

Using Figurative Language to Increase Advertising Effectiveness

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Project Personnel

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The Problem

Recruiting and retaining qualified personnel for
the armed services

Increasingly more difficult, for a variety of
reasons

One solution: more advertising (expensive)

Our proposed solution: *improve* advertising by
using *figurative language*

What is Figurative Language?

Language that is used nonliterally or in a nonconventional way, such as metaphor or exaggeration

Often used to communicate a variety of pragmatically complex discourse goals
(Roberts & Kreuz, 1994)

(e.g., irony can be used to express a statement *and* an attitude about that statement)

Figurative Language Types I

- Hyperbole
 - Deliberate overemphasis
 - “It took forever to find a parking space!”
- Idiom
 - Conventionalized expression
 - “He’s a real pain in the neck.”
- Irony
 - Opposite meaning intended
 - “What beautiful weather we’ve had lately!”

Figurative Language Types II

- Metaphor
 - Implicit comparison
 - “The idea was a gold mine!”
- Simile
 - Explicit comparison
 - “The idea was like a gold mine!”
- Rhetorical question
 - Assertion framed as a question
 - “How many times must I tell you?”

Figurative Language Types III

- Understatement
 - Deliberate underemphasis
 - “Chocolate is okay, I guess.”

Advertisers frequently use figurative language...

Top 10 Jingles of the Century

(Advertising Age magazine)

(10) “A little dab’ll do ya.”

(9) “It’s the real thing.”

(8) “Winston tastes good like a cigarette should.”

(7) “Double your pleasure, double your fun.”

(6) “I wish I were an Oscar Mayer wiener.”

Top 10 Jingles of the Century

(Advertising Age magazine)

(5) “See the USA in your Chevrolet.”

(4) “Mmm good!”

(3) “Pepsi-Cola hits the spot.”

(2) “Be all that you can be.”

(1) “You deserve a break today.”

Other Military Jingles

The Marines?

THE FEW, THE PROUD, THE MARINES

And the Navy?

ACCELERATE YOUR LIFE

and

LET THE JOURNEY BEGIN

Other countries, other approaches...

YOU TRAIN HARDER SO YOU EAT MORE EXCEPT IN WEEK 26



For 25 weeks of the toughest and longest basic training course run by any fighting force in the world, a Royal Marines recruit gets to eat 4 square meals a day. Whereas other Armed Forces burn off less calories in training so they're only given 3. However, come week 26 we teach you Survival skills, where it's worm omelette with rabbit's foot to follow, if you're lucky. If you've got the appetite for it and want to earn your Green Beret, get in touch today on 0345 300 123.

Send this coupon for your free book, The Challenge Royal Marines, to the Royal Marines Careers Service MW0005, FREEPOST 6L 876, Chichester, Glos. GL3 1SR (no stamp needed). Alternatively visit your local Armed Forces Careers Office, Submarine, Careers Service Office or <http://www.royalmarines.mil.uk>

Name (Mr) _____
 Address _____

 Postcode _____
 Telephone _____
 Date of Birth _____

The Royal Marines are part of the Royal Army. We are an equal opportunities employer and we have facilities for disabled employees and applicants. An equal gender. You should be under 60 or 65 and normally have been a UK resident for the past 6 years.



DO YOU HAVE THE STRENGTH OF MIND TO BE A ROYAL MARINES COMMANDO?

Previous Research I

Marketing Research

In a survey of 2400 ads, 75% used at least one figure of speech (Leigh, 1994)

Figurative ad language should be more memorable than literal ad language (McQuarrie & Mick, 1996)

Rhetorical questions can result in more favorable attitudes (Howard & Kerin, 1995)

Previous Research II

Psychological Research

Ironic statements are recalled better than literal equivalents (Kreuz, Long, & Church, 1991)

Ideas expressed metaphorically lead to better recall (Gibbs & Nagaoka, 1985; Read, Cesa, Jones, & Collins, 1990; but see Harris, 1979)

Research Goals and Overview

Current projects

Basic research on various forms of figurative language

Studies of on-line processing and memory

Future projects

Applied research on figurative language and attitude change

Analysis of figurative language in advertising

Recommendations to the Navy for improvements

Stimulus Selection and Construction

Familiar, positive and negative idioms chosen from Spear (1990, 1994)

Five-sentence scenarios built around each idiom (example to follow)

Literal and figurative forms, equivalent in meaning to the idiom, were also constructed

Comprehension question for each scenario

Example: “The New Arrival” (+)

Ted and Amy had been married for two years, and were anxious to start a family.

They were delighted to learn that Amy had finally become pregnant.

Nine months later, Amy give birth to a healthy baby girl.

Ted was surprised by the depth of his feelings for his daughter.

He admitted to his coworkers, ...

Ted's Comment I

Idiom

“That baby is my pride and joy.”

Literal

“That baby is extremely important to me.”

Metaphor

“That baby is my life.”

Ted's Comment II

Simile

“That baby is like my life.”

Hyperbole

“That baby is the entire universe to me.”

Understatement

“That baby is somewhat important to me.”

Ted's Comment III

Irony

“That baby means nothing to me.”

Rhetorical Question

“Who would have thought that baby would be so important to me?”

Comprehension question:

Do Ted and Amy have four children?

Norming Studies I

- Valence experiment
 - Designed to assess the perceived positivity and negativity of the idioms
 - Subjects rated 48 idioms on a five-point valence scale
 - Subjects also asked “What does this phrase mean?”

Reliable difference between groups

Idioms near the midpoint of the scale discarded
(e.g., “Once in a blue moon,” “Go ape”)

Norming Studies II

- Familiarity experiment
 - Designed to assess the familiarity of the idioms
 - Subjects rated 48 idioms on a six-point familiarity scale
 - Subjects also asked “What does this phrase mean?”

Familiarity of positive and negative idioms did not differ

Less familiar idioms discarded

(e.g., “Fly in the ointment,” “In an ivory tower”)

Norming Studies III

- Idiom meaning
 - Did the subjects' definitions of the idioms match their dictionary definitions?
 - Project personnel assessed each match

Overall, subjects gave good definitions

Worst-matching idioms discarded

(e.g., “Set the world on fire,” “Hold one's own”)

Norming Studies IV

- Idiom/metaphor similarity experiment
 - How well did the idioms correspond to the metaphors we selected?
 - Subjects read 36 scenarios, and were asked “What did [character] mean by [metaphor]?”
 - Project personnel evaluated how well subjects’ responses matched the definition of the idiom

Scenarios with worst matches discarded
(e.g., “He is a jack of all trades” [idiom]
“He is a Swiss army knife” [metaphor])

Experimental Materials

- 24 scenarios
 - Five-sentence stories that end with an evaluation by one character
 - 12 with a positive context
 - 12 with a negative context
- Each scenario has eight different endings (literal plus seven figurative statements)

Experimental Procedure

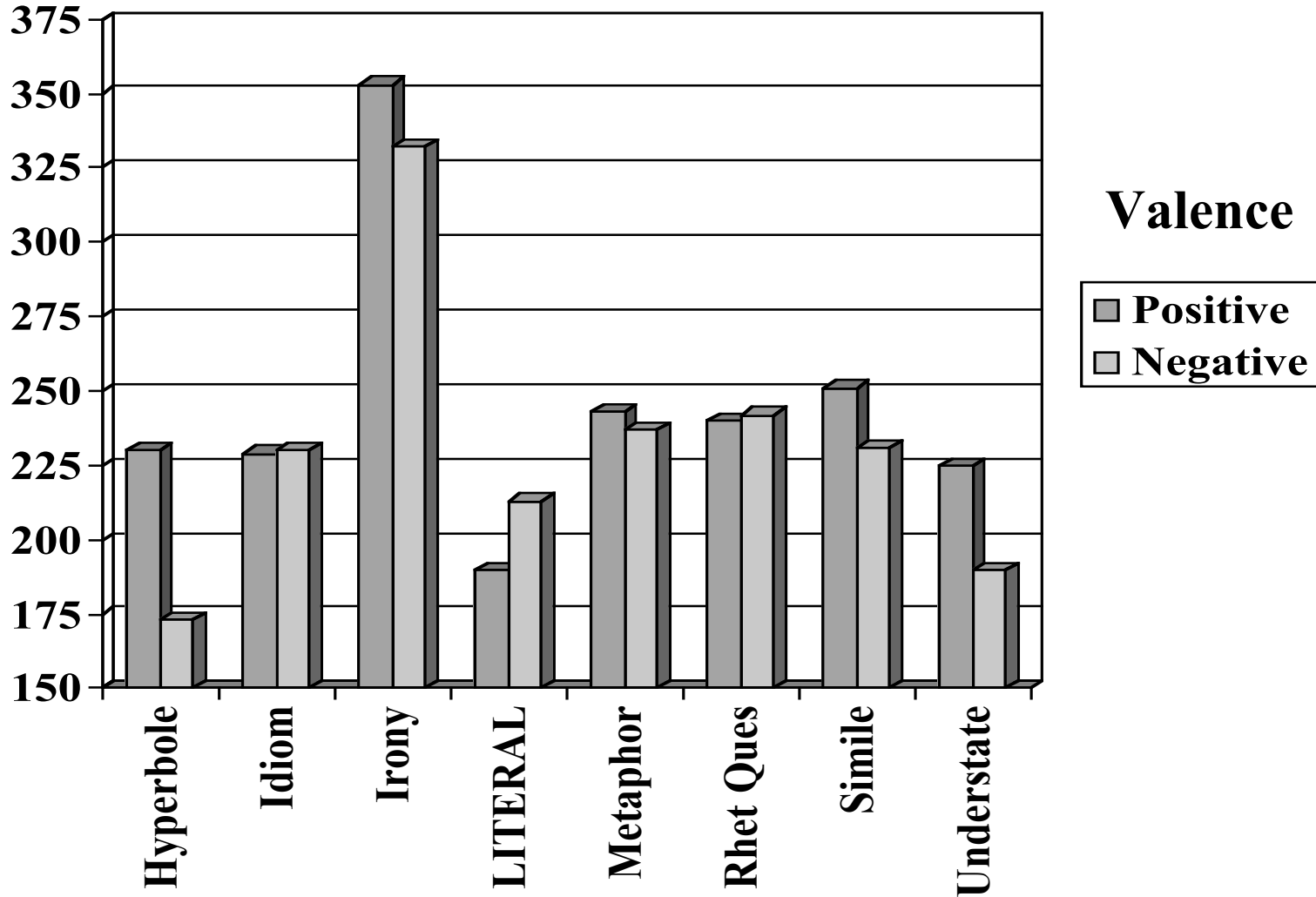
- 45 subjects read the scenarios on a computer, sentence by sentence (reading times collected)
- Each subject read one version of each scenario (along with practice and filler items)
- They answered a comprehension question after each scenario
- They received a surprise cued recall task at the end (title —> final sentence of scenario)

Reading Time Analysis

- Reading times divided by number of syllables to control for sentence length
- Data from critical sentence analyzed with a 2 (valence) x 8 (language form) analysis of variance
- Main effect valence: subjects took longer to read the positive valence sentences than the negative valence sentences
- Main effect of form: subjects took longer to read certain language forms than others

Reading Time by Condition

Time in msec corrected for syllables



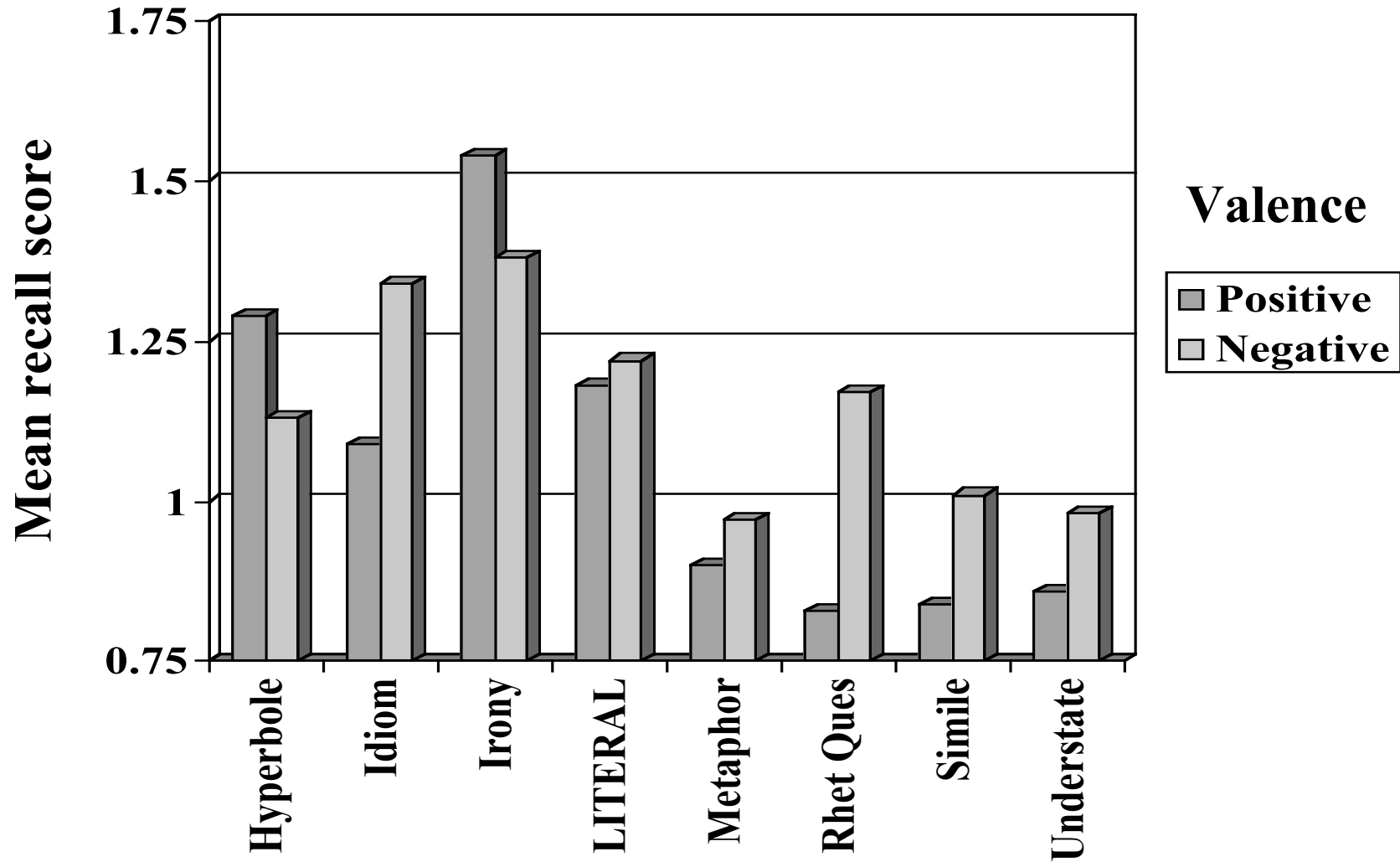
Reading Time Conclusions

- Pairwise comparisons (Bonferroni correction)
- Subjects were slower in reading ironic statements than in any other condition
- Subjects were significantly slower in reading simile than hyperbole or understatement

Immediate Cued Recall Analysis

- Similarity between subjects' recall and original was assessed by project personnel on a four-point scale
- Recall scores analyzed with a 2 (valence) x 8 (language form) ANOVA
- No effect of valence
- Main effect of form: subjects remembered certain language forms better than others

Immediate Recall by Condition



Immediate Recall Conclusions

- Pairwise comparisons (Bonferroni correction)
- Subjects had better memory for the ironic statements than for metaphor, simile, or understatement

General Conclusions

- People take longer to process ironic statements than either literal statements or other forms of figurative language
- People have better memory (at least initially) for irony than certain other types of figurative language
- This suggests that irony can be employed effectively to increase message effectiveness (but more research is needed)

For the Future

- A replication of the current study, with a longer delay before recall
- Applied research on language and advertising effectiveness
 - Should allow the Navy to get a “bigger bang for the buck” with recruiting resources
 - Important as the Web pushes people back to text