

COGNITIVE MECHANISM OF “ZOOMING IN” IN “ANTIVIRAL” PUBLIC SERVICE ADVERTISING: FROM THE “SPANISH FLU” TO “COVID-19”

Whereas most studies on the pandemic COVID-19 discourse focus on its lexical and word-building features, the cognitive research on this issue is still scarce [Cummings 2021; Guido 2022]. The paper considers verbal and non-verbal means of the “zooming in” cognitive mechanism in the case of “antiviral” campaigns provided by public service advertising (hereafter – PSA). Building upon the conceptions of [Hill, MacLaury 1995: 280; Foulsham and Cohn, 2020], by the “zooming in” cognitive mechanism we mean a semantic shift aimed at switching between full and close-up scenes and bringing the object to the spotlight of attention.

The study analyzes three main groups of public service advertising texts that promote the fight against viruses throughout the twentieth – twenty-first centuries: 1) advertising of the 1910s – 20s about the prevention of the “Spanish flu” widespread in Europe, Russia, and the USA; 2) the “Avant-garde” hygiene propaganda in the USSR in the 1920s, created by Soviet Futurists and Constructivists, such as Vladimir Mayakovsky, Alexander Rodchenko, etc., and 3) contemporary PSA on “COVID-19” in English and Italian.

Zooming in, as one of the major cognitive mechanisms of “antiviral” PSA, encompasses the word-forming, lexical-semantic, as well as visual dimensions (pic. 1, 2).



Pic. 1. Soviet hygiene propaganda, 1920s



Pic. 2. We Are Social, Snapchat, 2020

For example, Soviet “Avant-garde” hygiene propaganda introduced linguistic innovations with word-formation means, creating augmentative forms, such as *bacillina* (rus.) ‘a huge bacillus’, *gubishchi* (rus.) ‘enormous lips’. Contemporary anti-COVID campaigns employ enantiosemy, or auto-antonyms, as in the case of construction *go viral* with its two overlapping meanings: 1) ‘to spread quickly and widely on the Internet like a virus’ and 2) ‘to spread information on the fight against the virus with lightning speed’: *Let sharing. Go Viral. Share food. Share supplies* (#GoViralToStopTheVirus).

The analysis specifically addresses the case of the word *distance* which acquires contextual shifts of meaning: it no longer marks an objective spatial value, but a subjective variable switched to the zone of internalization, the internal space of a person: *Se ti vuoi bene, mantieni la distanza. Un metro puo bastare; E' la distanza a fare la differenza. Facciamolo per noi. Facciamolo per*

tutti. (#restiamoadistanza di almeno un metro); *Keep smart distance*; *Care starts on the front lines*. *But it doesn't end here*. *Every act of care matters*. *Share your small acts of care*. *And inspire others to do the same* (NIVEA Share the Care). Contemporary PSA brings into focus various semantic components: evaluative (*smart distance*), metaphorical (*Distance breaks the chain*), etc. The idea that external distance means internal unity with a distant object leads to enantiosemy: *Se ti vuoi bene, mantieni la distanza* (Italy); *Zoom*. *Shorten the distance*.

References:

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