
Reading Multimodal Texts: The Analysis of the Influence of Colors on the Interpretation of Tourism Slogans by Polish Students

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Joanna Hardukiewicz-Chojnowska¹, Anna Pol²

Abstract:

Purpose: The research examines the influence of colors on the comprehension of multimodal texts on the example of tourism slogans.

Design/Methodology/Approach: For the analysis, two slogans of Polish cities have been selected and described as multimodal texts in which colors are used as a semiotic mode. The slogans were applied in an empirical study conducted among two groups of Polish students. While one group of respondents was presented a set of colorful slogans, the second group was asked questions referring to their black-and-white versions.

Findings: The analysis revealed that colors cannot be ignored in the analysis of multimodal texts, insofar as they significantly influence their interpretation. Furthermore, colors increase the advertising potential of slogans, which is evidenced by the more positive feedback received from respondents who were presented colorful slogans.

Practical implications: The analysis may be found useful for people creating multimodal advertising texts, insofar as it points at the relevance of the relation between linguistic and non-linguistic elements included in such texts.

Originality value: Multimodal analysis is still a developing area of studies. In the times when messages surrounding us consist mostly of verbal language accompanied by other modes, mainly visual, a linguistic analysis cannot be limited to investigating only the verbal component of texts. Therefore, each contribution to the field of multimodal analysis is valuable. Additionally, the analysis provides a comprehensive view on slogans, which in the common awareness function mostly as verbal texts. The analysis reveals that in fact a slogan cannot be treated as a monomodal text, insofar as only by paying attention to all the elements included in it are we able to interpret the conveyed message correctly.

Keywords: Multimodal texts, color, slogans, reading comprehension, creative writing.

JEL classification: L82, K3, K4.

Paper type: Research article.

¹Assistant professor at WSB University in Wrocław, Poland, joanna.hardukiewicz-chojnowska@wsb.wroclaw.pl;

²Assistant professor at WSB University in Wrocław, Poland, anna.pol@wsb.wroclaw.pl;

1. Introduction

According to common knowledge reflected in popular dictionaries³, slogans are perceived as connected with verbal language only. However, the present analysis will focus also on the visual aspect of slogans that shall be defined here as instances of multimodal texts in which both visual and verbal elements need to be devoted the same amount of attention in order to allow for the proper interpretation of the conveyed message (Hardukiewicz-Chojnowska, 2021). Insofar as the involvement of more than one sense in the absorption of the information increases the human ability to remember certain data (Cipolla, 2021), it is reasonable to assume that a good slogan promoting tourist destinations needs to combine a catchy phrase that would be easily remembered once heard and an attractive visual layer that would draw the attention through sight.

The first issue to be discussed with respect to the theoretical background of the research is sign, which in semiotics refers to everything that indicates something else and includes “words, images, sounds, gestures and objects” (Chandler, 2002). This approach to signs corresponds to a multimodal perspective on texts, which defines a concept that was traditionally related to verbal language only as being “a semantic unit: a unit not of form, but of meaning” (Halliday and Hasan 1976). Therefore, in semiotic studies the attention can be paid to various elements apart from words and sentences.

There are two approaches to signs that are considered to be the most prominent, namely the one represented by Ferdinand de Saussure and the second by Charles S. Peirce. The first approach perceives a sign mostly as a linguistic phenomenon and defines it using a dyadic model in which a sign comprises two elements: *signifier* and *signified*. De Saussure states that “a linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern” (1983: 66). The second aforementioned model of a sign developed by Peirce is, on the other hand, triadic, insofar as it introduced the third element, i.e., a referent. According to Peirce, “a sign is anything which is related to a Second thing, its Object, in respect to a Quality, in such a way as to bring a Third thing, its Interpretant, into relation to the same object” (1932: 51). Therefore, in Peirce’s theory, a sign is involved in a “triadic relation,” in which the three elements are *representamen*, *object* and *interpretant* (Peirce 1932: 141).

Whereas, as has already been stated above, de Saussure’s concept of a sign was applied mostly in a linguistic theory, Peirce developed a division of signs which can be used in the analysis of content other than verbal. According to this division, signs can be iconic, indexical or symbolic. In each of these signs the relation between the object and the sign is different, i.e., iconic signs represent the object they refer to by

³For example in: <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/slogan> ED.

means of the similarity to this object, indices refer to the object “by being really affected by this Object” (Peirce, 1932: 248) and symbols refer to the object by means of a relation which is conventional, arbitrary and not motivated by similarity or any other type of connection. Examples of icons in language include onomatopoeias and photographs outside the verbal context. Indices include words that point at something, like pronouns *this* or *there* or a smoke that indicates fire. Finally, symbols include words, such as e.g. *dog*, that denote the object they refer to entirely due to the convention and have no other connection with the objects in the real world or e.g. flags that denote countries (Moriarty, 2004: 230).

Both of the aforementioned considerations on signs made by de Saussure and Peirce resonate also in the theory created by Roman Jakobson. One of the most significant observations made by Jakobson is that signs can create combinations such as “symbolic icons, iconic symbols, etc.” (1971: 700). Additionally, written verbal signs should not be perceived only as conventional and arbitrary symbols, because they include icons and indices as well and their meaningful potential is strengthened by the visual layer accompanying the transcribed words (Saraceni 2001: 440).

In fact, as observed e.g., by Kress, Leite-Garcia, van Leeuwen, the world of messages surrounding people today is mostly multimodal, i.e., it consists of texts that contain “a range of representational and communicational modes which co-occur in within the one text” (Kress, Leite-Garcia, and van Leeuwen, 1997: 257). Following this observation, new methods of text and discourse analysis allowing for the investigation of all the modes involved in a single message can be applied, inasmuch as paying attention to all the signs and the relation between them is the only method which can give the researcher full understanding of the analysed stimuli (Lim Fei, 2004).

Furthermore, as Saraceni observes, “the semantic value of any written language (...) is not necessarily entirely contained within the verbo-linguistic meaning, but is also expressed, at least potentially, by the visual aspect of writing” (2001: 440). Among the visual elements that ascribe the additional meaning elements such as the size of the font or its style can be mentioned. Additionally, Kress and van Leeuwen point out that color is another aspect of visual representation that “means” (2002: 344). Whereas there are differences in understanding colors in different cultures or different parts of the world, there are still some commonly shared properties that allow us to perceive color as “a semiotic resource like others: regular, with signs that are motivated in their constitution by the interest of the makers of the signs” (Kress, van Leeuwen 2002: 346).

Won and Westland relate the concept of color to the model of sign created by de Saussure and explain that a given color functions as a signifier and the meaning associated with the given color is the signified. As an example, the authors provide black as the signifier and “seriousness or modernity” that are the connotations related to black that are included in the meaning of this color (2017: 50).

Kress and van Leeuwen, in turn, observe that it is possible to relate colors to Halliday's metafunctional theory of language according to which language fulfills three functions, namely ideational, interpersonal and textual (1996 in 2002: 347). As far as ideational function ("the function of constructing representations of the world" (2002: 347) is concerned, colors may "denote specific people, places and things, as well as classes of people, places and things, and more general ideas" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2002: 348). Kress and van Leeuwen provide several examples of colors fulfilling ideational function, such as the application of colors on flags, where they help to identify certain nations, or the expression of various ideas through colors that has taken place for a very long time and was manifested e.g., in "Medieval color symbolism", in which colors were associated for example with values, like white with purity and black with remorse for sins (2002: 349).

Apart from ideational function, colors also have interpersonal meaning. People use them to influence others behavior, e.g., to warn about something by using red or orange or to draw someone's attention by applying color distinction in a written text (Kress and van Leeuwen 2002: 349-350). And finally, colors fulfil textual function, insofar as they can help to "create coherence in texts" e.g. by repeating certain colors in different components of texts like headings or by applying "color coordination" for instance in computer programs where the selection of a given pattern causes that all colors used belong to the same color scheme (Kress and van Leeuwen 2002: 350).

Whereas colors can perform all three functions simultaneously and can be perceived as a semiotic mode, they also differ from other modes like verbal language or image because colors always exist with other modes, never on their own, i.e. they are multimodal and "can survive only in a multimodal environment" (Kress and van Leeuwen 2002: 352). Therefore, in the present article, the analysis of colors applied in tourism slogans will be conducted with the attention devoted also to other visual and verbal elements included in them.

To conclude the theoretical part about semiotics of colors it is necessary to refer to Peirce's theory about icons, indices and symbols discussed in the previous section. Caivano (1998: 395) observes that colors can represent meaning as iconic, indexical and symbolic signs. When it comes to the iconic character of colors, it is based on psychological associations that people have with certain phenomena, such as e.g., "oranges, reds and yellows [are associated] with fire, sun and heat" (395).

Additionally, as Won and Westland point out, iconicity of colors, as defined by Caivano, relates also to the fact that the relation between the given color and the thing it represents is based on the similarity to the color of this thing in the real world. As an example, green can be provided, which can be "an iconic representation of green grass" (2017: 50). The indexical character of colors, in turn, results from the physical properties of colors and their perception. Insofar as the relation between the color, which is a "sensory image", and the "physical

phenomenon, radiation” is not based on similarity but on “a physical connection, a neurophysiological response” of the vision system (Caivano, 1998: 396).

Furthermore, colors are indices also in a sense that there is a certain adjacency between them and the objects they stand for, e.g., a person’s yellow face represents the bad physical condition of that person (Caivano, 1998: 396). The last in Peirce’s types of signs, i.e., symbols, are characterized by not by the relation of similarity or contiguity with the object they represent, but by certain agreement or convention.

Therefore, colors can have a symbolic nature, insofar as there are certain meanings assigned to them irrespective of any physical or other features of the represented phenomena. An example of such a situation when meaning is ascribed to a color due to a certain agreement is found in football, where a yellow card stand for a warning and a red card for ejection of the player (Caivano, 1998: 397-398).

Taking all of the above into consideration, it is possible to conclude that colors add meaning to multimodal messages and as such should be devoted special attention in the analysis of multimodal texts. One example of such texts are slogans, which are usually defined as a phenomenon related mostly to verbal language. Apart from definitions provided by popular dictionaries, some attempts to define slogans have been made mostly in literature devoted to advertising.

However, also in these sources, the researchers focus mostly on the linguistic properties of slogans. One of the shortest and most popular definitions of a slogan found in research literature devoted to advertising states that “a slogan is a short phrase” (Murthy and Bhojanna 2007: 206). According to Murthy and Bhojanna mentioned above, slogans are created to “identify a product, brand, organization”. In order to fulfil its function effectively, slogans cannot be too long, insofar as this would make them difficult to memorize (2007: 206). The issue of the importance of slogans being easily remembered is also mentioned by Kristen Hamlin, who states that a good slogan usually contains no more than five words that form “catchy, declarative phrases”⁴ (2014).

To make these phrases memorable, their authors frequently apply tools such as “metaphors, alliteration or rhymes with simple, vibrant language” (Hatim 2014). Pavel Skorupa and Tatjana Dubovičienė (2015), focusing on linguistic features of slogans, point at the fact that in most cases devices applied in slogans aim at making them attractive from the phonological perspective. The authors enumerate rhymes, certain rhythmical properties, alliteration, consonance and onomatopoeias, whose function is to increase the attractiveness of slogans. Apart from phonological aspects, Skorupa and Dubovičienė mention semantic features of slogans which they associate with the emotional appeal of the created phrases. Authors point at the fact that depending on the connotative meaning, various words that seem to be

⁴ <https://smallbusiness.chron.com/importance-ad-slogans-31343.html> ED.

synonymous may influence the receivers in a different way, like the word “cheap”, which usually has negative connotations and “inexpensive”, which can be used in a more positive context (2015: 113). Additionally, the authors discussing semantic properties of slogans focus on personification, simile, metaphor, hyperbole, metonymy, euphemism, polysemy, homonymy and apostrophe (2015: 113).

Insofar as slogans are used with relation to various products and they differ depending on the context as well as the category of the brand, it would be reasonable to point at some features of slogans devoted particularly to the issue of tourism that shall be later analyzed in the present paper. Slogans used in destination marketing are different in a sense that they often need to convey many factors that contribute to a tourists’ positive response. Supphellen and Nygaardsvik (in Gali *et al.*, 2016: 3) mention social, cultural, economic and political conditions that need to be taken into consideration while creating a successful tourist slogan. The difficulty consists usually in selecting the most significant quality that would attract the visitors.

However, initially the purpose of tourist slogans was to inform local people about the situation in their region or country rather than advertise it among foreigners. According to Papp Váry and Farkas, some of the first slogans were created by making references to a kind of a vision related to the described location. For example a Canadian slogan, “From Sea to Sea”, was created in the times when Canada wanted to “expand the territory of the country from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean” and thus represented a vision rather than the real situation (2018: 22).

The function of destination slogans changed with time and nowadays they are mostly directed at tourists. Interestingly, such slogans are often not very precise and sometimes do not refer to a quality that is unique to a given place. “The heart of Europe” is an example of such a phrase that has been used to advertise many countries in Europe whose actual geographic location was not so much taken into consideration while creating the slogan (Papp Váry and Farkas 2018: 23).

2. Materials and Methods

The article presents a description of the results of a survey conducted among the group of English Philology students. The aim of the survey was to give evidence for a thesis that tourism slogans are multimodal texts in which color is an important semiotic mode influencing the comprehension of the conveyed message. The study points at differences in the perception of tourism slogans in their colorful and black-and-white versions. The group of respondents includes 30 BA students of the first year of English Philology studying at the WSB University in Wrocław, Poland.

There were 8 male and 22 female students, 21 Polish and 9 foreign, all of them with at least basic knowledge of Polish. The survey was conducted in the winter semester of 2021/2022 academic year.

In the study, a questionnaire consisting of 6 questions was distributed among two groups of students. Questions in the survey referred to two slogans derived from the Internet websites and selected in order to illustrate various nature of multimodality included in them. The slogans were created for two Polish cities, namely Gniew and Słupsk. The slogan for Gniew is simpler and consists of a caption “Opanuj Gniew” (control the anger) written with a blue decorative font and a blue image of the city landscape depicted in a slightly curved shape. The slogan for Słupsk includes a red name of the city integrated in the colorful drawing depicting the elements of the city landscape, i.e. a red castle, blue river and green trees. The image is accompanied by words “Więcej niż myślisz” (more than you think) written in yellow.

Questions from the survey were divided into groups referring to each slogan separately. The list is presented below:

GNIEW

1. Why does the drawing have a curved shape? What does it resemble?
2. What kind of a place is Gniew? Write 3 adjectives describing it.
3. Would you like to visit Gniew after seeing the slogan?

SŁUPSK

1. What do the three lines in the drawing represent?
2. What kind of a place is Słupsk? Write 3 adjectives describing it.
3. Would you like to visit Słupsk after seeing the slogan?

Data was collected in two groups of students taking part in Practical Grammar course in the winter semester of 2021/2022 academic year. The first group consisting of 16 participants was shown the colorful version of slogans and the second group with 14 participants was asked questions about the black-and-white versions. Both slogans were displayed one by one on a screen and students were asked to answer the questions concerning. Insofar as there were some doubts on the part of participants, after displaying the first slogan, the researcher needed to explain that the term *slogan* referred to the whole displayed stimuli, that is both to its verbal and non-verbal part. Students were not informed about the relevance of the presence or the lack of colors in the slogans in order to avoid influencing their answers.

3.Results

Gniew: Question 1:

In the group of students asked about the colorful versions of slogans, 1 person observed that the shape resembled the landscape and was matching the color. Other mentioned reasons include resembling a smile (1), a boat (1), calmness (1), flame (1), planet (1), banana (1), river (1), valley (1), landscape of the town (2). 3 respondents wrote that the shape looked unusual. 2 respondents answered in a way that did not refer to the question, therefore they were not included in the description. In the group presented black-and-white slogans, 1 person noticed that the lack of

colors causes that the shape was related to destruction and poverty. Other mentioned interpretations include: controlling anger (1), dynamism (1), aesthetic function (1), idea of the author (3), landscape (3), smile (3). One person responded in a way that does not refer to the question.

Question 2:

In the group of students asked about the colorful versions of slogans, there were 6 negative adjectives out of which *crowded* was mentioned by 3 students and the rest only by 1 student each (the adjectives include e.g. *unfriendly*, *chaotic*) and 22 positive adjectives with the most popular one being *friendly* (mentioned by 4 people). In the group presented black-and-white slogans, there were 8 negative adjectives with the adjective *crowded* appearing the most often (3) and *scruffy* (2). The negative adjectives were rather strong, insofar as the list included also words like *dirty*, *dark*, *scary* and *polluted*. There were also 21 positive adjectives among which *friendly* was the most popular (4).

Question 3:

In the group of students asked about the colorful versions of slogans, 9 students responded that they would like to visit Gniezno, 5 that they would not and 2 said “why not”. In the group presented black-and-white slogans, 6 students responded “yes”, 9 students – “no” and 1 student “why not”.

Shupsk: Question 1:

In the group of students asked about the colorful versions of slogans, 11 students responded “river”, 2 “probably river”, 3 “water”, 1 “sea”. In the group presented black-and-white slogans, 3 students responded “river”, 2 “roads”, 2 said they did not know. Other answers include: “length of the city”, “railway”, “tram line”, “river or road”, “number of words in the slogan”, “reasons to visit the city”, “I don’t know”.

Question 2:

In the group of students asked about the colorful versions of slogans, there were 6 negative adjectives all of which were mentioned only once. They include: *unfriendly*, *old-fashioned*, *cold*, *boring*, *unappealing*, *crowded*. There were also 25 positive adjectives with the most popular being *colorful*, *pretty* and *friendly* (mentioned by 4 people). In the group presented black-and-white slogans, there were 3 negative adjectives each mentioned only once and including words *boring*, *strange* and *crowded*. There were also 18 positive adjectives among which *interesting* was the most popular (3).

Question 3:

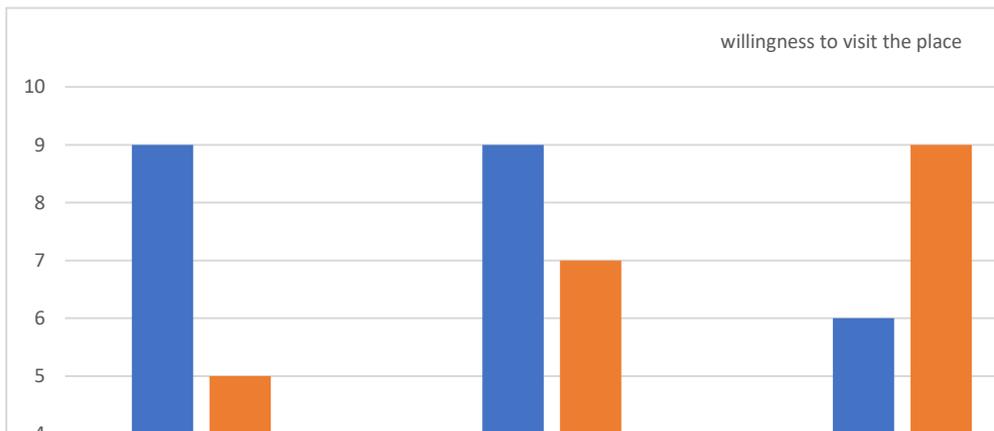
In the group of students asked about the colorful versions of slogans, 9 students responded that they would like to visit Gniezno and 7 that they would not. In the group presented black-and-white slogans, 5 students responded “yes”, 7 students – “no” and 2 student “why not”.

Table 1. Examples of adjectives used to describe the places on the basis of slogans

	Colorful slogan of Gniew	Black-and-white slogan of Gniew
Positive adjectives	friendly, mysterious, peaceful, interesting, beautiful, nice, traditional, creative	friendly, nice, amazing, interesting, appealing, quiet
Negative adjectives	crowded, chaotic, dark, unfriendly	scruffy, dark, scary, crowded, dirty
	Colorful slogan of Slupsk	Black-and-white slogan of Slupsk
Positive adjectives	colorful, friendly, pretty, natural, progressive, bright, cozy, green, calm	friendly, welcoming, nice, exciting, beautiful, calm, kind
Negative adjectives	crowded, unappealing, unfriendly, old-fashioned	boring, strange, crowded

Source: Own study.

Figure 1. Diagram illustrating responses referring to students' willingness to visit the place



Source: Own study.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The first slogan was created for a town situated in the Pomerania, i.e. Gniew. A verbal part of the slogan states “opanuj gniew” (“control your anger”) and can be interpreted in two ways, insofar as the slogan is based on a word play. The word “gniew” literally means “anger”, therefore the first interpretation of the slogan can be translated into English as “control your anger”.

On the other hand, the word “opanuj” can refer to controlling the emotion but also to conquering the place, which makes the second interpretation similar to an English phrase “conquer Gniew”. When it comes to the visual elements of the slogan, above the verbal part there is an illustration representing the characteristic panorama of the

town with its most significant buildings, one of which is a castle and the second – a church. The image is iconic, insofar as it is based on the similarity with the real view of the town. However, the shape of the image is somehow bent, its edges are raised up, which resembles a smile. This may be related to the first interpretation of the slogan, i.e., controlling negative emotions. With respect to color, both verbal and visual components are blue. The color may have an iconic relation based on the similarity to the color of water, i.e., the town is located on the bank of the Vistula river, which is a significant part of the landscape.

On the other hand, blue has positive connotations and is associated with such values as confidence, peace, security, calmness⁵, which in turn is related to the interpretation of the verbal part of the slogan referring to controlling anger. The overall impression that the color ascribes to the whole slogan is gentle, positive and peaceful. Blue fulfils here also three metafunctions, i.e., it has an ideational function insofar as it evokes positive emotions, textual function because it contributes to the coherence between visual and verbal elements and interpersonal function which is manifested by the fact that the color has a calming effect on the receiver and therefore may attract tourists by promising a relaxing atmosphere of the town, in which visitors can rest.

The second of the analyzed slogans promotes Słupsk, a city in the Pomerania. A verbal part of the slogan states “Słupsk. Więcej niż myślisz” (“Słupsk. More than you think”). The first part of the slogan, i.e., the name of the city is located inside the drawing depicting an image of a building, probably a city hall and accompanied by green and blue shapes, that resemble a tree and a river respectively. The second part of the verbal component of the slogan is located next to the aforementioned drawing.

On the contrary to the previous one, this slogan is colorful, it applies four different colors. The castle and the name of the city are red, which causes that this part of the slogan is somehow foregrounded and more visible than other elements. Additionally, red fulfils here a textual function and links visual and verbal elements. Moreover, red symbolizes things such as energy and passion, therefore it evokes positive connotations. The green and blue colors used for the shapes located next to the red part of the slogan enhance their interpretation as a tree and a river. Without the application of blue the shape with three lines could be confused e.g. with a road, therefore the color contributes to the proper interpretation of the visual elements.

The second part of the caption is written in yellow, which symbolizes energy, positive emotions, like optimism and happiness. When it comes to the interpersonal function of yellow, it is said to inspire and energize people⁶. These corresponds to the meaning of the phrase (“more than you think”), which is also full of positive

⁵*12 Color Meanings - The Power and Symbolism of Colors (Infographics) (color-meanings.com) ED.*

⁶*Ibid.*

connotations. It promises that the city offers a lot of attractions and tourists will spend their time actively there. The fact that the slogan applies more than one color also enhances this interpretation of a lively, energetic place, surrounded by nature.

The description of slogan presented above and the results of the questionnaire show that colors are a very significant component of this type of texts. The fact that they contribute meaning to the conveyed message supports the initial statement that colors are semiotically important elements that in a multimodal analysis should be paid attention next to other visual and verbal modes applied in the investigated text. In both slogans, colors fulfil three metafunctions described in section 3 of the present article. Textual function of integrating visual and verbal components is displayed in both slogans. Ideational function consisting for example of the representation of certain values and ideas is applied in both of the analyzed slogans, where colors contribute additional meaning to the conveyed message by providing certain associations that support the message conveyed through words and the visual components.

And finally, interpersonal function of influencing the receiver is manifested through colors which draw the receivers attention or influence the receivers' emotions, making the person more willing to visit the promoted place. Last but not least, colors applied in the slogans also have symbolic, iconic and indexical character. The fact that colors function as symbols was illustrated by all the emotions that are evoked due to the use of a certain color. In slogans, the symbolic nature of colors is particularly relevant, insofar as it allows the author of the message to indirectly refer to the receivers' experiences and knowledge and thus influence the person's interpretation of the message.

The iconic character of colors is applied in the slogans for example when there is a link between the object in the real world and the color used, like in the example of the slogan of Słupsk and the blue lines representing the river. The iconicity of colors allows the author to create certain associations, it helps to convey elaborate messages through a limited number of tools by relying on the receivers' knowledge and associations. Similarly, the indexical character of colors based on the relation of adjacency helps to convey additional messages associating the color with the nature of the promoted place.

To sum up, the analysis presented in the paper proves that colors cannot be ignored while investigating multimodal text, insofar as they carry a significant semiotic potential. Additionally, when it comes to slogans, the analysis revealed that their authors need to pay a lot of attention to colors, insofar as they can strengthen the conveyed message and make the slogan more memorable and attention-drawing. Moreover, the process of reading and interpretation of multimodal texts demands paying attention to all the applied modes, insofar as both visual and verbal content contribute to conveying the complete message.

Undoubtedly, a systematic analysis of a bigger number of slogans should be carried out in the future in order to reveal more systematized knowledge in this field. The data collected during the questionnaire could also be investigated in more detail, paying attention to the differences between the perception of slogans depending on the respondents' age, gender or nationality.

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