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Author(s): James H. Leigh

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# The Use of Figures of Speech in Print Ad Headlines

James H. Leigh

*A content analysis of 2183 print ads with a headline was conducted to investigate the frequency with which figures of speech and figure categories are used in ad headlines and the extent to which selected executional factors relate to their use. A figure of speech entails the use of words in a manner that is varied from common use. Delineation of forty-one figures of speech, organized by functional similarity, is provided along with a review of relevant research literature. Results revealed that selected figures of speech, including alliteration, assonance and puns are widely used, whereas others are not. Various executional factors were found to be related to figure use. Implications of the results for the practice of advertising are provided and research directions outlined.*

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**James H. Leigh** (Ph.D., University of Michigan) is Associate Professor, Department of Marketing, Texas A & M University, College Station, TX.

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The headline has long been considered to be the most important part of a print advertisement (Caples 1974; Ogilvy 1964, 1983; Starch 1923). Its primary function is to get across key selling points to desired prospects in a manner that attracts attention and stimulates them to give serious consideration to the product (Wells, Burnett and Moriarty 1992). A number of different headline factors are believed to affect the impact on memory a print ad will have. Some headline factors that have been studied are the number of words (Hanssens and Weitz 1980; Holbrook and Lehmann 1980; Rossiter 1981), the number of lines and type size (Holbrook and Lehmann 1980), the type (Soley and Reid 1983), psycholinguistic characteristics (Rossiter 1981), and the use of rhetorical resonance (McQuarrie and Mick 1992). Little research has been done on facets of rhetorical resonance in print ads, and even less has been conducted on other rhetorical aspects. The present study was undertaken to help fill that void.

McQuarrie (1989, p. 97) defines resonance as an echoing or doubleness of meaning among stimulus elements within an advertisement, such as among two visual elements, two verbal elements, or a visual and a verbal (headline) element, with the latter one believed to be the most common. Echoing implies that two elements are arranged in such a manner that a new meaning results that is different from the meaning of each separate element. Puns and other similar plays on words are believed by McQuarrie to be the most common rhetorical tools for creating resonance. McQuarrie (1989) estimated that fewer than ten percent of all magazine ads are resonant in some way. McQuarrie and Mick (1992) report that just over fifteen percent of the ads they content analyzed are resonant.

Two separate dimensions of an advertisement are usually involved in creating visual-verbal resonance: the form of the headline message, including rhetoric (Ogilvy 1964; Starch 1923), and the linkage of the headline content and the pictorial information presented (Caples 1974; Ogilvy 1964). There is a need to determine the nature and extent to which these factors appear in advertisements, given that resonance is but one of several different possible executions using one or both of these dimensions. This research study will help establish a baseline of the frequency with which headline message form elements and headline-picture linkage appear in print ads. If the results of the study indicate that print ads frequently contain these factors, subsequent investigations can be directed to the assessment of their relationships with measures of ad effectiveness. Such a research program

will allow for a more complete understanding of the headline factors that affect print ad effectiveness to be obtained.

## Figures of Speech

The manner in which a message is communicated — its form — is an important consideration in headline construction. Authors differ, however, as to what form a message should take. Starch (1923) maintains a catchy headline “should be short, euphonious, rhythmic, alliterative” (p. 509). Wells, Burnett and Moriarty (1992) note that “an unexpected idea can be one with a twist, an unexpected association, or catchy phrasing” (p. 387). They later criticize the tendency for copywriters to rely on formula-written “adese” that uses “clichés, superlatives, stock phrases and vague generalities” (p. 412).

Ogilvy (1964) recommends using selected clichés (p. 106), but discourages the use of “tricky headlines — puns, literary allusions, and other obscurities” (p. 107). Caples (1974) dislikes any form of advertising that solely provokes curiosity, such as “too smart” and “hard to grasp” headlines (pp. 37-43).

Though the terms they use differ, as do their opinions on the practice, each of these authors is alluding to the use of figures of speech in headlines. A figure of speech is “a form of speech artfully varied from common usage” (Corbett 1971, p. 460). Grinnell (1987) uses the term “wordplay” instead of figure, but the basic meaning is the same. The two major groups of figures are *the tropes*, which involve a transfer of meaning of a word that is a deviation from what it normally signifies, and *the schemes*, which involve a word transfer that deviates from customary grammatical structure (Corbett 1971, p. 461).

Virtually all students are exposed to such figures as puns, alliteration and assonance. Many more figures exist than the few that students learn, and a number of them are believed to be important to effective communication. Beginning in the age of Aristotle, rhetoricians have catalogued over two hundred different figures. However, as Corbett (1971, p. 460) notes, many are subtle variants of forty or so general types of figures of speech.

Table 1 provides a listing of 41 figures that are organized into groups based on similarity. A definition and advertising example of each one is given. Several sources on rhetoric, including Abrams (1981), Corbett (1971) and Ravenel (1959), were used to compile the set of figures listed. The goal was to develop a list that is inclusive, yet parsimonious. As none of the

consulted sources provided a detailed categorization, figures were arranged into homogeneous groups, and each subcategory was named.

The trope category is organized into two subcategories, puns and associations, with the latter one further divided according to the type of association made. Associations use words that have something in common or that are contradictory, that are grammatically correct or are deliberately incorrect, that are either sensory or verbal in nature, that are extreme positions or midrange, and that are direct or indirect. The figures involving associations are organized into six groups on the basis of their similarity on these dimensions — animate associations, contradictory associations, “visual” associations, verbal substitutions, exaggerations and understatements, and rhetorical questions. The scheme category concerns grammar structure, and that terminology is used here for clarity; grammar subcategories involve word order, omissions and insertions, repetitions, and rhyme.

Five advertising studies (Beltramini and Blasko 1986; McQuarrie and Mick 1992, 1993; Reece, Vanden Bergh and Li 1994; Vanden Bergh, Adler and Oliver 1987) focused directly or indirectly on figure of speech aspects. In their study of award-winning headlines, Beltramini and Blasko (1986) had a panel of creative directors categorize the headlines according to their commonalities and differences. Of relevance here is that of the seven categories derived by their judges, only one of them (news/information) does not have its basis in figures of speech. In their study of the top-selling brand names, Vanden Bergh, Adler, and Oliver (1987) used the 19 kinds of wordplay provided in Grinnell (1987) and developed a list of 22 figures of speech and other communication tools organized into nine categories. Though there is a fair degree of similarity between their classification scheme and the one offered here, the list of figures in Table 1 covers several additional areas they do not include and treats related figures separately. Their results showed that top brand names occasionally employ one or more figures of speech, but figures are not as common as are the use of an initial hard-consonant “plosive” and a close brand name - product fit. Reece, Vanden Bergh and Li (1994) investigated the effects of the number of wordplays used in a slogan on brand name and product category recall. They report that wordplay usage is positively related to brand recall, but is not significantly related to category recall.

McQuarrie and Mick (1992, 1993) conducted two studies that directly addressed figure of speech phenomena. In their 1992 article, they report results of a

Table 1  
Selected Figures of Speech

| Figure of Speech              | Definition                                                                                       | Example                                                                            |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <u>The Tropes</u>             |                                                                                                  |                                                                                    |
| I. Puns                       |                                                                                                  |                                                                                    |
| 1. Antanaciasis               | Repetition of a word in two different senses                                                     | Our frequent fliers can frequent other fliers.<br>(British Airways)                |
| 2. Paronomasia                | Use of words alike in sound but different in meaning                                             | If you want to get read, use red. (Panasonic copiers)                              |
| 3. Syllepsis                  | Use of a word understood differently in relation to two or more words it modifies                | Some people really know how to dress. (Good Seasons salad dressings)               |
| 4. Other Types                | Use of a single word or phrase for more than one purpose, or an amusing twist of a common phrase | A power plant that recharges human batteries.<br>(BMW 535i)                        |
| II. Associations              |                                                                                                  |                                                                                    |
| A. Animate Associations       |                                                                                                  |                                                                                    |
| 1. Allusion                   | A reference to persons, places, myths, etc., the audience will recognize                         | 40% Sin, 60% Forgiveness (Land O Lakes Country Morning Blend)                      |
| 2. Personification            | Ascribing inanimate objects or abstractions with human qualities or abilities                    | It makes salads, dressings, ... - and it won't bite.<br>(Cuisinart food processor) |
| 3. Simile                     | An explicit comparison between two things of unlike nature which have something in common        | As thin as a giraffe. (Noblia watch)                                               |
| B. Contradictory Associations |                                                                                                  |                                                                                    |
| 1. Irony                      | Use of a word in a manner that conveys an opposite meaning to its literal meaning                | We make it tough for kids. (Fabriloock film for jeans)                             |
| 2. Metaphor                   | An implied comparison between two things of unlike nature which have something in common         | If people ... had adjustable bodies, they wouldn't need Tilt-Wheel.                |
| 3. Oxymoron                   | Use of two terms which are ordinarily contradictory                                              | Real Bacon makes the ordinary extraordinary.<br>(Hormel Real Bacon Pieces)         |

|                                        |                                                                                           |                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4. Paradox                             | A statement that either seems to or actually does contradict itself                       | 2000 Calorie Mascara. The only thing you gain is fat lashes. (Max Factor)                                    |
| 5. Parody                              | A statement mimicking the language, style or ideas of another for comic or satiric effect | Introducing the sugar free gum recommended by 2 out of 3 patients. (Extra gum)                               |
| C. "Visual" Associations through Words |                                                                                           |                                                                                                              |
| 1. Imagery                             | Use of words that appeal to one of the senses                                             | Make your hair glimmer, shimmer, or simply glow. (Clairol hair color)                                        |
| 2. Onomatopoeia                        | Use of words whose sound echoes the sense                                                 | Open up and say "ahhh." (Ford Mustang LX Convertible)                                                        |
| D. Verbal Substitutions                |                                                                                           |                                                                                                              |
| 1. Anthimeria                          | Substitution of one part of speech for another                                            | Gift him with <u>Playboy</u> .                                                                               |
| 2. Metonymy                            | Substitution of some attributive or suggestive word for what is actually meant            | Knorr takes you on a kettle cruise of England. (Knorr soup)                                                  |
| 3. Periphrasis                         | Substitution of a descriptive word or phrase for a proper name, or vice versa             | Packs like luggage. Carries like luggage. Stores like luggage. Cleans like a Hoover. (Hoover vacuum cleaner) |
| E. Exaggerations and Understatements   |                                                                                           |                                                                                                              |
| 1. Euphemism                           | A mild, vague expression used instead of a harsh, unpleasant one.                         | For 50 years, more women have trusted the special moments of their lives to Tampax.                          |
| 2. Hyperbole                           | Use of exaggerated terms for emphasis or heightened effect                                | The 1987 Volvo 740 Turbo. A collector's item you can drive every day.                                        |
| 3. Litotes                             | Deliberate use of an understatement to enhance the impressiveness of what is said         | Introducing another little reason to love a Dove Bar.                                                        |
| F. Rhetorical Questions                | Asking a question for the purpose of asserting or denying something obliquely             | Doesn't he deserve a dinner that looks as good as yours? (Grand Gourmet dog food)                            |

## Grammar Structure

### A. Word Order -- Coordinated

- |                |                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                            |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Anastrophe  | Inversion of the natural or usual word order                                                                          | America's look is Cover Girl. (Cover Girl cosmetics)                                                                       |
| 2. Antithesis  | The juxtaposition of contrasting ideas, often in parallel structure                                                   | Sundown vs. Sun damage. (Sundown sunblock)                                                                                 |
| 3. Apposition  | Placing two coordinate elements side by side, with the second serving as an explanation or modification of the first. | If you had your eyes tested outdoors as well as indoors, you'd know why we developed photochromic lenses. (Corning lenses) |
| 4. Climax      | Arrangement of words, phrases or clauses in order of increasing importance.                                           | You're in trouble. You've had an accident. You need a lawyer. (American Express)                                           |
| 5. Parallelism | Similarity of structure in a pair or series of related words, phrases or clauses.                                     | It catches your mistakes. Finds it. Erases it. Even helps you to spell it. (Smith Corona electronic typewriter)            |

### B. Deliberate Word Omissions and Insertions

- |                 |                                                                                         |                                                                                           |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Asyndeton    | Deliberate omission of conjunctions between a series of related clauses                 | Come. Feel the warmth of Mexico. (Turismo de Mexico)                                      |
| 2. Ellipsis     | Deliberate omission of a word or words that are readily implied by the context          | If you can do any of these ..., you can load this 35mm camera. (Fuji)                     |
| 3. Parenthesis  | Insertion of some verbal unit in a position that interrupts the normal syntactical flow | Creates pain relief (and without aspirin complications). Tylenol Extra-Strength Capsules. |
| 4. Polysyndeton | Deliberate use of many conjunctions                                                     | Panasonic also gets you read with blue, or brown or green. (Panasonic copiers)            |

### C. Repetitions

- |                 |                                                                                    |                                                                                                      |
|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Alliteration | Repetition of initial or medial consonants in two or more adjacent words           | Salon Secrets for thick, fuller hair. (Jhirmack)                                                     |
| 2. Anadiplosis  | Repetition of the last word of one clause at the beginning of the following clause | A shave this close used to take guts. Today it takes gel. Gel makes a difference. (Edge shaving gel) |

|                   |                                                                                        |                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3. Anaphora       | Repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginning of successive clauses   | The miracle of VHS. The miracle of JVC technology.                                                                      |
| 4. Antimetabole   | Repetition of words in successive clauses in reverse grammatical order                 | Applique' is part of you .... you're part of Applique'. (Franciscan china)                                              |
| 5. Assonance      | Repetition of similar vowel sounds preceded or followed by different consonants        | I hate to wait! (Avis)                                                                                                  |
| 6. Epanalepsis    | Repetition at the end of a clause of the word that began the clause                    | Cooks like the best chefs cook. (KitchenAid)                                                                            |
| 7. Epistrophe     | Repetition of the same word or group of words at the end of successive clauses         | Unlimited mileage included. Collision protection included. First tank of gas included. (Hertz)                          |
| 8. Polyptoton     | Repetition of words derived from the same root                                         | Get your money's worth. Or your money back. (General Electric)                                                          |
| 9. Repetition     | The repeating of a word or phrase for emphasis or rhetorical effect.                   | Take a long, long look at all the services you can only get from a Full Service Bank. (Foundation for Commercial Banks) |
| D. Rhyme          |                                                                                        |                                                                                                                         |
| 1. End Rhyme      | Correspondence between the sounds of words at the ends of phrases.                     | KitchenAid. For the way it's made. (KitchenAid)                                                                         |
| 2. Internal Rhyme | Rhyme of words in the same phrase or between a word in one phrase and one in the next. | 7-Footer. High and dry for those who sky. (Wigwam Mills)                                                                |

content analysis of 1286 full-page ads from one issue of each of twenty magazines. They found that 15.2 percent of the ads are resonant. Ads were not examined for figure of speech types or headline-picture linkage. They also report results of two experiments that compared levels of recall, brand attitude and attitude toward the ad among resonant and nonresonant ads. Resonance produced a higher level of recall and more positive attitudes.

McQuarrie and Mick's 1993 article reports results of a content analysis of 154 full-page ads taken from three issues of *People*. Ads were analyzed for the number and types of figures of speech in the headline and subhead. They found that 86 percent of the ads employed one or more figures of speech, and each of these ads averaged about 1.5 figures. Over sixty percent of the ads contained only trope figures, almost twenty percent of the ads contained only grammatical schemes, and slightly over twenty percent contained both types of figures. Taken together, these five studies provide suggestive, but incomplete evidence of the relevance and prevalence of figures of speech in headlines.

### Headline-Picture Linkage

A second headline dimension believed to be important to successful print ads relates to the extent to which the headline and the picture or illustration are mutually reinforcing (Caples 1974; Ogilvy 1964; Wells, Burnett and Moriarty 1992). Through conveying a unified concept, Keller and Swan (1986) maintain that the pulling power of the ad can be increased markedly. At the same time, Lutz and Lutz (1978) note that pictures only need to be related to, but not necessarily repetitive of verbal content to have a facilitative effect.

The term, linkage, is used here to represent an association among the headline and visual elements. Other terms have been offered to convey somewhat the same basic idea, including framed [versus unframed] ads (Edell and Staelin 1983; Shimp, Urbany and Camlin 1988), specifically-related [versus generally-related] audio (Edell and Keller 1989), interactive [versus noninteractive] pictures (Lutz and Lutz 1977), and product-relevant [versus product-irrelevant] pictures (Miniard et al. 1991). These terms typically describe a directional linkage among one or more ad elements, such as "the pictorial information demonstrates the verbal message" (Shimp, Urbany and Camlin 1988, p. 24).

As used here, the concept of headline-picture linkage has no directional assumptions and thus covers any instance where the headline and picture are related in some fashion such that one element calls attention to or provides information related to the other. Of the possible terms, linkage seems to do the best job of reflecting the concept of mutual reinforcement.

The relevant research literature is generally supportive of the potential importance of the headline-picture linkage factor. Aspects of interactive ads tend to be better remembered than comparable elements of noninteractive ones (Childers and Houston 1984; Houston, Childers and Heckler 1987; Lutz and Lutz 1977). In addition, framed ads have been found to have positive effects on attitudes and be recalled better than unframed ads; however, framed ads were found to be no different on these dimensions from ads that provide the same information using only verbal claims (Edell and Staelin 1983). Moreover, an ad with a product-relevant picture produced more positive attitudes than one with a product-irrelevant picture (Miniard et al. 1991).

An experiment by Unnava and Burnkrant (1991) varied both the presence/absence of a copy-relevant picture and the imagery value of the ad copy to investigate whether it is the inclusion of the picture along with copy or the imagery evoked by the copy that serves to produce the recall effects associated with interactive ads. The researchers found that for high imagery copy, the presence of a picture has no incremental effect on immediate or delayed recall; for low imagery copy, the presence of a relevant picture serves to increase recall substantially. The patterns of mean differences across the experimental treatment groups observed by the researchers provide support for the potential importance of linkage among visual and verbal ad elements.

Two content analysis studies (Durvasula, Andrews and Akhter 1992; Shimp, Urbany and Camlin 1988) investigated the extent to which framed ads appear in magazines. Based on a sample of 1415 ads that appeared in thirty magazines, Shimp, Urbany and Camlin (1988) reported that 92 percent of the ads are framed. Durvasula, Andrews and Akhter (1992) content analyzed 500 magazine ads and 500 TV ads. Based on their sample, they found that 85.2 percent of the magazine ads and 96 percent of the TV ads are framed. Thus, framing appears to be common in practice. What is not known, however, is the extent to which the more general factor, headline-picture linkage, is employed in print ads.

## Research Questions

There are a number of research questions that merit investigation. The primary purpose of the present study is to build on the prior research and examine the actual incidence of figures of speech in ad headlines using the expanded framework provided. Based on the ideas and research needs outlined by Stern (1988, 1992), content analysis is employed to address several important questions pertaining to figure of speech usage:

1. Are figures of speech used in magazine ad headlines? If so, what types are used?
2. Are figures used in concert with one another? Of what types?
3. Does the usage of figures vary among magazines and products? Are ad execution factors related to figure of speech usage?

Based on the literature on headline-picture linkage, several research questions can be framed for investigation:

1. Do all ads with both a headline and a picture or illustration have these elements linked in some fashion?
2. If not, are there differences between linked and non-linked ads in terms of the use of figures of speech?

Answers to these questions will provide insights to advertisers regarding two important, but relatively unexplored dimensions of print ads. No study to date has investigated these research questions in full or in tandem.

## Method

The procedure that was followed to assemble the data for analyzing figure of speech usage and headline-picture linkage in print ad headlines involved several steps: selection of magazines, issues and advertisements to be included, initial content analysis of selected ads, and follow-up content analysis and consistency assessment. Each step is discussed below.

*Selection of Magazines, Issues and Ads.* It was desired for the purposes of comparison that both general and specialty magazines are represented in the study and for a large number of ads from each magazine issue to be included so that an adequate cross-section of different sized ads is represented. To keep the study manageable, it was necessary to use a relatively small number of magazines and to limit the

range of specialty areas included. The decision was made to restrict the scope of the study to four magazine topic areas: sports, financial, special interest, and lifestyle/editorial magazines.

Selections were made on a judgment basis using 1990 U.S. consumer magazine circulation data published in *Advertising Age* and *Adweek* as a guide. All chosen magazines were among the top 200 magazines in terms of circulation. Final choices were partly governed by the availability of particular magazine issues in complete form in the library. Selections are as follows: sports — *Field & Stream*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Tennis*, and *World tennis*; financial — *Business Week*, *Fortune*, and *Money*; special interest — *Popular Photography* and *Stereo Review*; and lifestyle/editorial — *Esquire*, *Life*, *Town & Country*, and *US News & World Report*. The reason that no women's magazines were included, such as *McCall's* or *Woman's Day*, is that the library collections were incomplete; the closest complete substitute magazine that could be identified is *Town & Country*. Moreover, a deliberate effort was made to select two general and two specific magazines in the sports and lifestyle/editorial categories; no similar distinction was made for financial and special interest magazines.

For each selected magazine, four issues were used to assemble the set of ads included in the study. All selected issues were published in April and August 1986 and 1988 to minimize across-magazine differences due to temporal factors. In the case of weeklies, the second issue in the month was selected as the representative. A census of all ads 1/8 of a page and larger in each issue were included in the study. A total of 2468 ads met the size criterion.

*Content Analysis of Ads.* The content analysis phase entailed the recording of a number of ad characteristics that either have been investigated or recommended for consideration (Hanssens and Weitz 1980; Holbrook and Lehmann 1980; Rossiter 1981; Stern 1988, 1992) — magazine where ad appears, product advertised, size and location of the ad, presence of a picture or illustration, presence of a headline, the number of words in the headline (and other display copy, e.g., subheads and taglines). Moreover, characteristics pertaining to the research issues of interest were catalogued: whether a figure of speech is used, the number of figures used, and the categorization of each figure, as well as whether the picture or illustration is linked to the headline.

After being provided with detailed instructions and practice, a second-year graduate student who holds an undergraduate degree in English with coursework

in rhetoric performed the initial coding task on all 2468 ads. The training phase included time spent reviewing the discussion in Corbett (1971) and reviewing the codebook that would be used in the analysis process. The practice phase entailed coding thirty ads that appeared in a recent issue of *Money* that also had been coded by a doctoral student in English specializing in rhetoric. Results were reviewed and discussed with the coder in detail.

The codebook contained a detailed definition and at least one example of each figure of speech, as well as a description of the other ad components to be coded. The figures were purposely arranged in alphabetical order to force the coder to go through the entire list one-by-one and address whether the figure were used. Accompanying instructions also directed the coder to approach the task in that manner and that correctness should be emphasized over speed. The codebook layout and formal instructions minimized the chance of infrequently-used figures being overlooked.

A second graduate student in business with no formal training in rhetoric content analyzed ads the other coder determined to have a headline ( $n=2183$ ). During initial training and practice, a good bit of time was spent discussing figure of speech aspects. Additional practice sessions were also completed. This second coder analyzed the following ad characteristics: the number of words, picture-headline linkage, and the number and types of figures.

The work flow entailed having the second coder analyze ads soon after the first coder had completed them, which enabled the decisions on particular ads to be reviewed and feedback provided on an ongoing basis. The regular feedback and the knowledge another coder was also analyzing the same ads minimized the problem of intraobserver reliability decay (Bakeman and Gottman 1986).

*Coder Disagreement Resolution and Consistency Assessment.* A three-phase process was used for resolving coding differences among the two judges. When there was a disagreement, each coder was instructed individually to reconsider the decisions made about an ad. If this phase did not resolve the differences, each coder met privately with the author to discuss his reasoning. The final decision resided with the author. Given the complexity of the coding task, there were a number of initial differences in judgment. The three-phase process was very effective in ensuring that a clear coding decision could be reached; most other approaches used to deal with coder disagreements are believed by Krippendorff (1980, p. 132) to

be biased.

Cohen's kappa [ $\kappa$ ] (Cohen 1960) was employed as a measure of interjudge reliability. Unlike the percentage of agreement, kappa corrects for agreement due to chance (Kolbe and Burnett 1991). Extensions forwarded by Bakeman and Gottman (1986) for calculating the chance agreement portion of the measure allow for kappa to be used in circumstances where there is not a one-to-one correspondence in the number of decisions made by the coders, which is the case here. For a particular ad, the two coders could differ in the number of figures of speech recognized as well as the type of each figure.

Agreement among the two coders tended to vary across the particular ad facets coded. High levels of interjudge reliability were obtained in the decisions involving whether a figure of speech is used ( $\kappa=.93$ ), headline-picture linkage ( $\kappa=.94$ ), and the number of words in the headline ( $\kappa=.98$ ). In contrast, reliability levels were lower, as expected, for the identification of the number of figures of speech present and the classification by figure type.

Intercoder reliabilities for the number of figures the coders initially detected in an ad were found to be below the recommended standard of .70, using as a base either the set of ads where a figure is present or the set of the 2183 ads with a headline ( $\kappa=.43, .59$ , respectively). However, after asking the judges to check their work and make any needed changes when there was a disagreement, the kappas increased to a respectable .83 for the ads where a figure is present and to .88 for all ads with a headline as a base.

Reliability assessment for the classification of the type of figure present entailed performing analyses at several different levels of abstraction — using the 41 figures of speech as the separate analysis categories, using the eleven subcategories of figure types as the categories, or using the thirty frequently-used figures as separate categories (and not including the twelve categories having frequencies of fewer than 10 observations). Of the 2427 figures initially classified by one or both coders, the kappa statistics for the 42 figures, the 11 subcategories, and the set of the 30 more frequently-used figures are fair ( $\kappa=.60, .78, .75$ , respectively). However, after the coders reconsidered their decisions when there were disagreements, the respective reliability estimates consistently surpassed the benchmark standard of .70 ( $\kappa=.82, .94, .92$ ). Some of the figure categories where there were disagreements include: other types of puns with paronomasia, litotes and hyperbole; simile with metaphor; ozymoron and paradox; syllepsis with irony; and assonance with

internal rhyme. Disagreements often involved figures in the same subcategory. A total of 2433 figures of speech were identified and corroborated.

## Results

Because of the large size of the sample ( $n=2183$ ), an alpha level of .01 was used as the baseline for assessing statistical significance. Based on Cohen (1977), this alpha level has substantial power (e.g., .85) for detecting even small effects. To provide the reader with a sense of the extent to which a test statistic approached or surpassed the .01 alpha level, obtained  $p$ -values of .05 or below will be noted as follows:  $p<.05$ , .01, .005, .001.

### Ad Characteristics

The sample of 2468 ads was distributed as follows: sports (26%), financial (35%), special interest (10%), and lifestyle/editorial (29%). Most of the ads have both a headline and picture (84%), 4.5 percent have a headline but no picture, 10 percent have a picture but no headline, and 1.5 percent have neither. For the study focus, analyses concerned the 2183 ads that contain a headline. Of the ads with a headline, 45 percent are for durable goods, 23 percent for nondurables, and 32 percent for services. The majority are full page (62%), 22 percent are smaller than full page, and 16 percent are multi-page ads. The ads were located as follows: inside front or back cover (7%), first 1/3 (but not cover) (35%), middle 1/3 (27%), and back 1/3 (31%).

The ad headlines averaged 8.2 words in length ( $sd=5.3$ ), with a range of 1 to 52 words. Of the 2183 ads with a headline, 88.3 percent of them have the headline and picture linked together in a synergistic manner such that the headline describes the picture or the picture restates or builds on the message conveyed. In 6.6 percent of the ads, the picture and headline were not linked, and in 5.1 percent of the ads, the ad contained a headline but no picture.

### Figure of Speech Usage in Ads

A clear majority (74.3%) of the ads used at least one figure of speech in the headline. The average number of figures used is 1.1 ( $sd=.85$ ), with a range of 0 to 3. Whether a figure of speech is used varied across magazine types ( $\chi^2=13.13$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p<.005$ ), but this was not the case in the number of figures used ( $F=1.67$ ,  $df=3,2179$ , ns). The basis for the significant

difference is that sports magazine ads were more likely to contain a figure (82%) than the ads for the other magazines (72%). No significant differences in either the presence of a figure or the number were noted for product category, location or size of the ad. In contrast, the presence of a figure ( $\chi^2=40.83$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<.001$ ), and the number ( $F=17.49$ ,  $df=2,2180$ ,  $p<.001$ ) are related to picture-headline linkage. Ads that are linked were likely to use a figure (78%) and contain more figures ( $M=1.2$ ), compared to ads that the picture and headline are not linked (58%;  $M=.8$ , respectively), or to ads that do not have a picture (61%,  $M=.9$ ). The number of words in the headline is related to whether a figure is used ( $F=86.86$ ,  $df=1,2181$ ,  $p<.001$ ; figure present:  $M=8.9$ ; figure absent:  $M=6.4$ ), and the number of figures ( $r=.25$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

As shown in Table 2, there are 2433 instances of figures of speech in the headlines examined. Tropes and grammar structure are about evenly represented in the total. Of note is the large number of repetitions, particularly alliteration and assonance, that are used. Other types of puns, apart from antanaclasses, paronomasia and syllepsis, are also frequently used. One need for the future will be to develop subclassifications for this general category.

It is important to point out that some figures appear to be frequently used, but others such as polysyndeton are seldom adopted. Some figures can be incorporated more easily in headline copy. Alternatively, perhaps copywriters tend to rely on conventions that they and others have used successfully in the past. If so, careful scrutiny of seldom-used figures of speech may serve as rewarding avenues for the development of new ways of communicating one's ideas.

### Figure Category Usage and Ad Execution Correlates

The distribution of figures of speech among the 2183 ads are as follows: tropes are used in 45 percent of the ads, with puns being used in 19 percent and associations in 30 percent, and grammar structure figures are used in 48 percent of the ads. Table 3 shows the results of analyses that examined the relationship of various executional factors with the use of a figure category. As can be seen, differences among magazine types exist for the association trope subcategory, but not for puns, for the overall trope category, or for grammar structure. The basis for the significant effect is that special interest magazine ads are more likely to use an association (42%) than the other

**Table 2**  
**Incidence of Types of Figures of Speech**

| Figure of Speech                       | Frequency  | Percentage |
|----------------------------------------|------------|------------|
| <u>The Tropes</u>                      |            |            |
| I. Puns                                |            |            |
| 1. Antanacsis                          | 42         |            |
| 2. Paronomasia                         | 34         |            |
| 3. Syllepsis                           | 7          |            |
| 4. Other Types                         | <u>330</u> |            |
|                                        | 413        | 17.0       |
| II. Associations                       |            |            |
| A. Animate Associations                |            |            |
| 1. Allusion                            | 88         |            |
| 2. Personification                     | 41         |            |
| 3. Simile                              | <u>16</u>  |            |
|                                        | 145        | 6.0        |
| B. Contradictory Associations          |            |            |
| 1. Irony                               | 10         |            |
| 2. Metaphor                            | 80         |            |
| 3. Oxymoron                            | 12         |            |
| 4. Paradox                             | 57         |            |
| 5. Parody                              | <u>17</u>  |            |
|                                        | 176        | 7.2        |
| C. "Visual" Associations through Words |            |            |
| 1. Imagery                             | 84         |            |
| 2. Onomatopoeia                        | <u>6</u>   |            |
|                                        | 90         | 3.7        |
| D. Verbal Substitutions                |            |            |
| 1. Anthimeria                          | 7          |            |
| 2. Metonymy                            | 34         |            |
| 3. Periphrasis                         | <u>63</u>  |            |
|                                        | 104        | 4.3        |
| E. Exaggerations and Understatements   |            |            |
| 1. Euphemism                           | 5          |            |
| 2. Hyperbole                           | 81         |            |
| 3. Litotes                             | <u>11</u>  |            |
|                                        | 97         | 4.0        |
| F. Rhetorical Questions                | <u>105</u> | <u>4.3</u> |
| III. Total: The Tropes                 | 1130       | 46.5       |

continued . . .

Grammar Structure

|    |                                          |           |             |             |
|----|------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|
| A. | Word Order--Coordinated                  |           |             |             |
|    | 1. Anastrophe                            | 9         |             |             |
|    | 2. Antithesis                            | 45        |             |             |
|    | 3. Apposition                            | 15        |             |             |
|    | 4. Climax                                | 14        |             |             |
|    | 5. Parallelism                           | <u>80</u> |             |             |
|    |                                          |           | 163         | 6.7         |
| B. | Deliberate Word Omissions and Insertions |           |             |             |
|    | 1. Asyndeton                             | 5         |             |             |
|    | 2. Ellipsis                              | 73        |             |             |
|    | 3. Parenthesis                           | 5         |             |             |
|    | 4. Polysyndeton                          | <u>0</u>  |             |             |
|    |                                          |           | 83          | 3.4         |
| C. | Repetitions                              |           |             |             |
|    | 1. Alliterations                         | 362       |             |             |
|    | 2. Anadiplosis                           | 1         |             |             |
|    | 3. Anaphora                              | 54        |             |             |
|    | 4. Antimetabole                          | 5         |             |             |
|    | 5. Assonance                             | 398       |             |             |
|    | 6. Epanalepsis                           | 3         |             |             |
|    | 7. Epistrophe                            | 22        |             |             |
|    | 8. Polypoton                             | 40        |             |             |
|    | 9. Repetition                            | <u>82</u> |             |             |
|    |                                          |           | 967         | 39.7        |
| D. | Rhyme                                    |           |             |             |
|    | 1. End Rhyme                             | 14        |             |             |
|    | 2. Internal Rhyme                        | <u>76</u> |             |             |
|    |                                          |           | <u>90</u>   | <u>3.7</u>  |
| E. | Total: Grammar Structure                 |           | <u>1303</u> | <u>53.5</u> |
|    |                                          |           | 2433        | 100.0       |

Grand Total

three magazines combined (28%). Product category was found to not be significant for the overall trope category, but differences were observed for the two subcategories. In the case of the pun subcategory, durable good and services ads are more likely to have a pun (20%) than nondurable ads (14%). With associations, nondurable ads (35%) are more likely to have one than are ads for the other two categories (28%).

The results associated with the size of the ad reveal a significant relationship with the use of grammar structure and a relationship with the puns trope subcategory that approached significance. A lower incidence of grammar structure usage was found to exist among smaller ads (42%) than among full page or larger ads (50%). In contrast, the tendency for

puns was a somewhat greater incidence among smaller ads (22%) compared to full page (18%) and multi-page (16%) ads. Based on these results, it appears that copywriters of large ads are more likely to use grammar structure figures than are those who prepare small ads, who exhibit a tendency to use puns. Location was not found to be associated with any of the figures of speech categories.

Results concerning the picture-headline linkage relationship reveal highly consistent and significant effects for the trope category and its subcategories. In particular, ads with the headline and picture linked are more likely to employ a given figure of speech category than are those ads without a picture or with a picture that is not linked: trope — 48 vs. 25 percent;

Table 3  
Relationships of Ad Execution Factors with Figure of Speech Category Usage

| Figure of Speech<br>Category | Type of<br>Magazine<br>(df = 3) |       | Product<br>Category<br>(df = 2) |       | Size of<br>Ad<br>(df = 2) |       | Location<br>of Ad<br>(df = 3) |       | Picture-Headline<br>Relationship<br>(df = 2) |       | No. of Words<br>in Headline<br>(df = 1,2181) |       |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------|---------------------------------|-------|---------------------------|-------|-------------------------------|-------|----------------------------------------------|-------|----------------------------------------------|-------|
|                              | $\chi^2$                        | prob. | $\chi^2$                        | prob. | $\chi^2$                  | prob. | $\chi^2$                      | prob. | $\chi^2$                                     | prob. | F                                            | prob. |
| The Tropes                   | 6.87                            | ns    | 4.49                            | ns    | 5.08                      | ns    | 2.23                          | ns    | 45.68                                        | .001  | 10.09                                        | .005  |
| a. Puns                      | 3.52                            | ns    | 10.79                           | .005  | 5.98                      | .05   | 4.99                          | ns    | 31.15                                        | .001  | 2.12                                         | ns    |
| b. Associations              | 17.04                           | .001  | 11.15                           | .005  | 3.63                      | ns    | 0.86                          | ns    | 12.02                                        | .005  | 22.02                                        | .001  |
| Grammar Structure            | 2.24                            | ns    | 0.01                            | ns    | 9.39                      | .01   | 7.37                          | ns    | 4.70                                         | ns    | 91.71                                        | .001  |

ns  $p > .05$

**Table 4**  
**Incidence of Multiple Types of Figures in Ads**

| <u>Number of<br/>Figures in Ad</u> | <u>Types of<br/>Figures</u>   | <u>Frequency</u> | <u>Percentage</u> |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 1                                  | Trope                         | 471              | 51.0              |
|                                    | Pun                           | (210)            |                   |
|                                    | Association                   | (261)            |                   |
|                                    | Grammar Structure             | <u>453</u>       | <u>49.0</u>       |
|                                    | Total                         | 924              | 100.0             |
| 2                                  | Trope only                    | 93               | 15.9              |
|                                    | Two Puns                      | ( 1)             |                   |
|                                    | Two Associations              | ( 39)            |                   |
|                                    | Pun and Association           | ( 53)            |                   |
|                                    | Grammar only                  | 164              | 28.1              |
|                                    | Trope and Grammar             | 327              | 56.0              |
|                                    | Pun and Grammar               | (115)            |                   |
|                                    | Association and Grammar       | (212)            |                   |
|                                    | Total                         | 584              | 100.0             |
| 3                                  | Trope only                    | 5                | 4.4               |
|                                    | Three Puns                    | ( 0)             |                   |
|                                    | Three Associations            | ( 4)             |                   |
|                                    | Pun and Association           | ( 1)             |                   |
|                                    | Grammar only                  | 19               | 16.8              |
|                                    | Trope and Grammar             | 89               | 78.8              |
|                                    | Pun and Grammar               | ( 13)            |                   |
|                                    | Association and Grammar       | ( 58)            |                   |
|                                    | Pun, Association, and Grammar | ( 18)            |                   |
|                                    | Total                         | 113              | 100.0             |

puns — 20 vs. 6 percent; and associations — 31 vs. 20 percent. With the exception of the pun subcategory, the number of words in the headline is related to the likelihood of a figure category being used. Ads which use tropes, and particularly associations, have longer headlines ( $M=8.6$  and  $9.1$ , respectively) than those which do not ( $M=7.9$ ,  $7.9$ ). For grammar structure, the tendency is the same ( $M=9.3$  vs.  $7.2$ ).

The results of these analyses indicate that selected executional factors are related to the use of various figure categories. Different kinds of figures tend to be used in different types of magazines, for different goods categories, and in ads of differing size, but not generally in different locations. In contrast, picture-headline linkage and headline length are both related to most figure categories in the same direction — linked and longer headlines are more likely to employ almost any type of figure of speech than are shorter headlines and ones not linked. Taken together, these relationships suggest usage of a type of figure is at least partly associated with what, where and how a product is to be advertised, and perhaps with who develops it.

### *Use of Multiple Figures*

The McQuarrie and Mick (1993) article provided some evidence regarding the use of multiple figures of speech in headlines. As an extension to their analysis, Table 4 shows the breakdown of the types of figures used in the 1621 ads with at least one figure of speech. If only one figure is used, tropes and grammar structure are about evenly split, as are puns and associations. When two figures are used, in slightly over half of the ads both a trope and grammar structure figure are used, and it is nearly twice as likely to involve an association trope as a pun. Use of two grammar figures is also fairly common, whereas two tropes is less common. When three figures are used in an ad, both trope and grammar categories are generally represented, followed by ads that employ three grammar figures. A combination of association and grammar, with or without also a pun, is the most common of the various possibilities.

Of the ads with one or more figures, 39 percent use only grammar figures, 35 percent only tropes, and 26 percent use both. For the ads which employed two or three figures, 60 percent of them employ both a trope and grammar, 26 percent have only grammar, and 14 percent only tropes. The heavy combined use of tropes and grammar structure is not surprising when the differing functions of the two classes of figures are

taken into account; tropes have a role in what is said, and grammar structure comes into play in how something is said.

The patterns of figure usage reported here are quite different from those reported by McQuarrie and Mick (1993). However, the two studies differ in the way individual and multiple figure usage were classified as well as with the amount of headline display copy analyzed. The studies also differed in the particular magazines used, and in the sizes and number of ads in the samples. Thus, the differences between the studies are not surprising.

### **Discussion**

This study in part examined the extent to which figures of speech are used in print ad headlines. The results demonstrate that figures are used in over 74 percent of all ads that have a headline. In addition, the study revealed that over 88 percent of all ad headlines are linked with a picture; of those ads with a picture, 93 percent of the headlines and pictures are linked. Shimp, Urbany and Camlin (1988) report that 92 percent of the ads which have a picture are framed. Durvasula, Andrews and Akhter (1991) found that over 85 percent of the ads they studied are framed; however, it was not entirely clear from their discussion if ads without a picture were included or excluded from their sample. If the ads without a picture were in fact included in the Durvasula, Andrews and Camlin sample, the percentages of linked ads found here (88% and 93%) are only slightly greater than the respective percentages identified in the two studies, suggesting that linked and framed are practically overlapping concepts, as they were operationalized in the studies. Figure of speech usage was found to vary by magazine, headline-picture linkage and headline length, but not across product category, ad size, and location. The number of figures used varied by linkage and headline length, but not the other factors. In addition, some types of figures are heavily used, whereas others are not. Usage of particular categories varied by magazine, product category, headline-picture linkage, headline length, and ad size, but not among locations within a magazine. When multiple figures are used in a headline, the most common usage is a combination of a trope and a grammar figure, but multiple grammar figures are also fairly common. It is clear that message form factors represent a ripe area for further study.

The implications of the findings regarding figure of speech usage are important for the practice of ad-

vertising. When the findings are considered as a group, it appears that there is a tendency for "me-tooism," deliberate or not, in the application of figures of speech in practice. A number of figures of speech seem to be seldom used, and the building of headline copy around such a figure could conceivably help the ad to stand out from the others based on its novelty. The information provided in Tables 1 and 2 may be of assistance for identifying other figures to use. Of course, figures of speech are complements to strong, persuasive message ideas, not substitutes.

Even though Ogilvy (1964) and Caples (1974) strongly advised against using puns, 17 percent of the figures are of that category. Starch (1923), Ogilvy (1964, 1983), and Wells, Burnett, and Moriarty (1992) do seem to be in favor of grammatical figures and do not rule out associations. The high incidence of grammar figures and, to a lesser extent, associations indicate that the advertising community seems to be in line with their recommendations.

There are several directions for future research that emanate from this study concerning the use of figures of speech and headline-picture linkage in advertising. First, a comparative content analysis of print, television and radio advertising is needed to identify if there are commonalities among the three in terms of figure and linkage usage. Second, there is a need to examine if such other mechanical and message variables as one- versus two-sided message structure and the use of a celebrity spokesperson are associated with figure of speech and headline-picture linkage factors. Third, and most importantly, investigations of the effectiveness of ads that differ in terms of usage of headline-picture linkage, figures of speech, and of particular types of figures are needed to determine whether the practices are worthwhile. Both cognitive impact and persuasiveness are important effectiveness dimensions to examine. In particular, the information processing operations of awareness, attention, depth of processing, comprehension, integration with existing information, retrieval from memory, and attitude change are suitable candidates for effectiveness assessment. For instance, it may be the case that usage of figures may instigate a higher level of involvement in a bottom-up fashion as suggested by audience involvement theory (Greenwald and Leavitt 1984).

This study clearly demonstrated that figures of speech and headline-picture linkage are widely used in current advertising. It is important that attention be given to developing a better understanding of these factors in terms of how each works, its strengths, and

its shortcomings. The topic is highly relevant to the advertising discipline and should not be overlooked.

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