. Kant's definition of laughter states that "laughter is an affection arising from sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing" (Kant 1790, quoted in Attardo 1994:48). Even more interestingly, Schopenhauer explicitly refers to incongruity:

The cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation, and laughter itself is just the expression of this incongruity.

(Schopenhauer 1819, quoted in Attardo 1994:48)

As can be understood when analysing these two quotes, incongruity theories consider humour to be enhanced by the perception of an incongruity, something unexpected that does not match with reality. For this reason, incongruity theories are also considered to be the ancestors of cognitive theories. Moreover, incongruity theories can accompany both hostility theories and release theories (Attardo 1994:49): the perception and resolution of an incongruity can be the channel through which hostility or release is achieved.

Secondly, the group of hostility theories is found in this categorization. It is probably the most ancient group of theories, since Plato and Aristotle considered humour on its aggressive side. According to these theories, humour is enhanced by the perception of superiority towards an object (ibid.). The most influent exponent of this category is Henri Bergson (1859-1941), since he considers humour to be a device exploited to correct negative behaviours.

Thirdly, the group of release theories is mainly associated with the contribution of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Linguistically speaking, release theories refer to the liberation of language from rules and constraints. For this type of humour, also named ‘defunctionalisation’, puns and wordplays are crucial (Attardo 1994:50).

This brief introduction to the history of humour is functional to the understanding of humour techniques applied to advertising, which will be the topic of the next section of this work.



## Chapter 3 Humour in Advertising

“Nobody buys from a clown.”

Claude Hopkins (1923:42)

In this section the insertion of humour in advertising will be presented and discussed. The first instances of humour in advertising appeared during the second half of the twentieth century. Before those years, as confirmed by the 1923 quote by Claude Hopkins, an American advertising icon, humour was thought to harm advertising, negatively affecting the brand’s credibility; therefore, humour was not included in the advertising strategies known to be safe and effective. Interestingly, something in the attitude towards humour in advertising has changed throughout this period of time and recent studies showed that humour is increasingly exploited in advertising campaigns, in different modes among countries. It appears that campaigns developed in the USA are the most likely to contain humour, but also France, UK and China have well-established traditions of humour in advertisements (Nuñez Barriopedro et al. 2019:6). Nowadays humour is considered to be a double-edged sword, a useful tool that needs to be handled carefully in order to gain benefits in terms of sales.

### 3.1 How to Elicit Humour in Advertising

Humour in advertising can be elicited through several devices and with different objectives. In the next paragraphs some of the possible techniques exploited to elicit humour in advertising will be discussed. The strategies presented in this paper will be:

- multimodality;
- intertextuality;
- isotopy;
- iconicity;
- verbal humour.

As already mentioned, advertisements are often characterized by multimodality. When applying this term to the advertising domain, we indicate the interaction between several dimensions that contribute to the design of the advertisement. Multimodality is often exploited, in the case of humorous advertisements, to elicit humour. An instance of this process is provided by an advertisement contained in Cook (2001:52) and thoroughly analysed by the researcher. The example of the script here below, coming from a TV commercial released in order to promote the Peugeot 306, is meant to demonstrate how music connotes the visual and the verbal in an ad,

showing a high degree of multimodality. The music chosen for this ad was “*Memories Are Made of This*” by Dean Martin. While the music plays in the background, the scene develops on screen:

Song Words	Pictures and dialogue
<i>Take one fresh and tender kiss.</i>	A man of about 60 is arriving home to his villa by the sea.
<i>Add one stolen night of bliss.</i>	Inside the villa, a young man and a young woman are making passionate love. In their passion they knock a bedside photograph on to the floor. The glass shatters. It is a picture of the older man.
<i>(sweet, sweet the memories you gave to me)</i>	A fierce guard dog is barking outside.
<i>One girl, one boy,</i>	The doorbell rings. Putting on a robe, the young woman descends hurriedly to answer the door. ‘Frank!’ She sounds worried and surprised. ‘So where is he?’ demands the older man.
<i>Some grief, some joy,</i>	Clutching his clothes, the younger man is jumping over the balcony, to escape.
<i>Memories are made of this.</i>	<p>The young man reaches the car and gets in. He imagines the younger woman, writhing erotically in the passenger seat. Suddenly the older man bangs angrily on the car window. ‘Come on. Get out of the car!’</p> <p>The young man gets out. The older man hands him a pair of running shoes. ‘Put them on. We’re running this marathon together, father and son.’ The young woman is seen approaching, smiling, carrying a child.</p> <p>The Peugeot symbol. Written underneath: <i>Peugeot. The drive of your life.</i> <i>www.peugeot.com</i></p> <p>Voiceover: ‘The Peugeot 306. It’s a family affair.’</p>

Extract from Cook (2001:52)

As illustrated by this example, the initial interpretation of the scene changes completely at the end of the narration: what appeared to be an adultery scene results in being a humorous attempt to avoid running with the father. This overlapping of meanings is always intentional and it is often reinforced by the images and music in the background, and by the polysemous word ‘affair’ in this specific case. The ‘resolution phase’ reveals the incongruity and forces the receivers to reinterpret the whole text again with the elements that are now available to them. Interestingly, the first interpretation of the scene is mainly conveyed by the ambiguity of the action seen on screen; however, the interpretation of a love affair is reinforced by the lyrics of the song playing in the background.

Another device that is quite exploited in order to achieve humour in advertising is intertextuality. This phenomenon can be found in any text and it can be defined as the reference to other textual genres or concepts. Intertextuality in advertising can intervene in two possible directions:

- references to the socio-political and cultural context, events, stereotypes;
- references to fixed expressions (e.g., proverbs, idioms), linguistic resources (registers or other languages), or other texts and genres (whether literary or not).

Therefore, intertextuality is deeply connected with the context and the culture of the receivers. Intertextual references are a strong weapon to increase memorability of an ad, but this effect is elicited only if the audience recognize the references. Otherwise, the reference and its potentially humorous effects are lost. That is why it is important to know the audience and adapt the contents of ads accordingly.

Another linguistic device that is usually used in order to convey humour in advertising is isotopy. The term ‘isotopy’ refers to “a redundant set of semantic categories which makes possible the uniform reading of the text” (Greimas 1970:188). Algirdas Julien Greimas (1917-1992) was one of the main contributors to the Parisian school of semiotics: according to his model, two linguistic units can be defined ‘isotopic’ if they share one or more semes, with different meanings (Attardo 1994:65). An example could be the lexeme ‘head’, which can acquire more or less generality according to the context in which the word is uttered. Therefore, variations in meaning depend on the context, but there has to be at least one seme that does not change (ibid.). Moreover, when dealing with figurative denominations, some semes are disabled in favour of other ones: if a girl was compared to a flower, the seme ‘vegetable’ would not be activated. Humour in this case could be elicited if the girl compared to a flower interpreted the metaphor with its literal meaning and

activated the seme 'vegetable'. In everyday communication these ambiguities can be unintentional, but the same cannot be said when the aim of the communication is to elicit humour in advertising.

This concept deriving from the semiotic domain is useful to understand the mechanism underlying metaphors and humorous puns. Isotopy can intervene at various levels, the two levels that are particularly relevant to humour in advertising are:

- phonetic isotopy: repetition of phonemes (for instance alliteration, rhyme, paronomasia)
- semantic isotopy: repetition of semes and/or classemes

In order to clarify what has just been explained, an example will be presented.

“- Why do French only have one egg for breakfast?

- Because one egg is un oeuf.”

(Chiaro 2010:2)

The isotopy here works both at the phonetic level (repetition of the same phonemes between the French word *un oeuf* and the English *enough*), and at the semantic level (repetition of the lexeme *egg* in both languages).

Another strategy discussed in this study is iconicity. In semiotics, iconicity is defined as the similarity between the form of a sign and its meaning. This strategy is often exploited in advertising, where text and graphics are crucial. As explained by Cook (2001), iconicity can intervene at various levels:

- with words;
- through the elicited behaviour;
- through letter shape;
- through arbitrary sign.

The author of this paper believes that the first two types of iconicity are particularly relevant to the discourse of humour in advertising.

The first type of iconicity discussed in this paper is iconicity with words. This phenomenon occurs when words are shaped in order to form a specific sign that conveys a specific meaning, as can be observed in Figure 3.1.



*Figure 3.1 Advertisement for the Maxwell-House coffee (Cook 2001:85).*

Figure 3.1 was taken by a TV commercial for the Maxwell-House coffee. As can be observed, the tagline “Is yours Maxwell-house?” forms the drawing of a roof. The word ‘roof’ is associated with certain values such as ‘safety’ and ‘household’, which are transferred to the product itself (ibid.).

The second type of iconicity that can elicit humour in advertising is the one referring to the behaviour of the receivers. The organization of the text can provoke actions in the receivers, even involuntarily. Another example provided by Cook (2001) explains this trait:

“you	haven’t
seen	tennis
on	television
until	you’ve
seen	it
on	a
Philips 41”	screen”

(Cook 2001:88)

While reading the text, receivers are forced to move their eyes from side to side, as if they were watching a tennis match. This kind of texts can improve the elicitation of humour in advertising.

Finally, verbal humour is a strategy that can be exploited in order to elicit humour in advertising. A starting point in this direction is the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH), presented for the first time at a conference by Raskin and Attardo in 1991 (Ruch et al. 1993). This theory belongs to a broader group of theories, labelled with the term ‘script-based’ and referring to the organization and

representation of lexicon (Attardo 1994:195). The group of theories to which the GTVH belongs consider the notion of ‘script’, defined as “an organized chunk of information about something. [...] It is a cognitive structure internalized by the speaker which provides the speaker with information on how things are done, organized” (Attardo 1994:198). Generally speaking, a ‘script’ refers to all the values and actions automatically associated with a certain word. Therefore, when a speaker hears the word ‘hospital’, the image of a place will automatically come to the speaker’s mind, while some figures such as ‘doctors’ and some values such as ‘care’ will be evoked (Attardo 1994:199).

The GTVH stems from a revision carried out by Salvatore Attardo and Victor Raskin on the Semantic Script Theory of Humour (SSTH): the GTVH becomes a sort of broadening of the previous theory, since it does not only focus on semantics, it takes into account textual linguistics and pragmatics as well (Attardo 1994:222). This broadening is possible thanks to the addition of five Knowledge Resources (KR) to the more general ‘script opposition’ that was already found in the SSTH. The KRs identified by the GTVH are six and can be defined as:

- script opposition;
- language;
- narrative strategy;
- target;
- situation;
- logical mechanism.

The first KR that is presented in this paper is the script opposition one. As already mentioned, the concept of ‘script opposition’ derives from the SSTH and it can be considered a sort of ‘umbrella term’ for all the other KRs, which focus on different and more specific elements. Starting from the definition of ‘script’ already provided, it may happen that two scripts overlap: the consequence is that for the same action or behaviour, more than a reading is possible. As explained by Attardo (1994:203), “the overlapping of two scripts is not necessarily a cause of humour *per se*”. For instance metaphorical texts present this feature, but this does not necessarily mean that all metaphorical texts are humorous; what really elicits humour is the oppositeness of scripts. An example of script opposition is found in Chiaro (2018:15):

Girlfriend: “Darling, will you give me a ring on our wedding day?”

Boyfriend: “Sure, what is your number?”

The language KR refers to the verbalization of the text and its organization. Indeed, the same concept could be expressed using different words with the same meaning (synonyms): however, it can happen that humour is only elicited when a word or a specific combination of words it used. An exception in this sense comes from the domain of puns and wordplays that focus more on the signifier than on the signified. Another interesting feature that involves the language KR is the position of the punch line, which has to be in the last line of the joke in order to fully exploit its potential. The following example provides a practical explanation for this specific KR, since humour is elicited only through the resemblance in terms of sound between “a wafer” and “away for”.

Why did the cookie cry?

Because its mother was a wafer so long.

(Chiaro 2018:16)

The narrative strategy KR analyses the frame of the joke: two possible examples of this frame are whether the humorous stimulus derives from a simple narrative or a dialogue, but the possibilities of frames are several.

The target KR refers to the butt of the joke: it contains all the information and the stereotypes on the ‘victims’ of the humorous trait, may they be individuals or groups of individuals.

The situation KR refers to the fact that each joke must have a topic, some content to talk about. There actually has to be an action or something that elicits humour. In order to better explain the meaning of this KR, an example is reported here below.

French Original :

C’est une brillante soirée mondaine, très chic, avec des invités triés sur le volet. À un moment, deux convives vont prendre un peu d’air sur la terrasse :

« Ah ! », fait l’un d’un ton satisfait, « belle soirée, hein ? Repas magnifique...et puis jolies toilettes, hein ? »

« Ça » dit l’autre, « je n’en sais rien. »

« Comment ça ? »

« Non, je n’y suis pas allé ! »

English Translation:

At a sophisticated party two guests are talking outside.

“Ah”, says the first, in a satisfied tone, “nice evening, isn’t it? Magnificent meal, and beautiful *toilettes* (=lavatories/dresses), aren’t they?”

“I wouldn’t know”, answers the second.

“What do you mean?”

“I did not have to go.”

(Attardo 1994:388)

In this example the described situation allows the ambiguity of the meaning of the term *toilettes* to be plausible and possible; therefore humour is elicited.

The logical mechanism KR refers to the relationship between two senses, and how they do enter in contact in a joke or in any source of humour. An example is the joke reported in Attardo (1994:225):

Madonna does not have it, the Pope has it but does not use it, Bush has it short, and Gorbachev long. What is it? A last name.

Therefore, the logical mechanism KR refers to all the connections that are made and that are responsible for the elicitation of humour.

Another interesting and noteworthy reflection concerns the kind of humour that could be exploited in advertising. Throughout history, many categories of humour have been created, starting from different perspectives. Crawford and Gregory (2015:571) provided a sort of summary of the categories of humour that were identified in the extant literature.

Freud, 1905	Tendentious (sexual or aggressive) wit, nontendentious wit
Goldstein & McGhee, 1972	Aggressive, sexual, incongruous (nonsense)
Kelly & Solomon, 1975	Pun, understatement, joke, ludicrous, satire, irony
Brooker, 1981	Puns, limericks, jokes, one-liners
Madden & Weinberger, 1982	Aggressive, sexual, nonsense



Speck, 1987	Comic wit, sentimental humour, satire, sentimental wit, full comedy
Alden et al., 1993	Incongruity-resolution contrasts (actual/non actual, expected/unexpected, possible/impossible)
McCullough & Taylor, 1993	Aggressive, sexual, nonsense, warm, pun
Murphy, Morrison, & Zahn, 1993	Nonsense, eccentric characters, word play, sarcasm, satire, parody, stereotype, human relationships, repetition, frustration
Catanescu & Tom, 2001	Comparison, exaggeration, personification, pun, sarcasm, silliness, surprise

When designing a humorous advertisement, it is important to choose the best type of humour, considering the audience and the context to which the advertisement is addressed. For instance, Chinese people tend to prefer neutral and non-aggressive forms of humour (Laroche et al. 2014:689), whereas Americans particularly appreciate forms of humour dealing with superiority (Gulas and Weinberger 2010:28).

### 3.2 When Humour is Used in Advertising

According to the extant literature, humour in advertising is considered to be a suitable strategy under certain specific circumstances, which will be presented in the following paragraphs:

- humour and the popularity of the brand;
- relatedness of the humorous trait to the product being advertised;
- humour and attention;
- humour and ethical considerations;
- humour and the context.

The first circumstance under which humour could be exploited in advertising concerns the popularity of the brand. Indeed, according to Weinberger and Gulas (1992), humour can have an impact on source credibility: popular brands are more likely to achieve a successful humorous ad than unknown brands. Therefore, humour might not be the best option for the advertisement of a new brand, whereas it could highly improve the sales of popular brands.

The second circumstance refers to the humorous trait contained in advertisements. Many studies have demonstrated that humour in advertising is perceived to be more effective when related to the product that is being advertised (Weinberger and Gulas 1992, Chabrol and Vrignaud 2006, Koneska

et al. 2017). This means that humour that does not refer to the product may be funny, but for the purposes of sales this strategy could harm its effectiveness. Instead, applying the humorous trait to the product itself is considered to be the most effective option. However, product-related humour may not end up with mocking the user of the product: sometimes the line between these two cases is blurred. In order to better explain this concept, two examples contained in the study carried out by Koneska and colleagues (2017) are reported in Figure 3.2 and Figure 3.3.



*Figure 3.2 Advertisement for a digestion product (Koneska 2017:121), which was not considered to be effective because it mocks the user of the product.*



*Figure 3.3 Advertisement for a shampoo (ibid.), which was considered to be effective because it exploited humour in order to illustrate the benefits of the product.*

These examples provide two different advertisements for two different products. The first is the advertisement built for the promotion of a product for digestion (Figure 3.2), whereas the second is the advertisement of a shampoo (Figure 3.3). According to the study performed by Koneska and colleagues (2017), the advertisement for the digestion product was perceived as less effective than the shampoo one. A possible underlying reason for this result might be the fact that the first advertisement mocks the user of the product, whereas the second one exploits humour to present the benefits of the product.

Moreover, humour is often applied to certain values. To this regard, it is important for practitioners to know the audience that will be exposed to the advertisement: it is demonstrated that humorous advertisements are perceived as more effective when they ‘attack’ some values that are not fundamental for a specific group of people. This element is strictly connected to the different perceptions of advertising among countries all over the world; this topic will be discussed in the next sections of this paper. However, an example to clarify what has just been mentioned is the difference between Americans and Chinese people (Crawford and Gregory 2015:571). Because of their different cultural values, an instance of ‘aggressive’ advertising will be appreciated by the American audience, whereas Chinese people would feel offended. The best option for humour in advertising seems to be applying the humorous stimulus to a value that is recognised by the intended audience, without being central for their culture.

The third combination that has been analysed is the relationship between humour and attention. Researchers widely agree that humour enhances attention and can contribute to the memorability of the ad (Weinberger and Gulas 1992, Eisend 2009). However, humour might be dispensed, since the objective of the ad is the memorability of the product and the brand. The objective of advertisements is that people actually decide to buy the product, not that they remember the humorous effect. This risk of humour shadowing the brand and the product is called ‘the vampire effect’.

Humour in advertising is also considered a strategy to be exploited when trying to escape from ethical judgements and mask negative information. Indeed, humorous stimuli contribute to attenuate the ethical considerations that could be addressed to the product itself. This is the case of deceptive ads and two-sided ads. In this sense humour works as a distracting factor that improves acceptability of the product among the audience. The example cited by Eisend (2022:1) perfectly shows the exploitation of humour under these circumstances: a tagline for Buckley’s cough syrup campaign states “It tastes awful. And it works”. Humour in this kind of ads might be a successful choice since it increases tolerance to negative information, reducing consumers’ scepticism.

Humour in advertising also depends on the external context in which it is released. For this reason, marketers and practitioners establish whether the audience would perceive the humorous stimuli as adequate or not. An example is offered by the study carried out by Pedrini (2006): two different ads against smoking habits were presented to a sample composed of smokers and non-smokers participants. Two ads were used in this study: one of them involved humour, whereas the other one tackled the issue in a more traditional and serious way. Interestingly, smokers tended to perceive the traditional and serious ad as more effective, whereas the non-smokers group preferred the humorous

approach to the issue. This example could be explained by the fact that people that are directly involved in an issue tend to perceive humour as less effective, as if affecting the credibility of the topic.

However, the relationship between humour and context does not only refer to the characteristics and habits of the audience, but to external circumstances as well. For instance, the Italian wine merchant Bernabei changed their advertising strategy at the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict: the company's Instagram account is now full of humorous posts and stories, generating engagement and interactions with the public, a feature of social media advertising that will be discussed in the next sections of this work. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 2022 they published the humorous post reported in Figure 3.4.



*Figure 3.4 Humorous advertisement posted on the Instagram account of the Italian winery Bernabei on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 2022.*

The strategy of this company appears to work on social media, considering the amount of positive comments that suggest that this joke has been understood and well-received. The humorous trait lies in the misunderstanding caused by the second sentence in the dialogue *Ma io vorrei qualcosa di più* and the following reply. This can be interpreted as an instance of script-based humour as well (Chapter 3.1).

A possible translation of this post could be:

- We can stay friends and have a beer together.
- But I want something more!
- What about two beers?

Obviously the second speaker was referring to the nature of their relationship and the reply ‘*What about two beers*’ works well since it enhances humour related to the type of product actually sold by the company.

As widely known, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2022 the Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered his army to invade and attack Ukraine. This event shocked the entire world and led to many economic, political and social consequences. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of February 2022, Bernabei published the post along with the caption reported in Figure 3.5. The company profile picture was then adapted with the colours of the Ukrainian flag.



*Figure 3.5 Advertisement published by the Italian winery Bernabei on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2022, when Vladimir Putin ordered his army to invade Ukraine.*

The caption *e questa volta non ci riferiamo alla bottiglia* (literally *and we're not talking about the bottle this time*) could be perceived as humorous, as *finitela subito* in Italian could apply both to war or to wine bottles (whereas in English the respective expressions would be *stop [war]* and *drink up*): however, this humorous post is more subtle and suggests an engagement by the Italian company, a sort of stance-taking. If the previous post (Figure 3.4) could provoke laughter, this second post (Figure 3.5) could at the most make people smile. The choice of including a black-coloured background differs from the light background of the previous post, as well as the lack of other symbols or references to the company and to the product itself. In this post, the Italian company did not try to directly sell a product, but they engaged with what was happening in their context and this has positive consequences in terms of audience reactions.

With the worsening of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the world being shocked by the happening of such a war, the company temporarily gave up this humorous trait on social media advertising and started introducing more traditional and neutral advertisements, such as the following, published on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2022:



bernabei.it ...e ti senti un Re! 🏰

*Figure 3.6 Advertisement posted on the Instagram account of the Italian winery Bernabei on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2022. The humorous trait is completely absent.*

As can be observed in Figure 3.6, the caption accompanying this post still complies with social media language, for instance through the use of emoticons, and the optimistic tone was preserved, but jokes and puns were completely excluded in those days. Humour was abandoned, possibly because of the evolution of external circumstances.

Another possible source of humour in advertising comes from the real-time marketing domain. Real-time marketing is a quite recent strategy that consists of exploiting events particularly important for the addressed audience. Its principle is to exploit cultural events, memes and more in general the context of the audience to promote their products, especially on social media. Real-time marketing often recurs to humour in the form of puns, intertextuality and metaphors. In order to get the humorous trait of these kinds of ads it is not sufficient to know the language, but also the current context of the correspondent country and culture.

A recent example of this strategy comes from Garofalo, an Italian company producing pasta: in April 2022, the Italian newspapers focused on the election of the French President. During this period of time Garofalo released the following advertisement.



*Figure 3.7 Humorous advertisement by Garofalo published on Facebook on the 24<sup>th</sup> of April 2022. This advertisement exploits the technique of real-time marketing and bilingual punning.*

Figure 3.7 provides an example of real-time marketing since the humorous trait relies on the assonance between the surnames of the two candidates and two different shapes of pasta. Marine Le Pen is represented by ‘penne’, whereas Emmanuel Macron is represented by ‘maccheroni’. The understanding of the wordplay is enhanced by the association of verbal text with images, other than the use of parenthesis in ‘Mac(ca)ron’. In this circumstance the wordplay is immediately understood by the Italian audience seeing this ad in April 2022, whereas the same could not be said in other circumstances. Figure 3.7 is an instance of bilingual punning (Chiaro 2017:22) as well, since if the text is read by a French perspective the reference to Marine Le Pen and Emmanuel Macron is clear; however, this pun only works in Italian, because Italians would recognize the assonance between the name of the candidates and the two different shapes of pasta.

### **3.3 Humour Advertising in Traditional and New Media**

Without any doubt, humour in advertising is an effective strategy, if handled carefully. More specifically, humorous stimuli in advertising must adapt to the mean of communication in which it is released. There are some characteristics and constraints that are taken into consideration in order to build effective advertisements. Advertising has followed and exploited all technology improvements and achievements, with a peculiarity: technological developments were an added value to the world of advertising and they allowed advertisers to communicate efficiently through different channels. The creation of TV has not replaced radio advertising, and the same can be said about the channels available today. Technological progress in the field of advertising is a form of

addition and spreading of possibilities, not a form of replacement. In this chapter humour advertising in traditional and new media will be analysed.

### 3.3.1 Humour in Traditional Media

The following paragraphs will be dedicated to the presentation of humorous advertisements in traditional media. More specifically, in this chapter radio advertising, print advertising and TV advertising will be discussed.

The first channel analysed in this work is radio advertising. After print advertising, radio is one of the first channels that were used to advertise products. Radio advertising has its own peculiarities and constraints, especially when observing the type of communication involved. In radio advertising people listen to the advertisement, they cannot see or read any picture or verbal text. Therefore, it is advisable for a radio advertisement to be direct and catch the attention of the audience through sounds and voice. In these regards humour can be a strong ally. As in every kind of advertisements, the technique takes into account the product that is being promoted. Academics studying advertising strategies often divide products into two categories: high-involvement and low-involvement. These categories refer to the degree of sensitivity to a specific product felt by the audience: high-involvement products are those that are felt to be more ‘serious’; therefore, more traditional approaches rather than humour are preferred in their advertisements. Weinberger and Campbell (1991:49) demonstrated that radio humour appears to be suitable for the advertisements of specific category of low-involvement products. According to their study results, radio humour is less exploited for high-involvement goods. In order to better explain what is meant with ‘low-involvement’ and ‘high-involvement’, in Table 1 some examples taken from Weinberger and Campbell study (1991:46) are provided.

High Involvement	Cars, trucks, insurance, bank loans, business machines, business services	Hair colouring, fragrance, grooming aids, medicated skin products, jeans, sportswear
Low Involvement	Feminine hygiene, mouthwash, toothpaste, deodorant, analgesics, stomach remedy, antiseptics, vitamins, cold medicine, other medicines, cereal, prepared foods, other clothes, gas-oil, detergent, bleach, cleaners, paint-	Beer, wine, soda, gum, hard candy, coffee, snack food, candy



	hardware	
--	----------	--

*Table 1 Adapted from Weinberger and Campbell (1991:46)*

As previously mentioned, the fact that there are new channels available today does not mean that previous strategies are abandoned: advertising keeps developing. Indeed, although radio was one of the first channels through which advertisements circulated, an instance of humorous radio advertisement comes from Spotify, the widely spread platform that allows users to listen to music: an advertisement by Benzac, a company producing treatment gels and wash against acne-bacteria, was released in May 2022 in Italy on Spotify. Following the structure of the app, users could listen to the advertisement between a song and the following one. This advertisement found its humorous stimulus in the incongruity between what was being said and radio advertising constraints: the voice stated “guarda questo” (literally, “look at this”) and corrected themselves by saying “ah no non puoi vederlo” (literally, “oh right, you can’t see it”). This technique plays with the channel constraints and at the same time it catches the attention of the user. Moreover, at the beginning of the same advertisement the concept of co-text, explained in Chapter 1, is exploited. The voice presenting the product states “Bella questa canzone, un po’ meno svegliarsi con l’acne” (literally, “this song was nice, what is not so nice is waking up with acne”). This advertisement pretends establishing a link with the song that the user has just listened to, and transfers this link to the acne disease and treatment. The relationship between the song being nice and waking up with acne being not so nice elicits a humorous opposition.

As far as print advertising is concerned, other elements are considered. If in radio advertising there is no space for images and the entire focus is on sounds and voices, the contrary occurs with print advertising. Print advertising can be exploited in different contexts, especially in outdoor campaigns and on newspapers. Humorous print advertisements can exploit the power of images but also of written text: in this form of advertising, puns and taglines can make a difference. An instance of humorous print advertising comes again from Spotify, with its outdoor campaign released in 2016. As shown in Figure 3.8, the advertisements could not count on sounds but focused on the power of the written text. More specifically, these advertisements elicit humour started from the title of some popular songs and connected them with a specific day or social event. This connection elicited humour in those who read the advertisements.

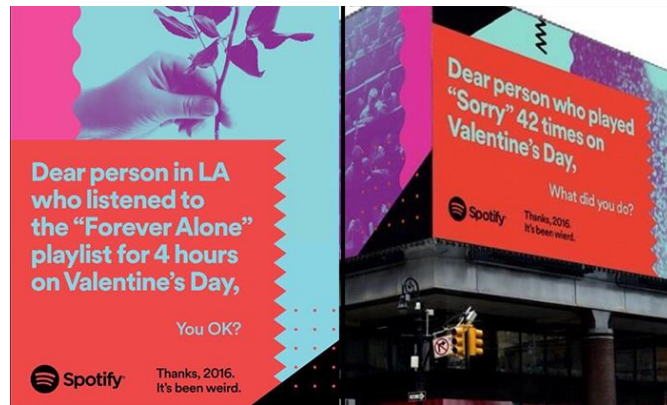


Figure 3.8 Print advertisements released by Spotify in 2016<sup>1</sup>.

Moreover, humour in print advertising can involve the physical outlook of the ad. This is the case of Figure 3.9: an advertisement for a fitness centre shows an overweight man causing the billboard to lean. Another instance of this peculiar approach comes from Mc Donald's, as showed in Figure 3.10: the billboard advertising a sandwich shows the signs of the biting.



Figure 3.9 Print advertisement for Silberman's Fitness Center.<sup>2</sup>

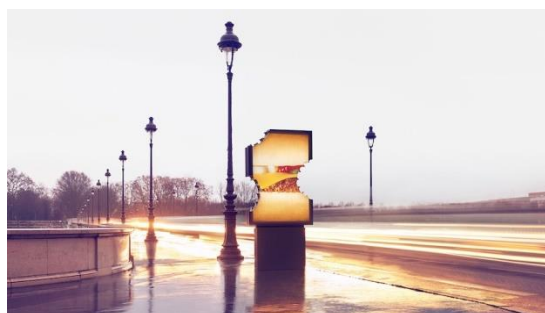


Figure 3.10 Print advertisement for Mc Donald's in France.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Available at <https://www.deseret.com/2017/1/9/20603715/spotify-s-new-ad-campaign-pokes-fun-at-listeners-2016-music-choices>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Available at <https://billboardconnection.com/article/creativity-meets-simplicity/>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Available at <https://www.adweek.com/agencies/these-clever-mcdonalds-outdoor-ads-have-giant-bites-taken-out-of-them/>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

Furthermore, Hatzithomas and colleagues (2011) carried out a cross-cultural study on print advertising, focusing on cultural values. Specifically, their study compared UK print advertising with Greek print advertising with regards to the use of humour. They found that cultural diversity was actually mirrored by print ads, since British instances contained disparaging humour, whereas Greek advertisements tended to prefer cognitive humour appeals. These results may not be underestimated, because they demonstrate how print advertisements are constructed for a specific place and audience; therefore they have to conform to characteristics and expectations in terms of cultural values. Nowadays it is impossible to limit the spread of an ad, because globalization and social networks allow users to share and see anything they want, from all over the world. This means that marketers need to be aware of this potential risk factor of unintended audiences, but they also have to keep adapting their advertisements to the target audience; a balance between being global and local needs to be found and preserved.

From a chronological perspective, after print advertising and radio advertising TV commercials appeared, with new features: in TV commercials the audience actually sees images (or videos) and listens to sounds at the same time. Marketers exploited this new opportunity: a strategy that appears to be heavily exploited in television is incongruity that turns into surprise (Alden et al. 2000:2). Indeed, television technical constraints allow marketers to think about a story and present it to the audience. Furthermore, the audience appears to be particularly involved by humorous TV commercials: as explained by Woltman Elpers and colleagues (2004:596), “a sequential dynamic transformation that proceeds from surprise to humour must occur”. Humour in television advertising works through “surprise as mediator and playfulness, ease of resolution and warmth as moderators” (Alden et al. 2000:11). Another noteworthy element concerns some timing remarks, according to the study carried out by Woltman Elpers and colleagues in 2004: given that the commercials last around 40 seconds, ads that were perceived to be the most humorous elicited surprise at around 35 seconds (Woltman Elpers et al. 2004: 596). This is a clear indicator for practitioners, suggesting that the more the commercial plays with incongruities, the more it is perceived as successfully humorous.

Finally, humorous approaches in traditional media seem to keep finding new strategies in order to catch the attention of the audience and convince them to actually buy the product that is being advertised. In the next section of this work, humour in social media advertising will be discussed and analysed.

### 3.3.2 *Humour in Social-Media Advertising*

Before analysing humour in social media advertising, which will be the main topic of this section, it should be defined what is generally meant with the term ‘social media’. Okazaki & Taylor (2013:56) provided a quite elaborate definition, according to which the term ‘social media’ refers to “a series of technological innovations in terms of both hardware and software that facilitate inexpensive content creation, interaction, and interoperability by online users”. Moreover in the same study the theoretical foundations of social media advertising are developed:

- networking capability;
- image transferability;
- personal extensibility.

Firstly, networking capability refers to the possibility of social media to soften boundaries related to location and time; secondly, image transferability allows a company to create and maintain the same brand image around the world, thus favouring the brand recall; finally, personal extensibility, that is to say consumers’ interactions, possibly one of the major innovations brought by social media. The combination of these three elements allows marketers to realize international advertisements without renouncing to personalization, with personal extensibility being the core agent in this sense.

A noteworthy clarification concerns networking capability, since advertisements on social media could appear to be ‘international’. Although international advertisements and their translation will be discussed in the following sections of this work, it should be observed that the globalization effect does not necessarily undermine cultural differences. An international humorous ad does not focus on cultural-specific elements, since they could be unknown or worse, they could be perceived as offensive, in another culture. Instead, what seems to efficiently work is focusing the humorous stimuli on elements that are universally recognized as humorous for international campaigns, and to localize those aspects that could be culture-related or problematic.

Social media advertising is one of the newest types of advertising because of the channels in which it is developed. Social media were born recently and a few studies have been dedicated to this new domain, but many companies have now understood the power of this new channel. Social media allow companies to reach potential customers in a way that was unpredictable some years ago. Nowadays, many companies have an account on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and most recently on TikTok as well.

Companies' accounts on social media are obviously meant to advertise their products, but they also have to adapt to social media language and rules. Social media are made of reactions and engagement: those are the final objectives of social media campaigns. Therefore, all the contents of these pages tend to reflect this attitude. Ge's study (2019) shows how the visual is the most important trait in social media advertising, leading to increased reactions and engagement of the audience. Humour can be exploited in order to achieve these objectives: humorous contents are more likely to be reposted and to enhance interactions. The same study shows that humorous images are perceived to be more effective than humorous words in social media campaigns, and this feature needs to be considered when dealing with social media ads. Advertisers can plan their campaigns using pictures collages, animated GIFs, memes, humanized animals, photomontages and several other devices and strategies to convey a sense of humour to their messages. What seems to be always true is that on social media, advertising abandons some features typical of other channels: hard selling and direct promotion of goods appears to be less effective than a softer approach to it. This obviously depends on the target audience and their culture, but it is a feature that cannot be ignored.

Humour might be the right choice for social media campaigns as it enhances social reactions, consumer engagement and emotional nourishment (Ge 2019:7). An example of a humorous ad on social media is once again provided by Bernabei.



*Figure 3.11 Bernabei's Instagram post published on 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 2022.*

A possible English translation of this post could be "Give me respect. And a Spritz." As it can be observed, this post reflects the strategy explained earlier in this chapter: the post does not sell any good in particular (apart from the winery's ingredients for Spritz, which are not explicitly referred to), but it creates engagement and the audience will probably associate the company to this post in the future, leading to an increased brand awareness.

### 3.4 The Concrete Object of Humour in Advertising

This chapter focuses on the object (or source) of humour in advertising, when it refers to groups of people. Generally speaking, the object of humour is only one of the elements involved in the elicitation of humour; therefore, let us start from a general explanation of such process.

As explained by Gulas and Weinberger (2010:17), for the elicitation of humour “an agent, an object and an audience” are needed. These roles can be seen as a further categorization of ‘participants’, already mentioned in Chapter 1. These categories can be described as follows:

- the agent is the source of humour;
- the object becomes the victim of the humour;
- the audience is the recipient.

These components are not fixed and in specific circumstances they may overlap. In the case of self-deprecating humour agent and object coincide, whereas in others the audience could be also the object: it is a fluid categorization. If these principles are applied to humour in advertising, a first crucial consideration needs to be drawn: the agent can be a character in the ad, but the actual agent is the advertiser, the one that thinks about humour and plan the ad in order to elicit a humorous trait. Humorous traits can be elicited by language, not just by the actor starring in the ad: what is really crucial is the advertiser who developed it.

As far as the object of humour is concerned, it often refers to a third party, not directly to the audience: since humour in advertising has the ultimate objective of selling, it is safer to take a target that could not offend the audience of potential customers. People are more likely to laugh at other people, other groups, because they are not directly involved in the joke, they are not the ‘victims’ of the humorous trait.

What really makes an ad humorous is the audience. The audience is the one that perceives humour and appreciates it: if this does not happen, despite all the efforts of the advertiser, the ad cannot be considered humorous. As stated by Gulas and Weinberger (2010:19), this should not be underestimated, since attempted humorous advertisements that are not perceived as such by the audience “are not likely to succeed in achieving marketing objectives”. In the following paragraph and sections, the most recurrent groups and targets exploited as ‘object’ of humour in advertising will be presented.

Humour in general, but especially in advertising, needs forms and rhetorical strategies to achieve that effect in the audience, but it does needs other elements as well. It might sound trivial, but

humorous ads need a target, that can move from a simple language-play to an entire social group. The target of the humorous stimuli might be people, but also values, events, lifestyle attitudes and behaviours. Moreover, a theme is chosen when developing an ad or a campaign, something that could spark the humorous trait: isotopies and intertextuality (Chapter 3) are just two of the linguistic elements that are used in order to release an effective humorous ad. That is what it is meant with ‘the object of humour in advertising’. The following sections will discuss some examples of ‘concrete objects’ of humour in advertising, i.e. groups of people and specific manners.

### *3.4.1 Stereotypes in Humour Advertising*

Stereotypes are probably the most exploited source of humour in advertising, involving different perspectives and affecting various social groups. In this section some specific stereotypes will be discussed, namely:

- gender stereotypes
- social stereotypes;
- ethnic stereotypes.

The first group of stereotypes that are widely spread in advertising are those based on gender. Gender stereotypes can be defined as “beliefs that certain attributes, such as occupations or role behaviours, differentiate women and men” (Eisend et al. 2014:257): throughout history women have been related to dependent roles, to the households and children care, whereas men were depicted as breadwinners, the ones playing independent roles. It is curious how even nowadays, after several waves of feminism having demonstrated that this strict distribution of roles and activities is outdated, these stereotypes persist. An instance of gender stereotypes in the field of advertising comes from the spokespersons in TV commercials of cleaning products: until very recent times, they were mostly women, and even when the narrative voice came from a man, the character that actually used the product turned out to be a woman. Even if improvements have been achieved, these longstanding stereotypes are often exacerbated and reinforced in current societies.

Gender stereotyping is regulated from a legal perspective as well. In 2008, the European Parliament encouraged its member states to adopt measures in order to prevent stereotypical portraits of women and men on TV (2008/2038(INI)). Humour therefore becomes a strategy to keep exploiting stereotypes in advertising, without being subject to political objections, since the effects of humorous and non-humorous ads are completely different.

However, women are also subject to sexual objectification: this term refers to the tendency of presenting women for their physical characteristics rather than for their non-physical attributes. This specific type of gender stereotype appears to be reflected when creating humorous advertisements (Tartaglia and Rollero 2015:1103). Tartaglia and Rollero carried out a study in 2015 to compare gender stereotyping in humorous advertisements in Italy and in the Netherlands: they found a correlation between the attitude of the country towards gender equality and the content and narratives of the advertisements. For instance, in Italian advertisements, with Italy being defined as a gender-unequal country, women were more objectified, i.e. described as attractive and dressed in a sexualised way, than their Dutch counterparts. And this is a clear demonstration of how stereotypes in advertising come from the real world, the context to which they belong.

Gender stereotypes are used in two different ways when humour is included in the ad: on the one side they can be the source of humour, on the other side they can be simply combined with the source of humour. In both circumstances, it is found that gender stereotypes are a great ally for marketers and practitioners, a sort of already traced and quite safe path to follow in order to enhance humour. When generating humour, a sort of incongruity is presented, something that violates the predominant perspective and expectations based on social norms and values, and when the incongruity is somehow resolved, then the audience will experience humour.

Gender stereotypes might be thought to be already well-known and spread, therefore overexploited, involving the risk of not causing any incongruity anymore. Anyway, even if the same gender stereotype has already been exploited by other companies, or by the same company some time before, this does not mean that the audience will perceive it as a repetition. The whole perception of gender stereotypes in humorous ads depend on the narration that the ad itself provides: stereotypes might be narrated in traditional ways or non-traditional ways, as shown in Figure 3.12. In particular, as explained by Eisend and colleagues (2014:257), “non-traditional stereotypical depictions imply changes in stereotypical roles; for instance, men could be depicted in domestic roles doing chores, whereas women would be presented in independent roles”. Non-traditional gender stereotypes can enhance humour, but at the same time they acquire a social value for both genders, not just for women. That is why including non-traditional gender stereotypes in a humorous ad seems to increase the ad credibility. Another possible strategy to elicit humour in advertising involving traditional gender stereotypes is to exaggerate them: exaggeration is a form of humour that makes fun of its object, and therefore it could be a strategy to react to traditional stereotypes, as in Figure 3.13. In this case the commercial plays with the stereotype associated with the word ‘bomber’, a term belonging to the football domain and indicating a skilled player. Gillette decided to transfer



and exaggerate the skills of a bomber to the everyday life. An everyday bomber is the one that always looks for the quickest solution (as the tagline ‘*noi scegliamo la soluzione più rapida*’ explains), that is provided by the product being advertised: this elicits admiration of others. The audience perceives the exaggeration of the stereotype, also through the starring of Christian Vieri, an Italian football player. The tagline “Shave like a bomber” becomes a light-hearted encouragement to follow his example and start using the same product.



Figure 3.12 Ikea advertisements framing gender stereotypes in both a traditional and a non-traditional way respectively.<sup>4</sup>



Figure 3.13 Gillette Italia 2021 commercial starring Christian Vieri.<sup>5</sup>

As in any other communication domain, context affects and shapes the contents and strategies exploited in advertising. Gender stereotypes were used in advertisements even during the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic exacerbated gender roles, with women working at home while taking care of their children. Han and Kuipers (2021) carried out a study on the videos published by Chinese

<sup>4</sup> Available at [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265550864\\_Gender\\_Roles\\_and\\_Humor\\_in\\_Advertising\\_The\\_Occurrence\\_of\\_Stereotyping\\_in\\_Humorous\\_and\\_Non-humorous\\_Advertising\\_and\\_Its\\_Consequences\\_for\\_Advertising\\_Effectiveness/figures?lo=1](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265550864_Gender_Roles_and_Humor_in_Advertising_The_Occurrence_of_Stereotyping_in_Humorous_and_Non-humorous_Advertising_and_Its_Consequences_for_Advertising_Effectiveness/figures?lo=1), last seen on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Ltc6fmiUc>, last seen on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

mothers on TikTok with the hashtag #workfromhomewithchildcare during the pandemic; these videos are humorous and show all the difficulties mothers had to face while trying to combine career and childcare during the pandemic, but they were also an instance of advertising when the video was a promotion of a product that could help mothers to overcome all the obstacles, namely entertaining their children.

As far as social stereotypes are concerned, one of the most recent instances involves the pandemic narrative. Since its outbreak, the pandemic has changed our lives in a way that could not be imagined some years ago: people started working from home, students attended their classes online, and all the non-essential activities were suspended for a period of time. Those moments will be in our minds forever, and marketers know it. That is why the pandemic was framed and narrated in ads as well: when people started accepting the situation and getting used to the new normality, even humorous approaches presenting the pandemic in the ads were considered to be adequate. It was hard to laugh at the pandemic when many people were passing away, but with the increase of vaccination rates and with risks of decease progressively decreasing, people were possibly ready to at least smile at it, as shown in Figure 3.14. In this example the source of humour relies on the typical behaviour of people during the pandemic: the protagonist is shown while eating small chunks of the last Dorito while having a video call, doing their workout or putting a puzzle together, while waiting for groceries delivery.



Figure 3.14 Humorous advertisement on the pandemic by Dorito.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5CuNbutjcOw>, last seen on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

From a social perspective, humorous advertisements can also rely on stereotypes on physical appearances, of both men and women. One of the most memorable advertisements ever was released by Vigorsol in 1998. The ad was meant to promote the brand and the product, and it was addressed to an Italian audience. In the advertisement, a curvy young girl goes to the seaside and compares herself with the beautiful lifeguards that run across the beach. When the protagonist picks up the product of the ad and starts chewing it, everything changes. This change is explained by the off-screen voice, acting the slogan “Vigorsol può cambiare il gusto della tua vita” (literally, “Vigorsol can change the taste of your life”): in the new reality, all people are just the same as her, physically speaking, and she feels more confident. The commercial (some frames are reported in Figure 3.15) shows the brand name and the product quite explicitly, leading to an increased brand awareness and memorability. Moreover, this commercial could also be considered an instance of deceptive ad, since what happens to the protagonist after consuming the product does not match with reality. Anyway, in this ad the focus is on stereotypes on thin and curvy people: thin people are athletic, curvy people get tired earlier. These stereotypes are well-represented in this commercial, which was really successful and resulted in higher sales and memorability of the brand and the product itself.



*Figure 3.15 Frames taken from Vigorsol commercial in 1998.<sup>7</sup>*

Another kind of stereotypes that are exploited in humorous advertisements refers to ethnicity. This category of stereotypes is quite controversial and requires caution when developing a humorous ad. Ethnic stereotypes can easily be perceived as the expression of superiority by a certain ethnic group and lead to other groups feeling offended and outraged. This has of course social consequences, but economic damages could be an additional reason for companies to proceed carefully.

As already mentioned, including ethnic stereotypes in humorous advertisements can easily and dangerously end up with stereotypical narratives that are potentially offensive and harm the effectiveness of the ad (some examples of unsuccessful campaigns will be discussed in the next sections). In these circumstances, humour plays a moderating effect, trying to reinforce the positive

<sup>7</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FqrxOTncc&t=20s>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

effects and reduce the impact of the negative ones. However, ethnic stereotypes can also be framed in a non-traditional way, as in Figure 3.16 and Figure 3.17.

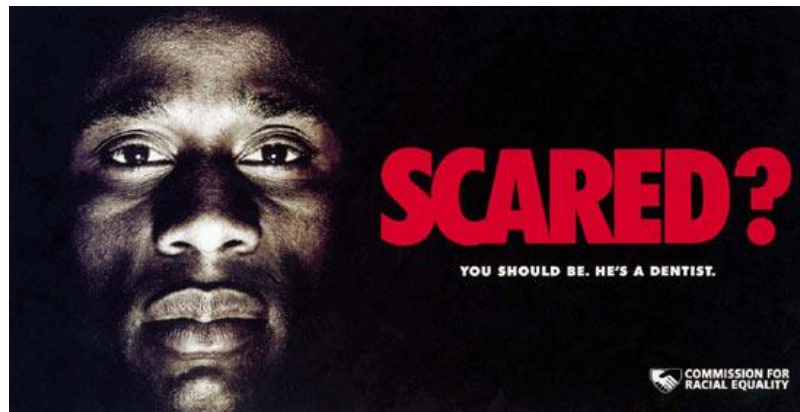


Figure 3.16 Advertisement released in 1998 by the UK Commission for Racial Equality.<sup>8</sup>

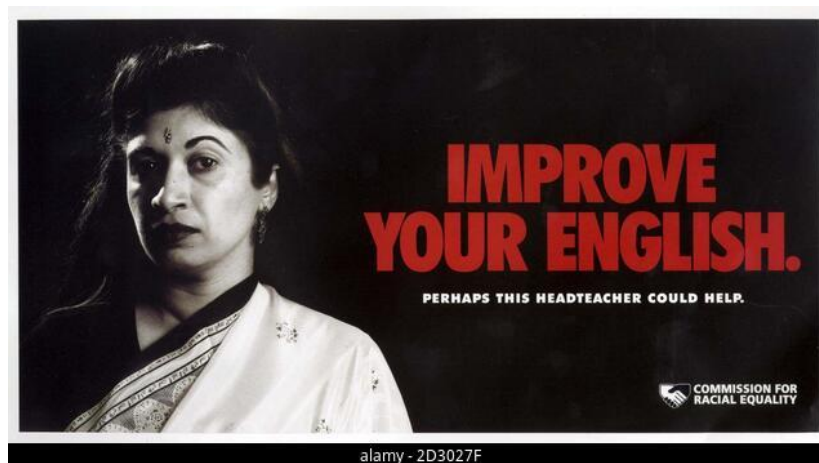


Figure 3.17 Advertisement released in 1998 by the UK Commission for Racial Equality.<sup>9</sup>

These advertisements tried to challenge racial and ethnic stereotypes around foreigners in the UK. In both cases, the red and bigger tagline fuels traditional ethnic stereotypes on minorities, which are immediately reversed by the white and smaller subtitle. In Figure 3.16, the reason why people should be scared is that he is a dentist, while in Figure 3.17 the woman is not the one that needs to improve her English, she is the one that can help the others. Subtle humour is elicited by the

<sup>8</sup> Available at <https://www.lewissilkin.com/en/insights/to-mark-black-history-month-weve-looked-at-some-of-the-ads-that-been-labelled-racist-in-both-the-uk> , last seen on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Available at <https://www.alamy.com/one-of-the-new-posters-launched-by-the-commission-for-racial-equality-today-monday-which-depicts-an-indian-woman-and-says-improve-your-english-perhaps-this-headteacher-could-help-the-new-posters-take-a-different-approach-to-the-shock-tactics-adopted-in-its-last-campaign-which-sparked-uproar-with-deliberately-racist-spoof-adverts-the-cre-said-it-was-hoped-the-posters-would-lead-people-to-question-the-way-they-themselves-stereotyped-black-and-asian-people-see-pa-story-social-race-image380473843.html> , last seen on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

incongruity between the stereotypes and the reality of ads, but it is above all a way of raising awareness and fight against stereotypes.

However, a main difference is found between gender stereotypes in advertising and ethnic portrayals: gender stereotypes are perceived to be effective and have an impact on the humorousness of the ad that is amplified if those stereotypes are framed in a non-traditional way. On the contrary, ethnic portrayals appear to be successful and strengthen minorities' identity, therefore they tend to be appreciated in their traditional narration: it can be stated that

the salience of ethnicity as triggered by traditional ethnic portrayals is evaluated positively by ethnic minorities, while the salience of gender as triggered by traditional gender-role portrayals is evaluated more negatively by women.

(Rößner et al. 2017:201)

#### *3.4.2 Violence and Threat in Humour Advertising*

Another frequently exploited source of humour is violence. In this section the use of violence and threat will be discussed. Although they are generally perceived as negative, they can prove to be effective in order to elicit humour in advertising. Firstly, violence in humorous advertisements will be presented; secondly, threat in humorous advertisements will be analysed.

Ads often contain people slipping or somehow hurting themselves, and if this is accompanied by a playful setting or a playful music, then humour is elicited. Some studies have been carried out to analyse the convergence between humour and physical violence. Swani and colleagues (2013) link these humorous stimuli to disparagement forms of humour. Disparagement is an example of the humour dealing with superiority (Chapter 2); however, humour enhanced by physical derision is counterbalanced with affection feelings.

The risk of violent humorous ads is to trivialize the use of violence, and this is a potentially dangerous social message: however, in the USA, “in 2009, more than 70% of the humorous ads used some form of aggression, with 13 out of 34 of these ads using men as the victims of physical violence; in only one ad were women the victims” (Swani et al. 2013:309). The latter statement leads to another crucial observation: people appear to be less likely to laugh at violence against women, whereas humorous effects are achieved when victims are men. This can be interpreted as a consequence of the outlook of our society: with crimes against women sadly increasing, it would be unthinkable to laugh or even smile at a humorous violence against women.

For a violent ad to be humorous, three conditions need to be fulfilled, according to the benign-violation theory (Swani et al. 2013:310):

- there must be a situation that is perceived as a norm violation;
- the situation must be perceived as benign;
- these two perceptions must occur simultaneously.

Furthermore, according to the findings of the study carried out by Swani and colleagues in 2013, men tend to appreciate higher levels of violence in humour advertisements, whereas women often show a negative reaction. On the contrary, lower-intensity violent humour appears to be well-received and appreciated by both genders.

Another possible strategy that might sound paradoxical if applied to humour advertising is humorous threat persuasion. A practical example of this device was explained by Yoon and Tinkham (2013:30): a social message to prevent frog extinction showed the tagline “If frogs go extinct, you’ll notice”, accompanying the image of a woman cooking while covered with spiders. Because the attitude of the woman is calm, humour is elicited: the audience can perceive an incongruity between the amount of spiders covering the woman and her complete indifference to them, but also an exaggeration of the consequences following frogs extinction. The humorous trait is nuanced here because even if incongruities and exaggeration are perceived, the main focus is on the message, which is preventing frogs from extinction. The same strategy can be observed in McDonald’s 2021 campaign (Figure 3.18) that was aimed at raising awareness among consumers about the dangers of distractions while driving.

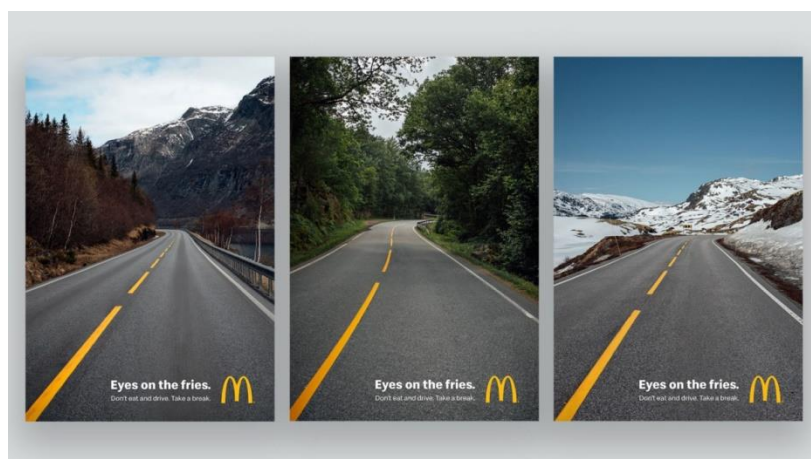


Figure 3.18 McDonald’s 2021 campaign.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Available at <https://bettermarketing.pub/mcdonalds-is-telling-you-to-keep-eyes-on-the-fries-in-this-road-safety-ad-11edaca848e1>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

In these circumstances, the lines on the roads resemble to the fries produced and sold by McDonald's and even if the outcome is humorous, this effect is nuanced because the audience can feel that the main message is all but humorous.

The reception and perception of these kinds of humorous approaches appear to depend on the receiver, especially on their degree of involvement with the respective issue. Threat persuasion, even without the humorous trait, faces critical issues and potential negative consequences for the audience (e.g., being distracted while driving might cause car accidents). Therefore, the audience might be more sensitive and prefer more traditional and serious strategies to frame these kinds of ads: creative strategies are probably perceived as underestimating the problem.

As previously stated, the perception of humorous traits in humour threat persuasion ads depends on the degree of involvement of receivers. More specifically, people with lower degrees of involvement are more likely to appreciate this kind of messages, whereas those who show higher degrees of involvement do not perceive humorous approaches as adequate (Yoon and Tinkham 2013).

Among others, humorous threat persuasion is present in social campaigns against smoking behaviours. Pedrini (2006:210) states that humour works well in order to sell products, but that its effects are reduced if applied to 'serious' topics. In his study conducted in Switzerland, the reactions to two different campaigns against smoke were compared, considering both smokers and non-smokers among participants. The first was a traditional ad against smoking, representing a patient suffering from lung cancer and the tagline stating "Smoking causes lung cancer": this can be defined as a traditional and direct campaign to achieve its main objective, which is convincing people to quit smoking or to never start doing it. The second advertisement analysed in this study contained a humorous trait and is showed in Figure 3.19: two people are waiting for the bus and it is made clear that they are supporters of two different football clubs. One of the two is giving a cigarette to the other: this action is interpreted by the tagline "Encourage someone you hate to start smoking".



*Figure 3.19 Humorous advertisement against smoking habits.<sup>11</sup>*

As mentioned by Pedrini (2006:198), this ad is part of a campaign composed of several ads with the same meaning and the same tagline providing the same interpretation, adding some humour because of the relationship between the characters involved. Another ad of the same award-winning campaign showed a boy giving a cigarette to the policewoman after receiving a fine (Figure 3.20).



*Figure 3.20 Humorous advertisement against smoking habits.<sup>12</sup>*

This campaign is considered to be successful and won the Bronze Lion Award at Cannes Lion 2000. However, the reaction of the public is also crucial. In his 2006 study, Pedrini found diverging results: on the one hand smokers, that can be considered the main target of this kind of campaigns that are meant to push them to quit smoking, considered the humorous trait to be inadequate for that type of communication. On the other hand, the group of non-smokers appreciated the humorous approach of the campaign: this second group is also a target of the campaign, since it should prevent people from start smoking as well. It appears that people not directly involved in the issue are more

<sup>11</sup> Available at <https://www.luerzersarchive.com/en/magazine/print-detail/anti-smoking-society-15976.html>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Available at <https://www.adforum.com/talent/16851-david-barker/work/11803>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.



likely to appreciate a humorous approach, whereas those that are directly involved appear to prefer more serious approaches, especially a *fear arousing* language.

### 3.4.3 Humour in Taboo Advertising

A special paragraph is deserved to describe and discuss those advertisements where the object is a controversial topic or a taboo content. This topic was covered by Dore (2020), who presented a small corpus of taboo ads that caused some controversial reactions in the public opinion.

The first example provided in the study comes from H&M, the Swedish multinational clothing company. The company chose a black child to promote a sweater (as shown in Figure 3.21).



Figure 3.21 A controversial advertisement released by H&M.<sup>13</sup>

Although the choice of involving black people can be considered an inclusive approach, the association of the black child with the sweater *the coolest monkey in the jungle* reinforces racist prejudices and stereotypes on black people. If we observe the sweater alone, the text can be considered to be humorous, since it is a modification of the expression “cheeky monkey” and since ‘coolest’ has positive connotations (Dore 2020:106). However, the combination of that text with the non-textual element of the black child converted it into a taboo ad. The reaction to this ad was harsh and the ad was removed from the website. The company apologized for this ad, stating that the association was unintended and that the ad was addressed to some European markets only (Dore 2020). Anyway, it should be observed that the text on the sweater is written in English, and that the image was uploaded on the company’s website, where geographical borders barely exist.

Race and ethnicity are not the only taboo topic that happened to be included in ads. The sexual sphere is also highly exploited. As explained by Dore (2020:102), in 2006 the Italian company

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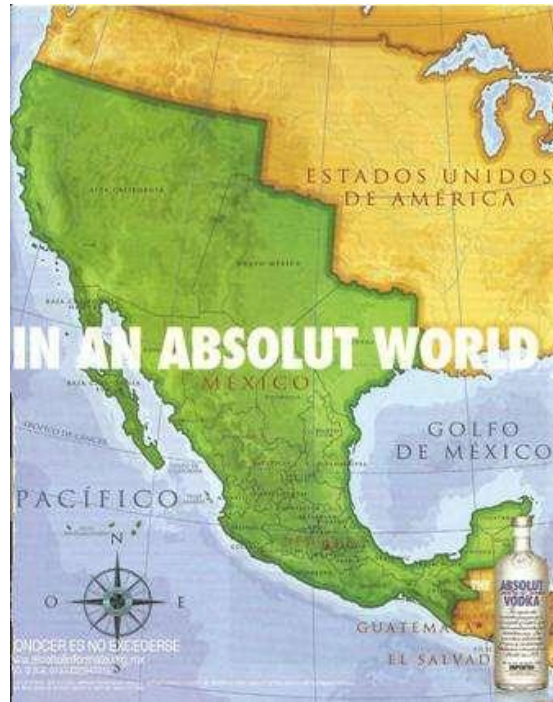
<sup>13</sup> Available at <https://www.insider.com/hm-coolest-monkey-sweatshirt-apology-reactions-2018-1>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

Amica Chips, that produces crisps, released a commercial starring Rocco Siffredi, a well-known porn actor. In the commercial he eats potato chips while at a pool party with several young and beautiful women. The sentences “I’ve tried many chips [in Italian, *patatine*] in my life” or “I’ve tried them all: German, English, Dutch... but none of them are like this one” acquire a double meaning because pronounced by that person. As explained by Dore (ibid.), “the verbal taboo reference plays on the Italian word *patata* (‘potato’) and, by extension, *patatina* (‘chips’), used to refer to female genitalia”. The combination of images, sound and text contributes to the ambiguous interpretation of the ad. Interestingly, the ad caused controversial reactions among the audience but it was not cancelled and the company did not apologize for this commercial. The reason for this is that the ambiguous reading of the commercial is confirmed by the references that the Italian adult public automatically adds when watching the commercial. The ad was not considered to be offensive, as children or people unaware of the role of Rocco Siffredi would not perceive the sexual reference. Another critique that was addressed to the company was about the offensiveness of the commercial towards women, accusing them of sexist advertising; however, the company defended the light-hearted approach of the ad.

### **3.5 Controversial and Unsuccessful Humour Campaigns**

Humour campaigns are not easy to be created and its effects to be predicted, and recent history is full of examples of unsuccessful campaigns using humour, leading to important and unintended negative consequences that might not be underestimated. Practitioners need to be aware of the culture of the target audience and shape the humorous traits accordingly; however in the era of the Internet, where geographical borders are progressively disappearing in terms of circulation of materials and ideas, some unpredicted reaction might still happen. Some examples of controversial and unsuccessful campaigns will be provided in this section.

The first instance of a controversial campaign comes from Gulas and Weinberger (2010:24), referring to the case of Absolut Vodka, an European company, and its campaign developed in 2008. In that circumstance, the brand decided to include humorous traits in its campaigns, since previous campaigns of the same brand had been appreciated and resulted in economic growth and increased popularity. An outdoor campaign was released in Mexico City (Figure 3.22), illustrating a geographical map of 1821, before the Mexican-American War and when Mexico still owned the lands then ceded to America at the end of the conflict. In this ad, the image of the map was accompanied by the sentence “In an Absolut world”, suggesting the desire and regret of better times coinciding with that specific historical period.



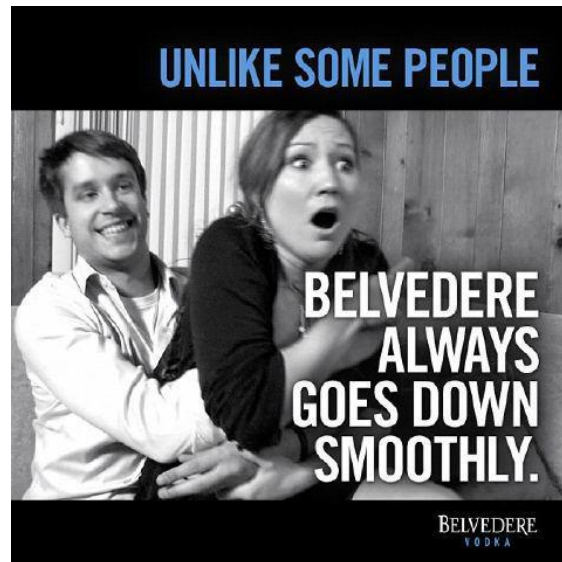
*Figure 3.22 Humorous print advertisement by Absolut Vodka.<sup>14</sup>*

This outdoor campaign obviously worked well in Mexico City; it was perfectly studied and addressed to the Mexican population. However, this outdoor campaign unpredictably reached America as well, and the reaction was completely opposite. At the end of the day, because of its political connotation, this campaign led to economic benefits in Mexico, but caused damages to the attitude towards the brand on the American market.

Another brand producing vodka, the Polish company Belvedere Vodka, released an ad in 2012 that was highly attacked and resulted in economic damages for the company. The print is showed in Figure 3.23.

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<sup>14</sup> Available at <https://www.chron.com/opinion/outlook/article/Absolut-Vodka-s-ad-map-points-to-past-1791034.php>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.



*Figure 3.23 Humorous advertisement by Belvedere Vodka.<sup>15</sup>*

In this case the sentence “unlike some people Belvedere always goes down smoothly” could be interpreted in several ways, with ‘going down’ being a polysemous phrasal verb; however, its sexual connotation is confirmed by the image, portraying a woman trying to get away from the man who is retaining her. As predictable, the allusion to rape and sexual consent raised outrage and rage among the public opinion. This is a clear example of unsuccessful use of humour in advertising, since social values need to be treated with caution, especially those values about which people are more sensitive.

Another example of unsuccessful humorous campaign comes from the fashion field: in 2018 Dolce&Gabbana released a series of commercials in which a Chinese woman was trying to eat traditional Italian food using traditional Chinese chopsticks (Figure 3.24).

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<sup>15</sup> Available at <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/industry-news/marketing/belvedere-vodka-ad-sparks-outrage/article535652/>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.



Figure 3.24 Frame of a humorous advertisement by Dolce&Gabbana in 2018.<sup>16</sup>

These commercials were meant to promote a fashion event in Shanghai, which was cancelled after the reactions to them. Dolce&Gabbana was accused of racism and mischiefousness since the setting is deeply constructed around the stereotyped European perception of China and Chinese people and since the off-screen voice asks the woman whether the *cannolo* is too big for her, interpreted as a sexual offense to the whole country. The consequences of the reception of this ad were not limited to the brand, but involved the woman herself, who was accused of betraying her country: her career as model and actress appeared to be at risk after accepting to participate in these commercials.

Moreover, it may happen to commercials and print ads to be banned: if applied to humour this circumstance may occur when the ad provides an interpretation of reality, or present something that could offend the target audience. This is the case of several commercials and print ads by the Swedish multinational IKEA: in the past few years the company published some commercials that were banned as they were considered potentially offensive. Indeed, these commercials presented situations that are problematic in nowadays society followed by the slogan “Tidy up”, in order to promote the company solutions: a woman stabbed by a man with a fork and a child playing with his toys and a vibrator are just two instances of representations that involve delicate spheres of our society. Even if the humorous trait is present, it does not distract from those allusions that could be problematic for the target audience and that could cause economic damages to the market of the company. In Italy, the print ad showed in Figure 3.25 was banned.

<sup>16</sup> Available at <https://www.insidemarketing.it/dolce-e-gabbana-in-cina-polemiche/>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

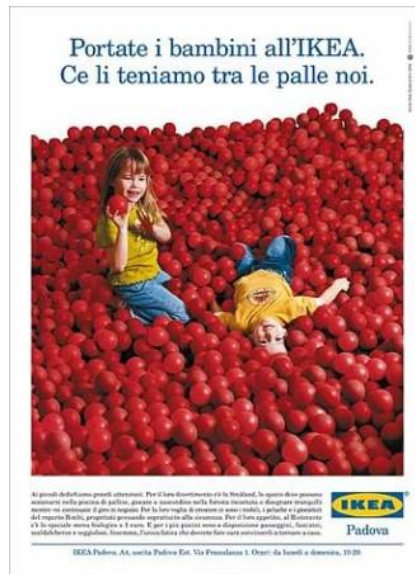


Figure 3.25 Banned advertisement from IKEA.<sup>17</sup>

This ad shows two children playing in a balls pit, clearly referring to the room where parents can leave their children while doing their shopping at IKEA. However, the slogan “Ce li teniamo tra le palle noi” (literally *we keep them in our balls*, meaning *we’ll take care of them* as if children were a burden) is a humorous attempt to invite people taking their children at IKEA and leaving them in that room, so that they will take care of them while their parents are doing their shopping: the association between *palle* (balls) and the image of children playing in a balls pit creates a sort of pun that could generate humour. The problem is that it associates children to a weight to be freed of, and this is socially unacceptable in our culture that is deeply engaged with children care.

These examples show how important is to know and keep in mind the target audience, with their culture and values, but also the nature of the product that is being promoted.

<sup>17</sup> Available at <https://www.mediterraneanonline.eu/lumorismo-come-forma-di-marketing-pubblicitario/>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

## Chapter 4 Internationalisation and Translation in Advertising

This chapter discusses the translation of advertisements, specifically focusing on humorous ads. First, a general overview on the role of translators in advertising will be provided; second, a thorough description of internationalisation and translation in advertising will be presented. In this chapter the focus will be on the translation of Business-to-Consumer (B2C) advertisements.

### 4.1 The Role of Translators in the Advertising Domain

Throughout history, translators have had a fundamental role in terms of circulation of ideas and texts. Similarly, translators can make a difference in the outcome of a campaign. Although they are not always considered as specialized texts, advertisements are cultural sensitive elements and there are more than just linguistic components to be translated. However, many companies are more likely to employ local copywriters than translators in order to adapt their ads to foreign markets. This tendency is mainly due to the fact that translators are often perceived as useless and a waste of funds in this specific field (Ho 2004:223). This misperception of the role of the translator, along with the errors made by less competent translators in the past, contributed to the decreased probability for a company to recur to professional translators in order to make an ad available for a foreign market (Ho 2004:238).

There are of course some exceptions that go against the grain, and translation agencies may be asked to translate an advertising text. Therefore, the translation agency needs to rely on translators with specific competences, including but not limited to the linguistic skills. Advertising and promotional translators have to demonstrate (Torresi 2010:8):

- agility, in order to recognize functions and purposes of the source text and to reproduce them in the target text;
- persuasiveness, which is obtained through an emotional and evocative style;
- creativity;
- awareness of laws and restrictions in the target country.

Moreover, because translating promotional involves the awareness of cross-cultural aspects belonging to the target audience, *localization*, *adaptation* and *trans-creation* are also terms that can be used to describe this process (ibid.).

When being assigned a translation of a text belonging to this specific domain, there are some tools that may be useful to the translator in order to provide the best version possible. The first tool is represented by the text to be translated: it may seem trivial, but reading the source text provides

some information on the register and features that could (or should, this depends on the client's requests) be present in the translated text as well. Another noteworthy tool is represented by the other elements composing the ad, namely the visual elements (Torresi 2010:11) but also sounds and voices. Finally, the most revealing tool for a translator in this field appears to be the *brief*, which could be provided by the client or requested by the translator or the translation agency.

An example of this specific document is provided here below:

1. The translated text will be circulated (please tick all relevant options):
  - as a brochure
  - as a leaflet/flier
  - as (part of) a website
  - via e-mail or snail mail
  - on the product's package
  - at trade fairs
  - in the press (title of publication/s \_\_\_\_\_)
  - it is the script for a TV commercial to be broadcast on channel/s \_\_\_\_\_
  - it is the script for a radio commercial to be broadcast on station/s \_\_\_\_\_
  - other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
2. What group(s) of people do you wish to reach and persuade? Please provide age range; nationality; gender; level of education; employment; degree of specialization with respect to the product/service; whether they are end-consumers/end-users, companies/organizations working in your field of activity, or companies/organizations working in other fields; any other relevant details.
3. Please list the brand values, corporate identity, and product/service image you wish to be conveyed in the translated text.
4. Please put an X where you would like to see your company/organization located on the following scales:
  - a. Degree of authoritativeness  
Min. \_\_\_\_\_ Max.
  - b. Degree of proximity to the customer/user/public  
Min. \_\_\_\_\_ Max.
  - c. Degree of deference towards the customer/user/public  
Min. \_\_\_\_\_ Max.



5. What kind of effect(s) do you wish the translated text to have on the target group? Please provide full details and be as precise as possible.
6. Please enclose all visuals and other material that will accompany the translated text, or at least samples or descriptions of the final form it will have (e.g., for printed texts: layout, fonts, and colours to be used; for TV/radio commercials: music, sound effects, description of action, camera movements, etc.)

(Torresi 2010: 10-11)

This model could obviously be adapted to each circumstance, for instance including an item for social media advertising. What is important in this document is the perspective that is adopted: the translator is not only the person that provides the text written in the target language; the translator becomes part of the process. The awareness of non-linguistic elements such as the target audience of the advertisement, or where the ad will circulate, helps the translator to make right choices and to provide a high-quality translation.

In this respect, the rest of this section will be dedicated to a digression around the concept of ‘quality’ in translation. The definition of quality in translation has always been controversial: for a long time quality of translation was assessed in terms of loyalty to the source text. A crucial step in defining what is meant with ‘quality’ in translation nowadays is represented by the Skopos theory (or Skopostheorie), which was first suggested by Hans Josef Vermeer in 1978. This theory radically changed the approach and the perspective of translation studies that used to focus on the textual transfer and equivalence only. This theory suggested the adoption of another angle that had not been taken into account before: the addressee. According to this theory, quality in translation reflects the contents of the source text but it should also consider the addressee of the translation. If until then the source text was considered to be the authoritative voice, from that moment on the aim was to dethrone the source text (Reiß and Vermeer 1984:126). Skopos theory, like other functionalist approaches, can be applied to advertising translation. Reiß and Vermeer (1984:137) themselves also believed that an ad text can be considered an authentic advertisement only when it is produced, read or translated in the target language.

#### **4.2 Internationalisation in Advertising**

When dealing with campaigns that will be released in different countries and in different languages, practitioners seem to take advantage of two possible strategies (Papavassiliou and Stathakopoulos 1997:504):

- standardization;

- adaptation.

Both these strategies will be discussed in the next paragraph; what should be remembered is that these strategies are just two extremes of a continuum, and nuances of both could coexist in an advertisement.

On the one hand standardization is found: in this case the ad will be presented as it is in all the countries involved in the campaign, limiting the translation work to the literal rendering of its verbal elements (that are considered to be the most informative). This strategy improves brand memorability and recalls association even if the customer goes abroad. On the other hand adaptation is found: under these circumstances practitioners will release completely different ads that comply with the cultural characteristics of each country involved in the campaign. When dealing with adaptation, translation does not apply only to the verbal elements, but to the entire conceptual frame of the ad (involving, among others, the visual elements or the name of the product).

Therefore, the choice between standardization and adaption should be carefully analysed. Standardization is without any doubt the most affordable strategy for companies, but adaptation leads to many advantages in terms of brand recall in national markets and foreign consumers. An element that could intervene in the choice between standardization and adaptation refers to degree of closeness of two cultures; more specifically, adaptation tends to be carried out when the source culture and the target counterpart show completely different values. When translating under these circumstances, the translator should try to convey the same ideas and concepts (unless the client requests otherwise), using elements and concepts the target culture is familiar with and does not perceive as offensive.

Cultural elements, in particular, can be problematic to be translated. In this respect, the intracultural model might be helpful (Ho 2004). It applies some principles of genetic engineering to translation studies: according to this theory, source texts are made of 'genes' and some of them can be considered culture-specific. When translating, these culturally sensitive 'genes' have to be replaced with 'genes' that are specific to the target culture. The target text becomes a transgenic message that presents the same contents as the source text, but that is culturally adapted to the target culture. This approach explains tendencies, such as the Chinese practice of translating the names of foreign brands: interestingly, these translations always show connotations of luck and positive feelings, whereas names related to taboos or negative feelings are rejected (Ho 2004:227). If this tendency is

interpreted through the intracultural model, the ‘intentional betrayal’ of the source text (i.e., the name of foreign brands) is what makes the target text effective in the target culture.

Knowing the target culture and its differences vis-à-vis the source culture is the first step towards of an effective translation of an ad. These differences are more prominent when translating across heterogeneous cultures, as is the case when the source advertising text was developed in Europe and is translated to be circulated in China. Europe and China are far in geographical terms but what really makes them heterogeneous is that they do not share the same culture and history. Language and context have some obvious consequences on the way of thinking and the result is a different metaphorical landscape: for instance, Europeans tend to prefer an abstract thinking, whereas Chinese tend to think via images (Ho 2004:232). An ad translation provided by Ho (2004) explains this difference. The English source text for the advertising of a type of kiwifruit said:

This is the world’s finest kiwifruit. New Zealand kiwifruit.

Superior colour, texture, size, freshness, and, most importantly, taste.

(Ho 2004:230)

This type of language works well in Western countries, which are characterized by abstract thinking (Ho 2004:232), and therefore the ad is perceived as effective and is likely to have an impact on the product sales. A literal translation in Chinese would be possible and quite simple, but it would not be perceived as effective. Because of the tendency of thinking via images, the words *colour*, *texture*, *size*, *freshness* and *taste* used in the source text would not mean much to the Chinese audience, even if the Chinese are increasingly tolerant towards Western values (2004:231). Translating an ad should pursue the same effectiveness provided by the source ad; therefore the literal translation would not be the best option in this case. Following the intracultural model, Ho translated, or rewrote, the ad as follows:

This is the fruit from Heaven to people on earth - Chinese gooseberry from New Zealand.

Jade green in colour, a pulp as soft as crisp candy,

With a wonderfully sweet taste and a smell as lovely as the Chinese rice wine’s,

An integral whole with colour, smell and taste.

(Ho 2004:231-232)

This version adds many elements that were not there in the source ad, but that well adapt and represent Chinese thinking via images and the tied relationship between Chinese culture and Taoism (when referring to *heaven*). Another translating strategy that was employed was the rephrasing of the word *kiwifruit*, which Chinese people are not familiar with. In the target ad the product is called *Chinese gooseberry from New Zealand*, explaining to the audience what the product is. This strategy resulted in increased sales of kiwifruit in China (Ho 2004:232). According to Ho (2004:235), “to overcome cultural miscommunication problems in translating advertising texts, translators need to localize the original message to meet local cultural taste”.

#### 4.2.1 When Adaptation of Advertisements is Needed

Another recurring circumstance is when translation is useful in order to adapt ads and messages to a country that shares the same language but not the same culture as the original text: this is the case of English speaking countries that have their own cultural identity and present some differences that cannot be ignored when developing an ad. Gulas and Weinberger (2010:28), relying on previous relevant studies, showed how British and Irish people, together with Australians and New Zealanders, tend to prefer humour in ads through the form of wordplays, whereas Canadians and Americans are more likely to prefer superiority oriented jokes. Another aspect practitioners need to be aware of is that even if some countries may share the same language, the varieties of it may differ, especially in idioms and colloquial registers: this is the case of ‘she’ll be apples’, an Australian expression meaning that everything will be alright or ‘Bob’s your uncle’, a typical idiom that can replace ‘that’s it’ (ibid.); these expressions are recognized and fully understood in a country and not in another, even if they share the same national language. Another possible source of misunderstanding between countries speaking the same language is the sensibility to swearwords. It has been demonstrated (Gulas and Weinberger 2010:29) that Americans, Australians and New Zealanders use swearwords more frequently than British and this results in the British being more likely to feel offended and to be more sensitive to them. As shown by Gulas and Weinberger (2010:30), an Australian campaign stating ‘So where the bloody hell are you?’ was well-received and accepted by Americans and New Zealanders, whereas it caused some reception problems in UK. Being aware of these differences has a huge impact in terms of economic consequences of an ad and the attitude of the audience towards a brand.

As already mentioned, knowing the tendencies of a specific market and the culture of the target audience can have an impact on the effectiveness and acceptability of the source ad: this clearly has some consequences in determining which strategy to adopt. A widely known difference that can explain these differences involves countries such as USA and Japan: it appears that Americans tend

to prefer the *hard-sell* strategy, when the potential customer is directly addressed and the act of buying directly evoked, whereas Japanese culture would favour the *soft-sell* strategy, when no direct reference to the act of buying is made. It should be observed that the *hard-sell* strategy seems to be losing its appeal even in countries that typically used to exploit it, whereas *soft-sell* strategies, especially those involving the emotional needs of potential customers, appear to be perceived as more effective from a global perspective (Ho 2004:225).

Another important distinction among different cultures that could have an impact on translation choices is the one between high- and low-context cultures. This concept was introduced by Edward Hall in 1976: high-context cultures tend to communicate more implicitly, whereas low-context cultures rely on the explicitness of communication (Hall 1976:111). If this concept is applied to advertising, high-context cultures are cultures where much is left unsaid, sentences and tag lines work at the implicit level (Laroche et al 2014: 682); when it comes to humour, it is harder for a foreign individual to understand and appreciate the humorous stimuli, even if one is familiar with the language. The main factor is the context, and companies can exploit this trait to enhance humour. As an example, Figure 4.1 shows the post published by the Italian wine merchant Bernabei on their Instagram account on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March 2022.



*Figure 4.1 Post published by Bernabei on Instagram on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March 2022. The post is considered humorous not because of a wordplay or a joke, but because of its link with the Italian context of those days.*

This post enhances humour even if there is no explicit joke or pun. Italy belongs to the category of high-context cultures: what really makes people smile is the connection with the context; with the fuel price exceeding the threshold of 2 euros per litre, the company suggests that is more convenient for people to fill up their cars with white wine instead of petrol. This post would not have worked in

the same way, even in the same country, three months before, when prices were still low and this was not considered to be a problem. Obviously, if this post was to be translated and the objective was to convey a humorous effect, the translator would have to study the context of the target country and, if needed, to rewrite the text.

Instead, low-context cultures tend to use direct and explicit jokes (Laroche et al. 2014: 682). In this kind of cultures, one can grasp the humorous stimulus without being familiar with the context, it is sufficient to know the underlying language. An example of low-context culture comes from the USA or UK, where humorous ads are often composed of jokes that are independent on the context of production.

The difference between high-context and low-context culture does not come from a clear-cut categorization: low-culture and high-culture traits can coexist and appear under different circumstances; it is more a tendency that can be observed. For instance, the Italian company Taffo that provides funeral services (with a quite established tradition of humorous ads) published the post reported in Figure 4.2. This post is humorous not because of a specific context of production (even if a reference to the reopening of Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria is made).



*Figure 4.2 Post published on Taffo's Instagram account on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 2022.*

To conclude, adaptation appears to be desirable especially when dealing with countries that are culturally different, or that have completely different perspectives (such as Japan and the USA). Instead, standardization is chosen when the company wants to circulate the same advertisement in several countries with different cultures: in this case, culturally-sensitive elements will be avoided.

#### 4.2.2 Two Specific Cases: Country-Associated Products and Product Names

This section discusses a specific theme of translation in advertising, i.e. how to behave when the translation involves a product with a strong association with a specific country. Both Nederstigt and Hilberink-Schulpen (2018) and Laroche and colleagues (2021) appear to describe some prototypical situations that could be helpful to make decisions in real situations. Both studies demonstrate that the original language of an ad should be kept even in the foreign version only if the product is highly associated with that language. An example could be an ad of a perfume produced in France: the voice should be kept in French. The issue here could be to determine whether the target audience is familiar with French, but in cases of strong associations between product and country, what is said is less important than the symbolical function of the foreign language. In other words, it does not matter if the target audience will not understand the actual meaning of the French slogan; just the fact of hearing something uttered in French will activate all the positive stereotypes linked to that country that will be transferred to the product itself (Nederstigt & Hilberink-Schulpen 2018, Laroche et al. 2021). Another possible strategy to adopt in these circumstances would be to partly translate what is said in the original ad, and to keep just one or two strongly language-associated words in the original language. This should be sufficient to grab the audience attention, to enable the product-country association and to enhance brand recall. Another example of this kind of strategies could be advertisements for the car industry delivered in Italy with some German word.

An exception in this sense comes from English, which is a widely known language in most geographical areas of the world. However, because of its universal trait, English is not linked to a specific country, except for the association between tea and British English. On the contrary, English is linked to ideas, especially values of “modernity, youthfulness and global mindedness” (Nederstigt et al. 2018:3). As a consequence, English as a language might be used for those products that are not associated to a specific country, and this choice could be effective because of the association with those already mentioned ideas.

The same concept can be applied to product names, which are studied before entering the market: a quite common example of this process comes from the Italian company Perfetti with their product *Big Babol* (Torresi 2010:21): the company preferred giving the product a name that sounded English, because of the nature of the product (a chewing gum) strongly associated with America. Instead, a noteworthy case of adaptation is represented by Procter and Gamble’s brand Mr. Clean, with the name of the product being translated in foreign markets:

Mr. Propre (France), Mr. Net (French Canada), Mastro Lindo (Italy), Meister Proper (Germany), Don Limpio (Spain), Mastro Limpio (Mexico), and so on.

(Torresi 2010:22)

This choice might seem a waste of funds, since the English term ‘Clean’ is quite known everywhere in the world and since changing the name of the product can cause some difficulties of customers in recognizing the same product abroad. Nevertheless, this strategy can be explained as expression of a tendency that is appreciated by local customers, that is to say read product names in their first language. The name of this specific product is very informative on the nature of the product as well, forcing the translation to the same semantic fields: however, despite all constraints, a certain degree of creativity was preserved, such as in the case of the Italian version, which was translated as ‘*Lindo*’, instead of ‘*Pulito*’ for example.

All these elements are useful in order to make aware choices on how to make an advertisement internationalised. The next paragraph of this work will be dedicated to the translation of humour in advertising.

### **4.3 Translating Humour in Advertising**

When an international humorous campaign is released practitioners have to consider translation strategies: even if an ad may work in different countries without localization activities, it is demonstrated that companies relying on translation and localization devices in order to adapt their ads to foreign markets register an added value that can have an impact on the value of sales of the brand itself (Ho 2004:222). As stated by the author in the same study, “translation is not merely a linguistic and cultural activity but also an economic and social activity” (Ho 2004:223-224).

The perception of humour highly depends on the culture of the country involved in the campaign, and advertisements might reflect those cultural values that shape humorous traits accordingly. As reported by Crawford and Gregory (2015:571) different types of humour are found in different cultural settings: China for example is less likely to accept aggressive humour than Americans. The consequence in terms of humour reception is that Americans will appreciate ads where “anyone perceived to be different to the target audience” (ibid.) is somehow attacked in a humorous way. Consequently, a feeling of *schadenfreude* is elicited and humour is very well perceived. On the contrary, collectivistic countries would perceive this focus on the outgroup as a source of anxiety, and aggressive humour would probably be perceived as an attack. It is evident that a humorous campaign originally developed in the USA and introduced in China needs some interventions in



order to be effective in China as well. What seems to be always true is that the more two cultures share some elements, the less problematic is to translate humour.

A peculiar case in the field of advertising is the translation of puns. Puns are often believed to be difficult to be translated, because of their strong connection with the source context. Quillard (2001) studied the translation of wordplays in ads from English into French. In order to convey the same humorous effects in the target culture and language, some rhetoric strategies were applied to the translation of wordplays; this work will focus on syllepsis, zeugma and antanaclassesis, in agreement with the findings provided by Quillard (2001:130).

Syllepsis, which is defined as the use of “the same word in two senses at the same time” (my translation, Quillard 2001:120). With this rhetorical device polysemous words are a great ally in translation. What is important to note is that the interpretation and comprehension of the pun is on the receiver of the ad, nothing is really explained but associations are triggered by the interaction between images and text in the ad. A specific type of syllepsis is the zeugma, where the same word is used in relation with two other parts of the sentence instead of only one, and this can happen both on the semantic and syntactic level. It can be stated that text and image interact together in order to provide a specific isotopy that is different from the general one that would be understood without the wordplay: and this potentially elicits humour. In the example from the campaign by Lactaid showed in the image here below (Figure 4.3), the difficulty of translation relies on the homophony in English between *ice-cream* and *I scream*, which obviously generates a sense of humour if applied to the image of an ice-cream. This is of course a pun relying on the homophony between the two words, and it could be difficult to reproduce the same effect in another language. Quillard (2001) found a possible solution in French in order to maintain the same effect, this time between *crème glacée* et *crime glacé*, that is also a reference to the typical idiom of Quebec “*un crime de bon dessert*” : the word *crime* respects and recalls the English word *cream* (Quillard 2001:123). The one between *crime* and *cream* is an instance of bilingual pun (Chiaro 2017:22), since the same phonetic sound corresponds to two different words in two different languages.



*Figure 4.3 Humorous advertisement issued by Lactaid where “I scream” is linked to “ice-cream” thanks to the presence of the image (Quillard 2001:150).*

Another frequent rhetoric device used in the translation of puns is antanaclasis, when the same word is used in the same sentence but with different meanings and grammatical functions. A clear example is:

“Having breakdowns from copier breakdowns? Break down and call Kodak /

Votre copieur vous lâche et vos nerfs aussi ? Lâchez tout et appelez Kodak”

(Quillard 2001:131)

Translating this kind of wordplay is a job that demands a deep knowledge of the language and culture of the target audience, but also a sensibility towards collocational forms and a degree of creativity.

What is important to remember is that humour depends on culture but also on the individuals’ perception. Chabrol and Vrignaud (2006) prepared a sample of humorous ads and asked a French and Spanish group of participants to classify them in three groups, following their taxonomy, which included visée ludique, or playful aim, visée critique, or critical aim and visée cinique, or cynic aim (Soulages 2006:105). Interestingly, results were different and, most importantly, the categorization differences were not related to the nationality, but rather to individual characteristics. A noteworthy example of these different individual differences of perception of an ad is provided by the Triumph

ad, used in Chabrol and Vrignaud study (2006:146). In this ad, a piece of lingerie is placed between two pillows, and it can be interpreted as a weapon or a trophy, following the tag line “La saison de la chasse sera toujours trop courte”, literally ‘The hunting season will always be too short’. The participants to Chrabrol and Vrignaud study (2006) interpreted this ad differently, according to their own characteristics and perceptions. Experts had classed this ad in the group of ads characterized by a playful aim, whereas some participants classed it as a cynic instance, others as a critical one. Some participants felt offended because they interpreted the piece of underwear as the symbol of submission of women; others thought that the piece of underwear was a weapon to hunt men, therefore placing the woman in a position of superiority. The same ambiguity occurred with many other ads in the sample of the same study, and this element should make us reflect about the high degree of subjectivity that is activated when dealing with humour. Therefore, even when translating a humorous advertisement, translators should be aware that the success or the failure of the humorous trait will be discovered only when the ad will be released and people will actually see or hear the translated advertisement.

In order to help translators in their decision making, it is demonstrated that it might be safer to apply the humorous stimuli in an ad to those values that are not perceived to be fundamental in a society or a culture (Laroche et al. 2014:694). This results in people being more likely to laugh and smile at it, leading to a more positive reception if compared to humour applied to those values that are sensitive and highly representative of a culture. An example of these values might be benevolence in the US, social power in France or achievement in China (Laroche et al. 2014:695): these values are not identifiers of the respective cultures, and therefore the risk of people feeling outraged by the humorous approach decreases. Moreover, applying the humorous stimuli to universally accepted values is a safer choice in the case of international campaigns, since all potential customers coming from different regions of the world could recall the ad and consequently the brand and the product as well.

## **Chapter 5 Content Analysis: Humour in Beer Advertising**

For this study I decided to focus my analysis on a single product type, in order to control at least one variable (product-specific characteristics) when comparing different companies' choices in the creation of humorous ads. After considering ads for several product categories, I decided to focus on beer ads. Ads for alcoholic drinks often include humorous traits, but the specific choice of beer comes from its stereotypical nature: beer is usually associated with men, it is framed as a male drink, and therefore I expected many gender stereotypes to be included in the ads. In this section I will discuss ads released in different countries and at times by several companies. A brief outlook each company will also be provided.

### **5.1 Selected Case Studies**

After performing a research on humorous ads, some companies were selected. The companies whose ads are analysed in this study are international brands and advertisements were selected on the basis of their availability on the Internet and the researcher's judgement regarding the presence of humour.

Probably the company that has the most longstanding archive of humorous ads is Heineken, a Dutch multinational founded in 1864 by Gerard Adriaan Heineken. Heineken owns another brewery whose ads are analysed in this study, that is to say Tui, from the New Zealanders DB Breweries. Carlsberg is also involved in this study, since the Danish multinational owns the French Kronenbourg Brewery. Italy is represented by Peroni, an Italian brewery founded in 1846 and then owned by Danone, Anheuser-Busch InBev and, since 2016, Asahi Breweries. Quite recently, Peroni bought the Kozel beer brand, the most famous Czech beer. Other two companies producing beer involved in this study are the Danish Ceres Brewery, founded in 1856, and the Mexican Cerveceria Modelo, producing the worldwide known beer Corona.

Humorous ads were analysed and then grouped according to the object of humour exploited and three sections were created: stereotypes, intertextuality and social messages. Moreover, stereotypes are grouped in gender, ethnic and social stereotypes, whereas intertextuality is framed through specific, social events and sport events. This is far from being an exhaustive categorization, and it is not a clear-cut division of advertisements: for instance, there can be advertisements dealing with social events and still exploiting stereotypes; the categorization was drawn according to the most evident trait in each advertisement. The period of time in which the ads were distributed was also taken note of, as well as the country in which each advertisement was released (when they were not international ads).

A translation perspective was also adopted during the analysis of these advertisements, providing insights about translation strategies that were or could be implemented and potential issues in terms of cultural transfer. All the translations suggested are in Italian, since – as already mentioned in the previous sections of this work – a deep knowledge of language and culture is needed. However, some potential difficulties in other languages and cultures were highlighted as well.

## 5.2 Stereotypes

As previously mentioned in this work, including stereotypes in advertising appears to be a quite powerful and widely spread strategy in order to achieve a humorous effect. In this section, beer humorous advertisements including gender, ethnic and social stereotypes will be discussed.

### 5.2.1 Gender Stereotypes

Until very recent times, beer has been associated to men and the male sphere of society, and this had a reflection on the ads. As an example we can find the ad from the seventies, starring Solvi Stübing, a German actress. The ad, that was also turned into a TV commercial released in Italy, showed the blond girl holding a beer from the Peroni company, with the tagline “Chiamami Peroni, sarò la tua birra”, literally ‘call me Peroni and I’ll be your beer’. This tagline could sound confusing and not humorous at all if it was not accompanied by the image of the blond girl holding the beer. The girl becomes the personification of the beer, since both are blond.

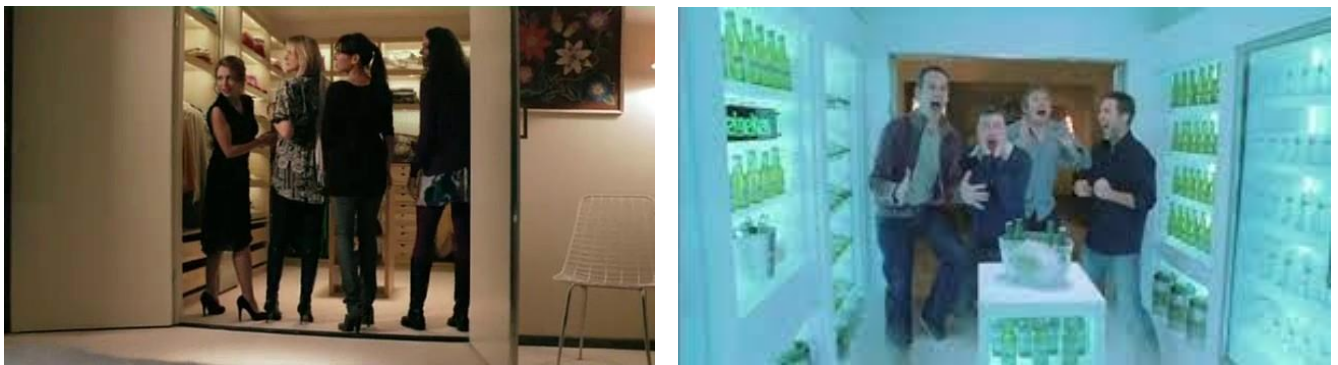


*Figure 5.1 Print advertisement by Peroni during the Seventies, with the tagline “Call me Peroni and I’ll be your beer”.*<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Available at [https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cultura/tv/2017/07/03/e-morta-solvi-stubing-celebre-per-spot-saro-la-tua-birra\\_82c92455-6450-406e-aecf-fd4c8fb7620a.html](https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cultura/tv/2017/07/03/e-morta-solvi-stubing-celebre-per-spot-saro-la-tua-birra_82c92455-6450-406e-aecf-fd4c8fb7620a.html), last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

Times change and probably today such an ad would be interpreted and perceived differently than fifty years ago. Nowadays women would probably feel offended by this objectification of their body, but also to be compared to a beer just for being blond. However, this advertisement could be translated in many languages and reach several cultures, since it does not focus on something purely 'Italian'. Actually, the same wordplay between a blond beer and a blond girl would work in any language that uses the same adjective to describe hair and beer, namely in English, French and Spanish. Since the entire ad is not linked to any culturally specific value, it can be said that it would belong to the category of standardization (Chapter 4) in from the internationalisation perspective.

Gender stereotypes are still being used in order to enhance humour in ads, but they are framed in different ways. For example, the 2009 TV commercial released by Heineken in the Netherlands represents a very traditional scene: a couple of English speakers are giving a party to show their friends their new house. At a certain point the camera follows the group of women: the female protagonist that shows them her new walk-in closet. They all start screaming in excitement but there is someone else that is shouting even louder in the house: suddenly the camera shifts to the group of men that are in a giant fridge containing tons of bottles of Heineken beers. The commercial was entitled 'The Walk-in Fridge', a clear reference and a 'male' alternative to the walk-in closet. Although this commercial was thought for the Dutch market, it went immediately viral, especially since what happens on screen can be understood even by people not familiar with English.



*Figure 5.2 Screenshots from the commercial "The walk-in fridge" by Heineken.<sup>19</sup>*

Gender stereotypes here are exploited to create an incongruity that could enhance humour and make the audience laugh. If the first scenes depicting the women comply with the traditional stereotypes around women and their passion for clothes, the scene involving men exulting in the same way transfers those specific stereotypes of female reactions on men. Men are excited in the walk-in

<sup>19</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1hYEKXE-4d0>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

fridge just as, if not more than, women are in the walk-in closet. Even if this ad reproduces a traditional gender stereotype around women, a first step towards overcoming it can be observed, since the humorous stimulus intervenes on men reaction, suggesting that there is no difference between the two genders in this perspective. What is crucial in this ad is that even if the message is humorous, the source of humour does not distract the viewer: the focus is still on promoting the brand, as it can be observed with the specific product placement of beers in the men scene. All beers have their label perfectly placed in front of the camera and this improves brand recall. Surprisingly, this advert does not show any tagline: when translating this ad, only the dialogue of the female group could be dubbed or subtitled, even if their conversation is just an introduction of what will happen later in the ad. From a translation perspective, the men shouting give voice to a common and well-established gender stereotype, at least in western countries, without involving any value specific to any culture; therefore, this can be considered an instance of standardization. However, it should be observed that this commercial would not be released in countries where differences between men and women are more culturally sensitive or linked to religion, or where women are not used to have a walk-in closet in their houses.

The same humorous structure was presented in many ads from Heineken in the same year and on the same market, starring different actors and depicting different situations, but with the same hilarious scene of men shouting in excitement in the walk-in fridge full of Heineken beers. The company went even beyond, and after that the audience had become familiar with “The Walk-in Fridge” narrative, in 2010 they developed another humorous ad to be released in the Netherlands<sup>20</sup>: a man is designing his house and asks for a walk-in fridge. After a while he enters his new house and instead of a *walk-in* fridge he finds a *walking* fridge, obviously full of Heineken beers only. Here the humorous trait is conveyed by the misunderstanding, but a degree of intertextuality can be found, especially with the last scene of the ad, showing men screaming in excitement as in the previous advert. From a translation perspective, this commercial could be complicated to be localized in other languages, since humour is elicited through the homophony between *walk-in* and *walking*, both associated to fridge.

Interestingly, at the beginning of 2010 in the UK, another commercial was released. Since Valentine’s Day was approaching, Heineken suggested “the gift for her that makes you happy too”<sup>21</sup>, which is the tagline chosen for the ad. The choice of the pronoun “you” directly addresses the target audience, that is to say, men. This integrated campaign (a commercial but also some print ads were released) was a great success, for its humorous approach. In the commercial there is no

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<sup>20</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gjAZ5esOBZw>, last seen on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

<sup>21</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdlDb74TwMo>, last seen on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

Heineken bottle at all: at its place, a ‘beer’ gloss. A woman is putting her beer gloss on her lips and, since it is beer flavoured, it makes her man happy too. Even if the product is not present on screen, it is evoked by the words ‘hops’ and ‘froth’. The humorous trait is also conveyed in the last scene of the ad, where the off-screen voice states “For a long-lasting effect repeat application”. This ad was translated entirely in Italian<sup>22</sup>: an Italian off-screen voice offered a quite literal translation of the original: only ‘beer gloss’ was left as such in order to preserve the similarity in sound with ‘lip gloss’, which is a word used in Italian as well. This campaign won two Bronze Lions at Cannes, a Gold at ADC and a Gold at International Advertising Cup of that year.

Heineken pursued the strategy of including gender stereotypes in their humorous ads, but in an evolutionary perspective. If the 2009 and 2010 campaigns reproduced the traditional gender stereotypes, the international commercial released in 2020 tried to reverse them. This commercial was composed of many scenes representing the same situation: a couple is sitting at a table of a cocktail bar and the waiter comes with two drinks on a tray, a Heineken beer and another alcoholic cocktail. The waiter takes for granted that the beer is for the man, whereas it was the woman that actually ordered it. The humorous trait goes even beyond the advertising of a beer, with the last scene showing a couple being served a salad and a dish with hamburger and fries. The waiter gives the salad to the woman and the hamburger to the man, but actually it was the other way around. Humour is also encouraged by the choice of the music in this case, since “*You Don’t Own Me*” by Lesley Gore plays in background. In this commercial the tagline is “Men drink cocktails too” and this could be seen as a dangerous choice by the company, since the tagline did not contain the name of the company or the product advertised. However, this choice does not harm effectiveness since throughout the ad the audience sees the green bottle of Heineken – and since Heineken is a widely known brand. The tagline improved and explicated the social message underlying the scenes the audience had just said: men drink cocktails too, and consequently women do the same with beers. The ad was entitled ‘Cheers to all’.

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<sup>22</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDK8ZGbEtc>, last seen on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.



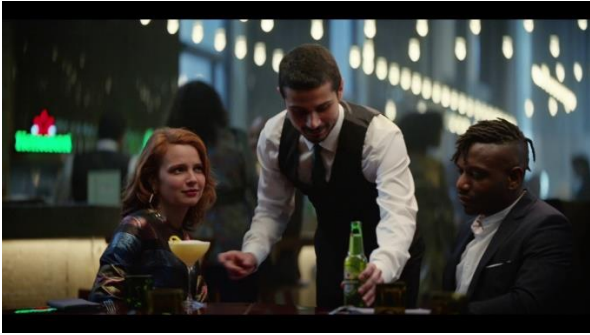


Figure 5.3 Screenshots from the commercial “Cheers to all” by Heineken.<sup>23</sup>

What is interesting is that the audience is left with comments and reflections about the automatic association made by the waiters ‘beer-men’, while the ad is playful and there is no trace of characters feeling offended by this association. This is an instance of subtle humorous effect, with the humorous trait being reinforced by the repetition of the same situation. From a translation perspective, this commercial does not appear to involve any element that could offend some cultures; standardization is once again employed and the translation work could be limited to the literal translation of the tagline “Men drinks cocktails too”; in Italian a possible translation would be “*Anche gli uomini bevono cocktail*”. However, the tagline was not translated into Italian and the Italian audience watched the commercial with the English tagline.

Another company that dealt with stereotypes in their humorous ads is Kronenbourg: the French brewery exploited the distortion of both ethnic, gender and social stereotypes in a global commercial released in the nineties and showing a sort of interview to several people, coming from different countries and having different lifestyles<sup>24</sup>. The questions are of all kinds, concerning their passions, but also their tastes in music and food, and the answers of the participants are all unexpected according to the stereotypes: among the others, women interested in astrophysics and basketball players passionate of ballet are found. The last question of this interview asks participants their favourite beer and the answer is clear: Kronenbourg. The commercial ends with

<sup>23</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dD6r53DWxwk>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

<sup>24</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEPdZ98ldQw>, last seen on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

the tagline “Have the right beer”. What is interesting about this ad, apart its humoristic approach, is the adaptation process that was chosen: the original language of the participants to the interview was kept, and, in the case of the commercial released in Italy, subtitles in Italian were added. This allows the brand to increase credibility and the feeling of internationalisation, but even more interestingly, the tagline at the end was kept visually in English, while the off-screen voice would play the Italian translation (“Bevi la birra giusta!”). Maybe this choice is due to the fact that, as stated in the previous sections of this study, English as a language in advertising is connoted with ideas of modernity.

### 5.2.2 Ethnic Stereotypes

Kronenbourg, the French company, released a commercial on the Canadian market in 2013 including ethnic stereotypes. In a completely French setting, the scene that takes place in the commercial, whose title is “The French Blah Blah”, is accompanied by the tagline, played by an off-screen voice, “No need to be French to enjoy Frenchness”. Indeed, the commercial is made of scenes where people holding a bottle of Kronenbourg beer in their hands are trying to speak French. The humorous trait comes from their meaningless utterances, just for the sake of sounding French. Sentences including French words recognized all over the world, such as “bonjour, bonsoir, croissant, je ne sais quoi” are meaningless if not used in the right context and with the right communicative purposes. Moreover, while characters are speaking those isolated words, subtitles appear on screen, stating “blah blah”.



Figure 5.4 Screenshot from the commercial “The French Blah Blah” by Kronenbourg.<sup>25</sup>

If this commercial was to be translated into Italian, a possible strategy would be to keep the dialogues in French, in order to preserve the association between the product and the country of production; instead, what should be translated is the tagline “No need to be French to enjoy

<sup>25</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdFBZD15PAU>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

Frenchness”, which could be translated with “Non c’è bisogno di sembrare francesi per apprezzare l’essenza francese”: the translation of this tagline might be fundamental for the interpretation of the scenes previously watched on-screen. Although this commercial was released in a country with a specific linguistic landscape, Canada, where French and English are both present, this ad could work well in any country, since it mocks people who try to speak French, without referring to any specific population.

Ethnic stereotypes were also framed by some Heineken commercials. “The Insider” was released in 2015 in the UK and, as the Kronenbourg commercial previously analysed, it reproduces stereotypes on Paris and French people. In particular, the commercial shows the protagonist grouping tourists in a secret location where a party takes place, while a French song plays in background. Ethnic stereotypes intervene when showing the group of tourists, that do not share French physical traits and way of dressing and therefore embody the idea of ‘tourist’ in Paris, as someone different than the locals. Moreover, ethnic stereotypes are found at a deeper level: the protagonist ‘saves’ the tourists from typical activities and setting of Paris: the cruise on the Bateaux-Mouches, the painter’s neighbourhood Montmartre, the attack of a group of white-faced mime artists. What elicits humour in this commercial is the way the protagonist saves them and takes them underground. The secret party also reproduces ethnic stereotypes on Paris, since tourists are involved in a typical can-can dance. Obviously, Heineken beer is always present on scene, at the secret party but also in the locations depicted in the city. From a translation perspective, this is an example of pure standardization, since not only does the advertisement avoid potentially offensive elements, but it does not include any verbal text or tagline that could be translated in other languages.



*Figure 5.5 Screenshots from the commercial “The Insider” by Heineken.<sup>26</sup>*

The same stereotypical connotations of setting and characters are reproduced in the Heineken international commercial, entitled “The Mexican”, released in 2016 and starring Ruud van Nistelrooij, a former football player and football coach. The scene is set in a traffic congestion, the protagonist is sitting in a bus and when he realizes that it is stuck in the traffic, he starts involving

<sup>26</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ILgAIVLAKU>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

other people and their belongings. Among the characters a band of mariachi and a guy transporting a TV on a motorcycle are found: especially the mariachi band reflects the common stereotype on Mexicans. Humour is not elicited by this stereotypical traits, but by the fact that all these are used to generate something unexpected at the end of the commercial: every action acquires meaning since all the stuff is grouped on the top of the bus and the television is used to watch a football match, an incongruity if we consider that all this takes place in a traffic congestion. The atmosphere is cheerful thanks to the Mexican playful and typical song playing in background but a positive setting is provided also by the visual features: people collaborate in order to watch the football match, and even some typical Mexican tacos are served. Heineken beer is present on-screen when they achieve to turn on the TV and cheer altogether, but the name of the company is written on the sides of the bus as well. Unconsciously the audience is provided with the advertised brand well before the beer is shown. Because of its international nature, the commercial depicts ethnic stereotypes about Mexican people, without risking to be offensive toward that culture or any other. Therefore this ad could easily be released on other markets.

This commercial is also an example of events sponsorship, a sort of ad in the ad: the entire story has the conclusion of people watching TV altogether, but a great importance is given to the programme that is being watched. It is not only a football match; it is a specific event, the UEFA Champions League. This importance is provided by the fact that the logo of the championship is depicted on the bus, but also that thanks to the camera focusing on the TV. Heineken is one of the sponsors of UEFA Champions League, and this trait was included in this commercial. Therefore, this ad is not only a way of promoting Heineken beer, but also to highlight Heineken relationship with UEFA Champions League.

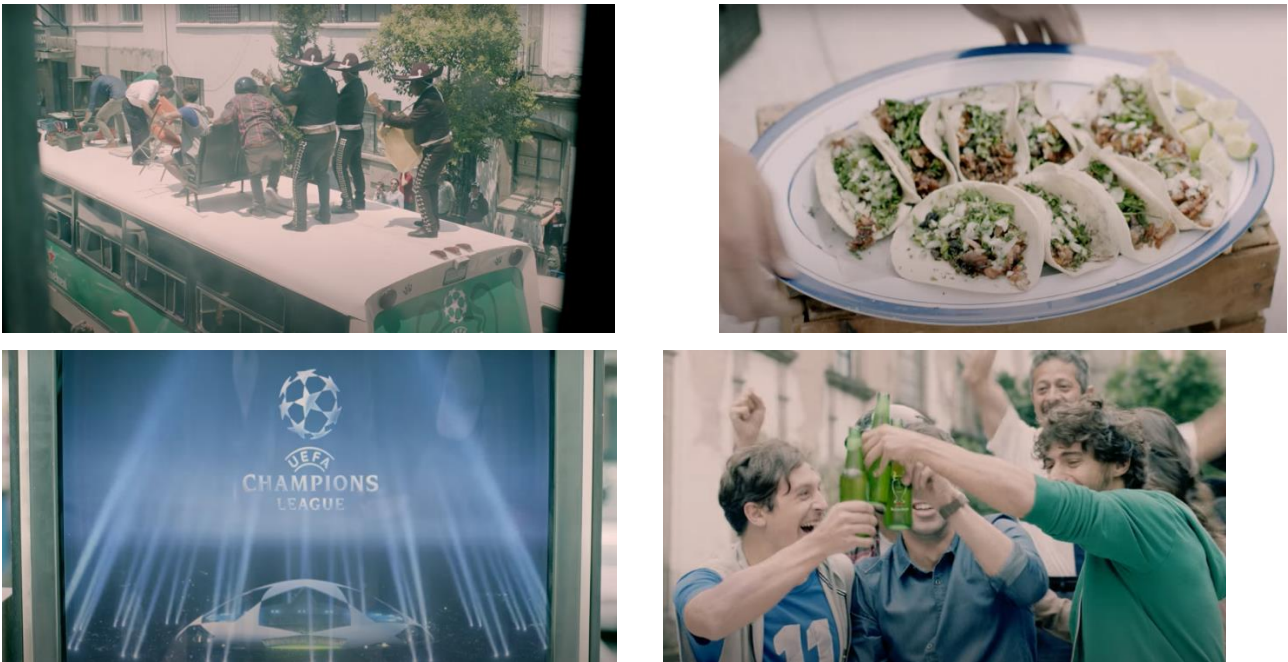


Figure 5.6 Screenshots from the commercial “The Mexican” by Heineken.<sup>27</sup>

In 2016, Kronenbourg released a commercial entitled “Ze Alsachiens” in the UK. This commercial lies on the assonance in French between the last part of the word *Alsaciens*, the inhabitants of the region where the beer is produced, and *chiens*, that means ‘dogs’ in French. The scene shows two dogs, defined as “the most intelligent ones in the world”, rescuing many people in need by offering them a Kronenbourg beer. Here humour is triggered by the assonance, but also through the visual thanks to the structural and content repetition, with several scenes depicting the same situation. These dogs deliver beer to people that suddenly feel better, but this commercial is also an example of companies starring famous people to reach the effect they want to achieve. In this case it is Éric Cantona who plays the role of the narrator and promotes the beer, talking in English with a French accent. His presence is thought to have an impact on the reception of the commercial, since people who support him should transfer, even unconsciously, the positive and optimistic features of the celebrity to the brand that is being advertised. If this ad was to be translated into Italian, a possible solution would be to dub Eric Cantona and inserting some French words to explicitly refer to the country of production of the beer. However, the similarity in sound between “Alsachiens” and “Alsaciens” would not be so strong in Italian, with the literal translation “Alsacani” and “Alsaziani”. Another possible strategy to adopt could be to keep the pun in French in order to preserve the connection between country and product and to dub Eric Cantona’s presentation of the dogs.

<sup>27</sup> Available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sb0\\_LsJl-dg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sb0_LsJl-dg), last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.



Figure 5.7 Screenshots from the commercial “Ze Alsachiens” by Kronenbourg.<sup>28</sup>

Eric Cantona had already starred in another commercial for Kronenbourg beer, released in the UK in 2013. This commercial tackled stereotypes against a specific professional category: farmers, especially hop farmers from Alsace. In the commercial stereotypes are both reproduced, since farmers are represented in their typical behaviours and physical appearance, and reversed, since they are adored, almost worshipped like football players. This happens because they are in Alsace and thanks to their occupation and sacrifices their land can contribute to the production of beer. Farmers in Alsace grow hops, which are the fundamental ingredient for beers. While “*We Are the Champions*” plays in background, Cantona explains what happens to farmers in that city. The humorous trait is enhanced because the description of farmers and their position in society does not coincide with what we would expect, but also because of the fact that, at the very end of the commercial, Cantona is asked whether he is a farmer by a young girl, and he replies that he is, winking to the camera in sign of deal. The tagline used in this commercial is interesting as well: “Taste sùpreme” merged the French “supreme” and the English word “taste”. This choice is not accidental: the word in French allows the audience to locate the beer in a specific region of the world, whereas the word “taste” is better known by foreigners as well and, when it is not the case, a word in English always leads to an idea of new and modern. As in the previous advertisement, Eric Cantona speaks in English with a French accent, and this helps associating the product to a specific country. In this case, if the ad was to be translated into Italian, Cantona’s presentation should be dubbed or subtitled, since the verbal text explains what is happening on screen. A possible strategy in order to preserve the connection between country and product could be to translate the tagline into “Gusto sùpreme”: the French word is similar to its equivalent in Italian and would be understood by an Italian audience that could effectively link the product to France.

<sup>28</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6dfiPq09uko>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.



Figure 5.8 Screenshot from the 2013 commercial by Kronebourg.<sup>29</sup>

The same rural setting is depicted in the commercial released in Italy to advertise Kozel beer, which is currently produced in Italy by Peroni. The commercial was released in 2021 for the Italian market and the scene takes place with a playful song in the background. The main character in this commercial is a beer barrel, being chased and rescued by all the inhabitants of the village after slipping from the back of a van. The final tagline states “Kozel, c’è un villaggio dentro” (literally “Kozel, there’s a village inside”), suggesting the collective engagement and involvement for the production of the beer. Interestingly, since Kozel beer is new to the Italian market, the humorous approach is quite subtle, but not exaggerated. Moreover, the focus is on the product and on the brand: at the beginning and at the end of the commercial the logo is shown, in order to increase brand awareness and positively affect purchase intentions. From a translation perspective, the tagline should be adapted to other languages, since it provides the interpretation on what the audience has watched on screen until that moment.



Figure 5.9 Screenshots from the 2021 commercial by Kozel.<sup>30</sup>

Another humorous commercial including stereotypes was released by Peroni in Italy in 2021 with the tagline “Se ci unisce, è Peroni” (literally ‘if it unites us, it’s Peroni’): many scenes suggesting the same situation are presented, and here repetition plays a key role in eliciting humour. Moreover, the audience experiences incongruities between the stereotypical characteristics of social classes and what actually happens on screen: categories of individuals that often are poles apart cheer with

<sup>29</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IVlozV5nPM>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

<sup>30</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EuBjTKHAnT4>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

two bottles of Peroni, instead of arguing as it would be expected. That is how the audience is showed, among the others and across different epochs, supporters of different football clubs, a butcher and a vegetarian, an orchestra director and a rapper, suggesting that Peroni can help overcoming all social differences and divides. The scenes are all set in an Italian context, and this could be a difficulty when adapting the commercial for other cultures as well: on the one side, maintaining the Italian setting could provide an association between the product and the country of production of the beer; on the other side, some scenes (namely the one showing Italian supporters of the Italian national team) might be felt as too much “Italian”, preventing other cultures to identify with the ad. A possible solution would be to delete that scene only, since the others involve more international divides (e.g., vegetarians vs butcher): at that point, it would be just the setting to be perceived as Italian, ensuring the association between country and product.

### 5.2.3 Social Stereotypes



Figure 5.10 Screenshot from the 2021 commercial by Peroni.<sup>31</sup>

Social categories are often the target of humorous advertising, and this is the case of the post published on Facebook by Ceres in 2018. The post includes an image showing two cardboard shaped in Ceres bottles and the tagline “Quindi, cheers ai terrapiattisti” (literally “So, cheers to the flat earth society”). The post is humorous because it transfers the beliefs of this specific social category to the bottle of beer. Consequently, if the earth is flat, also bottles do not have their shape anymore.

<sup>31</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ltgvaV8SI8>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.





*Figure 5.11 Humorous post published on Facebook by Ceres on the 29<sup>th</sup> of November 2018.*

This post was perceived to be humorous, but at the same time it sent a social value, since they were mocking a category of people, a minority, that does not believe to scientific discoveries and principles. Since the flat earth society is quite spread all over the world, this post could be adapted to other cultures and languages after translating the tagline.

In the same year, the New Zealander company Tui released an outdoor campaign in New Zealand that was not based on stereotypes around a group of people, but stereotypical behaviours of people in general. This campaign was entitled “Yeah right”, and all the out-of-home advertisements were graphically structured at the same way: the board had a black-coloured background on the left, and a red one on the right. On the right the name of the beer and the tagline “Yeah right” was always present, what changed were the sentences on the black section. These sentences represented some everyday lies that people say, pretending it is the truth. The reply “Yeah right” conveys a tone of irony, as in a dialogue: the board is divided in two sections as if there was a dialogue between two participants. The humorous trait is always triggered by “Yeah right” as a symbol of distrust in what is being said. Therefore, when someone says “I wrote you this poem”, the reply is “Yeah right” because the other does not believe at it. The same happens with “It’s not piracy. I have the CD...somewhere”, always followed by the reaction “Yeah right”. This campaign was potentially risky, since humour is not enhanced by the product and there is no image of a bottle of beer, but also because humorous stimuli are not product-related. Anyway, this campaign does not provide any image, and the logo of the beer is big in size. As an outdoor campaign, the sentence on the black-coloured board is probably meant to catch the attention of the audience that will then move their eyes towards the red-coloured section, where the name of the brand is clearly visible. The

repetition of the same structure of the ad and the same principles contribute to a better recall of the product and of the brand itself.



Figure 5.12 Instances from the campaign “Yeah right” by Tui.<sup>32</sup>

Some of these advertisements are humorous just because they present a situation in a playful manner, but there are some advertisements of this campaign that express some cynicism, or sarcasm: the humorous trait is useful to engage reflection about social values and human behaviours of our time.



Figure 5.13 A specific outdoor advertisement from the campaign “Yeah right” by Tui.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Available at <https://www.partisanadvertising.co.nz/advertising-blog/saatchi-and-saatchi>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

The outdoor advertisement that states “Let’s take a moment this Christmas to think about Christ” is a reference to the fact that many people love Christmas for the presents or for the meals, and most of the people do not think about Christ. This advertisement could be well perceived as a criticism to the loss of Christian values in the modern era, or a silly joke not to be taken as serious. There are other advertisements that are not so safe in terms of reception.



*Figure 5.14 Tui advertisements from the campaign “Yeah right”.<sup>34</sup>*

For instance, the advertisement with the sentence “If he wants to do ballet, let him” followed by the tagline “yeah right” suggests a gender stereotype, something that may not happen. Ballet is often associated to the female sphere of society, not to the male one. If a guy “wants to do ballet, let him”, followed by “yeah right” could be interpreted as a mockery towards those guys that actually do it. Men in ballet are usually associated with homosexuality, a very delicate topic nowadays. However, sensitivity and context change throughout the years and in 2018 this campaign was praised and achieved successful results in New Zealand. If this outdoor campaign was to be adapted for other cultures as well, a translation work would have been needed. In this case there are no images that could help the audience to interpret the humorous source; it is all about verbal text. In 2018, in Italian, the title of the campaign could be transformed into “Certo, come no”, and a quite literal translation of the billboards could be provided. Perhaps the most problematic board for an Italian audience would be the one about Christmas (Figure 5.13), because of the longstanding Italian catholic tradition. As already mentioned, maybe Figure 5.14 would not be accepted either, on an international level and not just in Italy, because of the increased awareness and sensitivity on gender stereotypes.

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<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*

### 5.3 Intertextuality

Intertextuality is often the key to interpret and experience humour contained in advertising: in these cases the audience needs to share the knowledge of the context in order to fully understand the implicit reference to other genres, and to other events. As already mentioned, this section will be grouped in specific events, social events, and sport events, according to which event the humorous trait is applied to.

#### 5.3.1 *Specific Events*

In Figure 5.15, a user coming from another country and not familiar with the European context would not understand why the background image turns out to be Buckingham Palace, the iconic representation of the British Royal Family. This post acquires meaning if we consider that it was released after that Prince Harry and Meghan Markle decided to relinquish their royal status, in January 2020. If the audience is familiar with this unexpected event they will understand why the term ‘corona’ has been chosen in the tagline, “Dopo un po’ la corona stanca” (literally, ‘after a while we get tired of the crown’), since the crown is the symbol of monarchy. However, there is another interpretation that reinforces the humorous trait and that made this post a humorous form of advertisement. A concurrent beer brand happens to be Corona, the Mexican beer: if we analyse the tagline with this second interpretation, we get tired of Corona, the beer. This second interpretation is reinforced by the caption accompanying the post: “Meghan, Harry, possiamo essere noi la vostra famiglia” (“Meghan, Harry we can be your family”), as if they had stopped drinking Corona beer and they were inviting them to try Ceres. Using concurrence in ads is not considered to be fair, but in this subtle way a positive reaction and humour are enhanced. What really makes the double interpretation possible is the choice of the font: the tagline is entirely written in capital letters, so that it is impossible to establish whether ‘corona’ refers to the crown or to the beer. Obviously this type of ambiguity could not be rendered in English for example, where “Corona” is the beer, whereas ‘crown’ has another spelling.



Figure 5.15 Humorous post published on Facebook on the 9<sup>th</sup> of January 2020 by Ceres.

In response to this ad, Corona (the company) framed the same event, that is to say Meghan and Harry choice to relinquish their royal status. On the company Facebook profile, an image was posted, with the bottle of Corona beer in the centre and the tagline “Solo alcune corone sono irrinunciabili” (literally, “only certain crowns are indispensable”). Again, in this case the tagline plays on the double interpretation possible to the word “Corona”, and again, the fact that all words are written in capital letters contributes to this ambiguity.



Figure 5.16 Humorous post published on Facebook on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 2020 by Corona.

The ambiguity is partially solved with the caption to the post, stating “Ceres, Harry e Meghan a questa Corona non avrebbero sicuramente rinunciato” (literally ‘Ceres, Harry and Meghan would

never relinquish this Corona). Again the company is playing with the polysemy in Italian of the word ‘corona’, but in this case a capital letter is inserted, making it clear that they are not referring to the crown, but to the beer.

Interestingly, both Ceres and Corona in this case generated a humorous post that relied on the knowledge of what was happening in the UK by an Italian audience. This is a clear trait of high-context culture (Chapter 1).

### 5.3.2 Social Events

One of the social most exploited events in advertising is Christmas: in 2020, Heineken released the commercial “Holidays As Usual” in Italy. Without involving any religious theme, since it might be perceived as offensive by some categories, the commercial depicts all the boring or annoying attitudes and elements that are typical of Christmas: among the others, people telling others how to decorate the Christmas tree and those that switch channels from a football match to a choir singing Christmas songs. It is interesting to observe how the general perception of Christmas as a cheerful and happy event is reversed by Heineken in this commercial as a source of boredom and annoyance. As in other Heineken commercials, the humorous trait is conveyed through repetitions of the same situation in different context, but also through the facial expressions of the ‘victims’ of these attitudes. Music is also crucial in this commercial, since “*You Make Me Feel So Young*” by Frank Sinatra plays in background. At a certain point it seems that music and the visual communicate, generating a humorous effect: when the song says “I’m smiling the whole day through”, the camera is actually pointed at a guy being forced to wear a Christmas sweater, who is everything but certainly not smiling. This general atmosphere of annoyance and boredom is reversed at the end of the commercial, where people are all cheering, obviously with Heineken bottles in their hands. The tagline offers the audience another interpretation of Christmas and of all the scenes of the commercial: “After such a different year, fortunately one thing stayed the same”. Basically, all those attitudes that people used to dislike are now appreciated, since the outbreak of Covid-19 had changed everything. It should be observed that this commercial does not show a Christmas setting typical of 2020, during the pandemic: at that period of time new restrictions were adopted by governments all over the world in order to prevent the virus from spreading. Interestingly, even if this commercial is dedicated to Christmas 2020, characters in the commercial do not wear any mask. In this ad the tagline “one thing stayed the same” appears ambiguous since it can refer to the general annoying attitude but also to Christmas as a recurrence where to stay with your beloved ones. The only implicit reference to the pandemic here is the tagline “after such a different year”,

and the hashtag #socialiseresponsibly that is present in all the commercials released during that period of time.

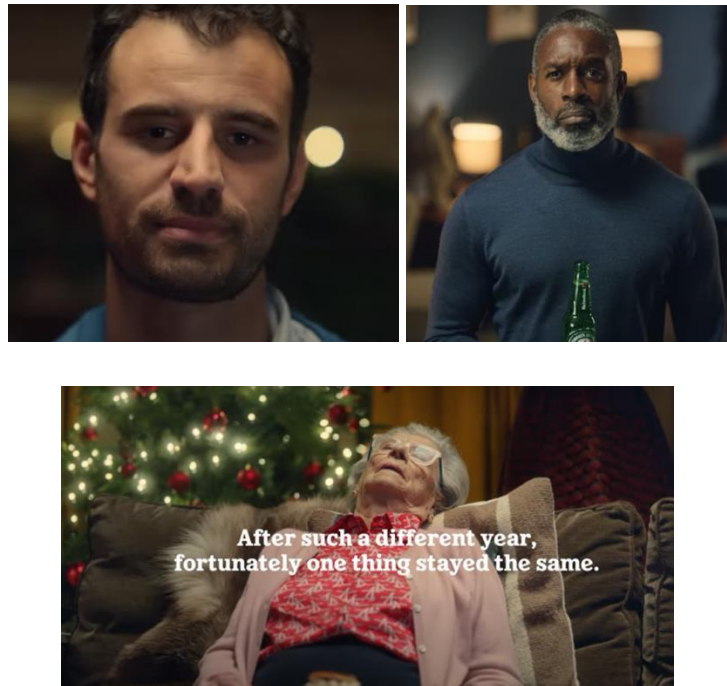


Figure 5.17 Screenshots from the commercial “Holidays as Usual” by Heineken.<sup>35</sup>

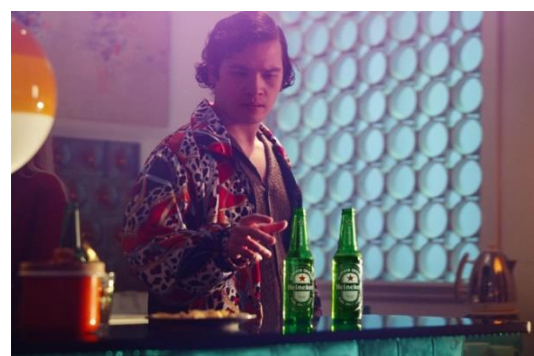
Even if Heineken bottles, the product being advertised, are not directly involved in the action, there are some elements that ensure the association with the product. Heineken has a well-established tradition of humorous commercials; this makes them easily recognizable and allows the audience to draw associations with the product even in those circumstances in which the product is less visible. Moreover, there are some characteristics that always recur, such as the font of the taglines, but also the last image of every commercial, composed of a frame with the logo only. Therefore, even if in some commercials it may seem that the focus shifts from the product being advertised to something else, this does not harm the general perception of the brand and product, since it can rely on a solid tradition and knowledge of the brand.

A fundamental social event that influenced our life is the pandemic. In 2021, Heineken released several humorous international commercials about the pandemic, in a moment where people were ready to laugh at the situation.

One of the most hilarious and better constructed commercials in this period of time is the one entitled “Home Gatherings”. “Perhaps, Perhaps, Perhaps” sung by Mars Big Bang and Octavio Rivera plays in the background, while people are participating in home gatherings, after a period of

<sup>35</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifphUWFdt0M>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

quarantine and lockdowns where they stayed completely at home. They are going back to their past normality, but something has changed: the fear of contagion, of catching the virus generates some situations that elicit humour. Firstly, the fact that no one wants to touch the doorbell, so they put in place many strategies to overcome this difficulty: someone uses their elbow, someone rings with a stick, someone else with their shoes, and someone else sprays the hand sanitizer on the doorbell before touching it. Difficulties of home gatherings are far from over: at the party, people are drinking from Heineken bottles, but they cannot leave them on a table or they will not recognize theirs and the risk of drinking from someone else’s bottle is frightening. Therefore, they start adopting some strategies to differentiate bottles, and the solution appears to be writing their names on a tape that is then pasted to the bottle. It seems to work, until two guys named Alex found their bottles next to each other and the strategy of the names does not help them. If compared to the previous commercial, in “Home Gatherings” the product is the protagonist, the source of confusion among the characters and therefore the element that triggers and reinforces the humorous stimuli provided by the scene of the doorbell. The international dimension of this commercial is understood by the fact that the scene is perfectly understandable by any person, at least in the Western countries. An exception could be represented by languages that do not share the Latin alphabet, in that case they would not get the Alex joke, but this is something that happens on screen, so probably the entire scene of the names of the bottles could be replaced by names written using the corresponding alphabet.



*Figure 5.18 Screenshots from the commercial “Home Gatherings” by Heineken.<sup>36</sup>*

The context of the pandemic was particularly exploited by social media that actually registered and increased popularity: people would spend more time of their day on social media to keep in contact with their beloved ones while in quarantine, or simply while staying at home because of the restrictions. Humour started accompanying the context of the pandemic in social media, and enterprises did the same. Ceres, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 2020, released a humorous post on its

<sup>36</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYHcqzLIuQQ>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.



Facebook account that can be considered an advertisement as well. The post was composed of a picture and the tagline with a humorous explanation of the anagram DPCM. DPCM was one of the most recurrent words during the pandemic, and it refers to the laws that were progressively adopted to prevent the virus from spreading. Among the restrictions contained in several Italian DPCMs there was the rule of not selling alcoholic beverages after 6 p.m. This was a controversial and highly debated decision, but Ceres decided to exploit it in this humorous image: D stands for “Dammi” (‘Give me’), P stands for “Presto una” (‘soon a’), C stands for “Ceres” and M stands for “Magarilaportoacasachesonoleseimenodue” (I’ll take it home since it is two to six p.m.). Here the humorous trait is conveyed by intertextuality, but also through the erroneous explanation of the anagram (DPCM actually stands for “Decreto del Presidente del Consiglio dei Ministri”) and through the fact that it does not follow the rule of anagrams: anagrams contain the initials of the words they are composed of. The last letter “M” actually is used to state eleven words, without including spaces. The fact of not including spaces has an impact on the reading of the words: after a moment of confusion, this strategy conveys fastness, as if the tagline was delivered in a hurry. And this is the case, since the person that is ordering a Ceres know that they have only two minutes left.



*Figure 5.19 Humorous post published on Facebook on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 2020 by Ceres.*

From a translation perspective, this advertisement seems to be an instance of adaptation. Indeed, the humorous effect is triggered by the erroneous explanation of the anagram DPCM; however, DPCM is the name of an Italian law only that would hardly be recognized abroad.

### 5.3.3 Sport Events

Sport events are also particularly exploited by beer humorous advertising. The most recent and international event in this perspective was represented by the European Football Championship,

UEFA EURO 2020, which actually took place in 2021 because of the pandemic. The Heineken commercial “Finally Together”, released in May 2021 in Italy, starts exactly from this context. The commercial shows supporters of different national clubs with a longstanding rivalry, cheerfully talking and helping each other, a weird attitude in such an event. Some scenes are presented among which a Spanish guy tells some Portuguese fans where to go and an Italian pizza chef makes pizza for free and gives it to a French supporter. In the meantime, “*The Barber of Seville – Overture*” by Rossini plays in the background. Everything seems weird but fine; one could even think that rivalry does not exist anymore, that people are just happy to support their national clubs again, after the pandemic. However, some plot twists clarify the big picture and refute this hypothesis. The information provided by the Spanish guy was wrong and the Portuguese fans get lost, while the French supporter finds “Forza Italia!” written on his pizza when he opens his pizza box.

In this commercial Heineken is everywhere: the camera focuses on the bottles, with a specific graphic design including European national flags created for this event, but bottles of Heineken beer and the brand Heineken are always on screen. It is made clear that Heineken sponsored the event and collaborates with it, as it can be read at the end of the commercial.

The tagline of this commercial is “Finally together, to be rivals again”. In these few words we can find the entire atmosphere suggested by the scenes: on the one hand the joy of being together supporting their national clubs, on the other hand those rivalries that never disappear but that can be exploited in humorous contents. From a translation perspective, since this commercial depicts different groups of supporters of different national clubs, without taking the perspective of any of them in particular, it could easily be released on the markets. What is important in order to preserve the memorability of the ad is that the audience national team is represented: since the commercial shows several scenes involving different countries and rivalries, it could work in other European countries as well.



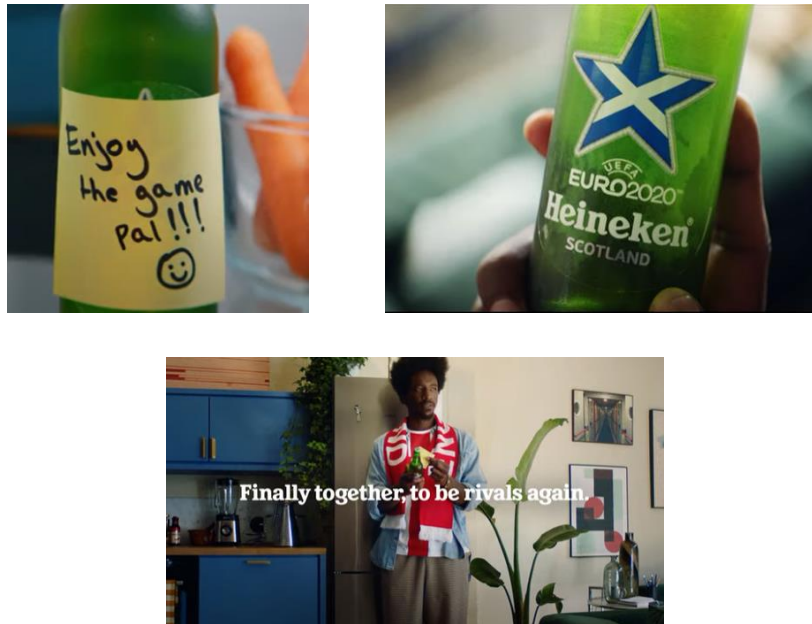


Figure 5.20 Screenshots from the commercial “Finally Together” by Heineken.<sup>37</sup>

Another sport environment in which Heineken is involved is F1. In 2018, a global commercial with the title “Perfect Man” was released, starring the British former racing driver David Coulthard. The commercial was launched in occasion of the F1's Heineken-sponsored tournament in Italy. “Perfect Man” shows Coulthard at a Formula 1 after party in Monte Carlo: Coulthard is dancing with a young woman with a red dress, and a couple of Indian people praise his ability to dance. Surprisingly, he thanks them in their mother tongue. Someone in the crowd calls his name and the audience at this point discovers why David Coulthard is so brilliant in conversation: he is wearing earphones that are connected to a team working with him and telling him what to say. They recognize the person calling him “Josh” and therefore David Coulthard says that name. Everything seems to work as it should, when someone of the crew says “Hi Nico!” to a person next to him, and David Coulthard repeat it while he is talking with Josh at a bar. Coulthard realizes that he was not supposed to say it and tries to correct himself: he looks at the bar and repeat “Heineken”, adding “two, please”. Beer in this case saves Coulthard and his team from making a bad impression, and the entire team celebrates this success. The tagline explains the scenes that the audience has just seen: “Great performances are always a team effort”. This tagline is also referred to the F1 world, where the race driver is supported by an entire team, even if he is the only one that actually drives. Similarly, even if David Coulthard is the only one that actually is at the party, his successful performances in terms of conversation are the result of his team efforts.

<sup>37</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Sxqrrr5JQo>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

Humour in this commercial is elicited in two different moments: the first, when the audience discovers how David Coulthard manages to recognize people and speak different languages. The audience would not expect an entire team to suggest Coulthard what to say and this element of surprise triggers a humorous effect. This first humorous stimulus is amplified when the misunderstanding occurs: Coulthard trusts his team and repeats everything that they tell him, even when this should not happen.

What is particularly interesting in this commercial is the use of subtitles. All dialogues in this case were written in English subtitles, with the exception of the Indian reply that is subtitled in that language and translated in the following line in English, so that even those unfamiliar with the language can understand what is happening on screen. The same strategy of comprehensibility is exploited when dealing with the misunderstanding and the correction between “Hi Nico!” and “Hei-neken”. Inserting the dash between ‘Hei’ and ‘neken’ reinforces the humorous effect because it underlines the assonance between ‘Hi’ and ‘Hei’ and between ‘Nico’ and ‘neiken’.

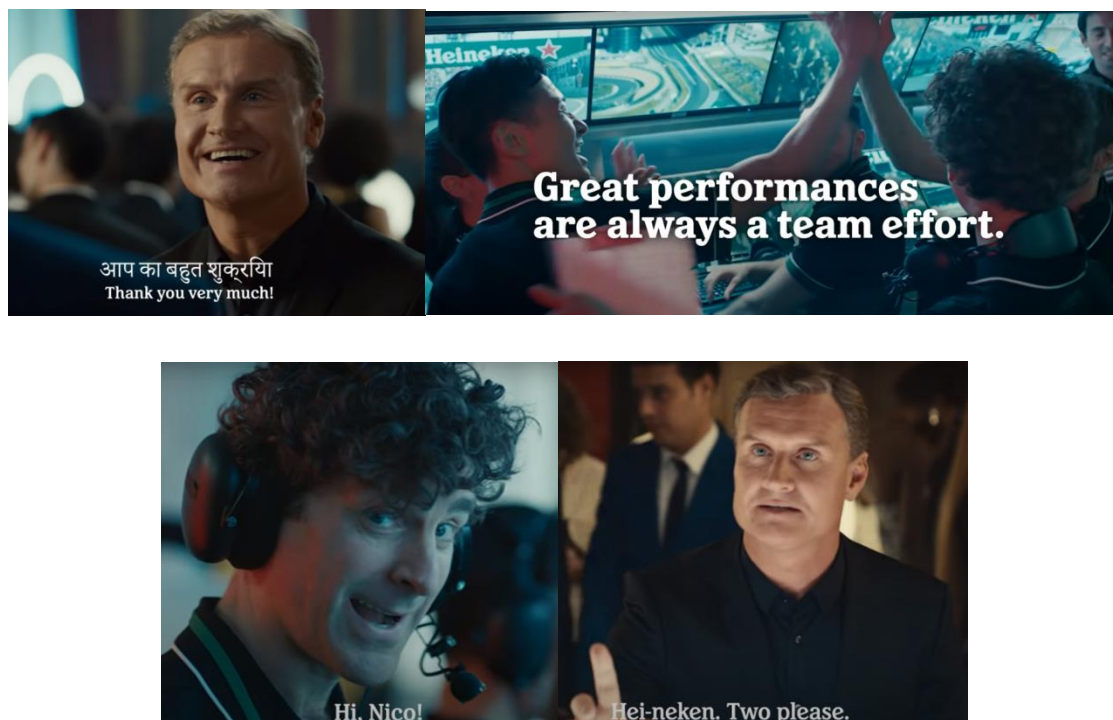


Figure 5.21 Screenshots from the commercial “The Perfect Man” by Heineken.<sup>38</sup>

This commercial is an example of accessibility as well: since humor is triggered by a dialogue, the subtitles give the possibility of experiencing humour to people that are not familiar with English or hard of hearing people. This commercial has an international trait, because every scene is not culture-specific and terms used are quite common and widely known. However, it could be possible

<sup>38</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SEcukKLZvgo>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

to translate subtitles in every language, but the focus should be on the retention of the assonance between 'Heineken' and the fact that the person of the team is greeting someone. Even if the commercial was launched in occasion of a tournament in Italy, and even if Nico is mostly an Italian name, the same humorous effect could be transferred to other cultures without any specific difficulty.

#### **5.4 Social Messages**

Humour in advertising can be exploited to convey meaningful social messages and promoting healthy behaviours. In the case of beer, the social issue that is the most directly associated with this product is drink-driving. Beer is an alcoholic beverage and its overconsumption could lead to dangerous situations both for the one that is drinking and for the others as well. Companies, experts and governmental messages have tried to raise awareness about this topic, and although some progresses have been achieved, there is still so much to be done. Heineken tried to tackle this issue in two parallel ways: on the one hand, they started producing a non-alcoholic beer; on the other hand they released some humorous commercials in order to deal with this issue. This choice was brave and involved risks, since it is demonstrated that humour can be interpreted as a controversial strategy when applied to serious communications and messages (Chapter 3.4.2). As mentioned in the previous sections, depending on the degree of involvement shared by the audience, serious and traditional advertisements are preferred when they deal with social issues, such as smoking behaviours. Heineken tried to reverse this tendency and applied humour to this kind of communications against drink-driving: they carefully shaped the advertisements with the aim of making people smile or laugh and, at the same time, influencing their choices in terms of product purchase and social behaviour. Marketers were cautious and developed the commercials so that they could not be perceived as offensive or as underestimating the issue they were dealing with: this is a complex objective that was reached through several strategies. The first and most evident one is the fact that drink-driving is never the source of humour, since that could have been problematic in terms of reception, considering the audience increasing sensitivity to this issue. The second strategy adopted by the company is to tackle this issue when advertising a non-alcoholic beer, as to provide a solution to the issue. Interestingly, a specific strategy was adopted by Heineken for the launch of the non-alcoholic beer, since it was a new product and the need of the company was to let the audience get familiar with it and recognize it. Indeed, it can be observed that commercials advertising this non-alcoholic beer focus more on the bottle: commercials advertising alcoholic Heineken beer can even show the green bottle only, since the product is already known by the audience and just the colour triggers associations, whereas in commercials for the non-alcoholic

beer the camera focuses on it and shows even the label. In this way, people can get used to the new product and easily find it on the shelves at the supermarket when they want to purchase it.

In 2018 Heineken released a global campaign entitled “Now you can”, composed of several commercials. One of them has the title “Parking”: a man is drinking a beer in his car, when a policeman arrives and is about to fine him. Suddenly, the man turns the bottle and shows the policeman the label of the beer he is drinking: it is a Heineken 0.0, the non-alcoholic beer produced by the company. This should prevent the man to get fined, but the policeman points somewhere else: the camera moves towards a sign of forbidden parking. Humour is not elicited by the fact that the man is drinking in his car, or by the fact that the policeman wants to fine him, since it is perfectly in line with the audience expectations: the element that enhances the humorous effect comes from the fact that the man thinks he is getting fined for drinking, and shows the label in order to avoid the fine; however, the reason why the policeman approached to him is that his car was parked in a forbidden area. The element of surprise is exploited here, since the audience does not know about the sign until the very end of the ad. Moreover, the humorous effect of this ad is also the result of an incongruity in terms of expectations: the audience, as the protagonist character, expect that he is getting fined because he is drinking beer in his car.



*Figure 5.22 Screenshots from the commercial “Parking” by Heineken.<sup>39</sup>*

This ad is particularly effective on an international level: there are no cultural specific references, only the US flag on the policeman uniform and the setting can suggest the American location used in this ad. However, the clarity of the sign of forbidden parking and the fact that there is no dialogue makes the commercial suitable for an international campaign. When released in other countries, what could be translated is the tagline “Heineken 0.0 – Great taste, Zero alcohol”, but this is not even fundamental for the comprehension of humour in the advertisement. Keeping the tagline in English could be a choice to convey a sense of modernity, since most people are familiar with English language.

<sup>39</sup> Available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNZCe3I\\_X7o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNZCe3I_X7o), last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.

In another international commercial against irresponsible drinking, Heineken humorously tackles the awkward situation in which those who do not drink alcohol always find themselves in: cheering with a non-alcoholic drink. The fact of cheering with a non-alcoholic drink is commonly seen as something not to do, and this is the context on which the 2022 commercial “Cheers with No Alcohol. Now You Can.”. While “*Superstition*” by Stevie Wonder plays in background, some scenes set in different historical periods are shown: they are all different, but there is always the same situation occurring, a character wanting to cheer with a non-alcoholic beverage being stared at and excluded by the others that are holding alcoholic drinks. The humorous trait is elicited by the fact that we would not expect people belonging to different epochs to reproduce this modern attitude. The commercial shows a time travel that ends in the present days, when Heineken has found a solution: non-alcoholic beer, that let you cheer without being judged and drinking alcohol. As in the other commercials advertising this new Heineken product, the centrality of the beer is maintained, whereas the alcoholic product is so well-known that advertisements can focus to other elements without harming brand awareness and purchase intentions.



Figure 5.23 Screenshots from the commercial “Cheers with No Alcohol. Now You Can”.<sup>40</sup>

Once again, humour is elicited through the repetition of the same concept and it is not triggered by a culturally-specific value, since people cheering with non-alcoholic drinks are mocked everywhere,

<sup>40</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftB76c1Dk9M&t=12s>, last seen on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 2022.

at least in Western countries; that is why this commercial can be considered internationalized and suitable for several markets.

One of the most exploited strategies by companies is the involvement of famous actors and actresses, singers, athletes, comedians and so on, in their advertisements. The idea is that the audience transfer their liking of that particular person to the product and the brand. Heineken exploited this strategy in many occasions, and in one of them a humorous commercial was released involving drink-driving. The international campaign “When you drive never drink”, or WYDND, was conceived in 2020, and many commercials were released to convey this important social message. One of them starred Keke and Nico Rosberg, two legends of the F1 that are also father and son. “Father and Son” is the title of the commercial, accompanied by the song “*Cats In The Cradle*” by Harry Chapin. The commercial shows the two protagonists spending some time together after the son’s race, and when they have to decide who is going to drive, they place bets that the father eventually wins. The same thing happens in several scenes involving different settings: the father always wins and gets to drive. The last scene takes place in a bar, where people are drinking Heineken beers. The father enters the room, sees that his son is drinking and therefore he knows he will get to drive again. When asked if he wants something to drink, the fathers replies “No thanks, I’m driving” and takes the keys. Suddenly, his son turns the bottle: it is a Heineken 0.0. The commercial ends with the son eventually driving.



Figure 5.24 Screenshots from the commercial “Father and Son” by Heineken.<sup>41</sup>

In this case, Heineken beer is the agent that helps the son playfully winning against his father. Humour is conveyed through repetition of bets with the same outcome and through the unexpected

<sup>41</sup> Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iN3pKkuYqtM>, last seen on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 2022.



win of the son, when he turns the bottle and shows the label of the non-alcoholic beer, as in a sort of plot twist. As can be observed, Heineken wants to convey some positive social messages and encourage healthy behaviour.

## 5.5 Discussion

As observed in the previous sections, beer advertising appears to often include humorous traits. Heineken seems to be the company that mostly experienced this strategy, but other brands are progressively exploiting humour in advertising too. In this respect, it can be said that social media provided a great contribution (see 3.3.2). After analysing the advertisements presented in the previous sections, it is possible to draw some recurring categories of sources of humour in beer advertising:

- stereotypes;
- intertextuality;
- social messages.

All these elements will be discussed in this paragraph. As far as stereotypes are concerned, this study shows how gender, ethnic and social stereotypes can trigger humorous effects in beer advertising. More specifically, gender stereotypes can be framed in a traditional way, exaggerating behaviours and preconceptions, as in the case, among others, of the “Beer Gloss” by Heineken or the Peroni’s advertisement that compares blond women to blond beer. However, the narrative of stereotypes can also be framed in a non-traditional way, overturning the audience expectations, as in the case of “Cheers to all” by Heineken. Moreover, ethnic stereotypes appear to be widely exploited in beer advertising in order to elicit humour: the difference between gender and ethnic stereotypes seems to lie in the playful and light-hearted narrative that characterises the second group, whereas the first one could be linked to social values as well. Ethnic stereotypes tend to represent positive stereotypes on a culture or a language, as in the case of “The Insider” commercial by Heineken. Additionally, social stereotypes appear to trigger humour in beer advertising: several advertisements include a humorous effect that mocks specific groups of people, such as the Ceres Facebook post against the flat earth society or the “Yeah, right” campaign by Tui. As far as intertextuality is concerned, specific circumstances, social but also sport events appear to be framed in humorous beer advertising. Specific events are quickly exploited through the real-time marketing strategy: in the case of Ceres and Corona Facebook posts about Harry and Meghan leaving the Royal Family, they were published immediately after this event occurred, so that the audience could easily recognize the reference to that specific event. Recurring social events or events that take place over

a longer period of time are also framed in international humorous beer advertisements, namely Christmas but also the pandemic. Sport events are also an established source of humour in beer advertisements, as in the case of UEFA and F1 Heineken commercials. Finally, humour in advertising seems to be exploited in order to convey social messages, namely the fight against drink-driving, but also providing solutions, i.e. new products, to tackle the issue (e.g., a non-alcoholic beer).

In the selected case studies, humour was elicited through the perception of an incongruity, surprise or wordplays, but also through the interaction between verbal text and other components of the discourse of advertising. For instance, the Heineken “Walking Fridge” commercial elicited humour in the homophony between ‘walk-in’ and ‘walking’. However, the humorous effect was elicited when the audience see a walking fridge in the room, knowing that the protagonist had asked for a walk-in fridge. This interaction is a powerful source of humour, but it can trigger difficulties in translation: if this specific commercial was to be translated, the visual components in this case would become a constraint to be considered when suggesting a possible translation in other languages.

From a translation perspective, it can be stated that most of the advertisements discussed in this analysis were not culturally sensitive; therefore, a standardization strategy had been chosen and the translation work could be limited to the rendering of text in different languages and could focus around the translation of puns, incongruities and jokes. Indeed, the humorous traits elicited by the visual components were applied to human behaviours and not to fundamental values in specific cultures. Nevertheless, there were some instances of adaptation strategies, such as the Ceres post concerning the DPCM anagram and the Peroni commercial showing supporters of the Italian national football team in excitement. Additionally, it might be stated that companies appear to prefer standardization over adaptation in commercials, whereas adaptation and a more “local” dimension seem to be preferred on social media advertising and outdoor campaigns. This clearly has some consequences in terms of translation strategies to be adopted when transferring the ad across different cultures: standardized products only need verbal text to be translated, whereas adapted products need to be recreated. It was also interesting to observe that international campaigns did not translate taglines and kept them in English: this choice was probably taken in order to preserve the ad recognisability across different countries; moreover, taglines involved simple and quite direct sentences that could easily be understood by people not familiar with English. Most of the times, taglines were exploited to ensure a specific interpretation of the advertisement, but there were cases in which the tagline provided a different interpretation than the

one triggered by the visual components: as in the case of the Kronenbourg commercial “The French Blah Blah”, the tagline “No need to be French to enjoy Frenchness” invites the audience to reinterpret the scenes of people trying to speak French. When these circumstances occur, it would possibly be better to translate the tagline in the target language in order to ensure the elicitation of humour.

## Conclusion

This work aimed at presenting some case studies in order to investigate the elicitation of humour in advertising and its translation across different cultures. The first three chapters of this work focused on a general and thorough discussion about the discourse of advertising, theories of humour and humour in advertising.

The fourth chapter was dedicated to the international dimension of advertising: through globalization and social media, geographical boundaries are increasingly disappearing in terms of circulation of material. Therefore, companies need to foresee unintended audiences and to prevent some unintended negative effects: translation could avoid intercultural accidents and misunderstandings. In this respect, two internationalisation strategies were discussed: adaptation and standardization, that can be interpreted as two extremes of a continuum.

The fifth chapter focused on the analysis of several humorous beer advertisements. Beer was chosen as the product to be investigated, for its stereotypical nature: until very recent times, beer has been associated to men and several humorous advertisements appear to play with this specific gender stereotype. The case studies selected for this work seem to confirm that stereotypes are one of the major sources of humour in advertising: gender, ethnic and social stereotypes appeared to be quite exploited by practitioners when promoting their product in a humorous way. As far as gender stereotypes are concerned, humorous beer advertisements appeared to keep evolving and finding new narratives according to the outlook of society: the difference between gender stereotypes framed in 2009 and in 2020 advertisements is outright; nowadays gender stereotypes tend to be increasingly framed in a non-traditional way. Instead, ethnic stereotypes proved to be framed in a light-hearted perspective, without risking to offend the audience: most of the times ethnic stereotypes involved 'positive' prejudices about a group of people. Finally, social stereotypes appeared to be quite exploited in order to elicit humour in beer advertisements, with some specific categories of the society being the 'victims' of humour. Moreover, intertextuality appeared to be a strong ally in the elicitation of humour: references to external events, whether they were specific, social or sport events, were exploited in several advertisements. However, specific events appeared to be framed in a humorous way mainly on social media: in order to increase the likelihood for the audience to recognise the reference to the external context, advertisements needed to be released within a very short time. As far as recurring social and sport events or events that took place over a longer period of time, such as Christmas or the pandemic respectively, commercials were created and released. Finally, humour in beer advertising appears to be exploited in order to convey serious social messages as well, namely to fight against drink-driving. In the majority of cases, humour was

elicited through the perception of an incongruity, but also through surprise and wordplays. Furthermore, humour appeared to be triggered by the interaction between verbal text and other elements of the discourse of advertising, namely sounds and images.

Interestingly, the advertisements that were analysed in this study were found at two extremes from an internationalisation perspective: some humorous advertisements played around neutral themes and could work in other countries as well, whereas others were specific to a culture and would not be understood elsewhere. However, in the material selected to the purposes of this dissertation, no advertisement would be remarkably controversial or offensive if transferred to another culture. From a translation perspective, there were some instances of country-associated products, where some references to the source language (namely English and French in the selected case studies) needed to be kept in translation in order to preserve the association. Moreover, the taglines at the end of the commercials of the selected case studies appeared to provide an interpretation of the previous scenes: sometimes the English sentences could be kept across different cultures and be understood by other nationalities as well, whereas in other cases translation would possibly be the best option, in order to ensure the right interpretation of the ad by the audience.

It would be interesting to investigate whether other products share the same features and to follow the further developments of humour in beer advertising in the next few years. This could lead to a clearer outlook of humour in advertising and its translation across different cultures, in order to raise awareness about the specialized nature of this kind of texts; because, joking apart, humour in advertising and its translation are a serious matter.

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