From Verbal English to Visual English—A Semiotic Turn

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Abstract
As its general aim, this paper calls for a semiotic turn or a paradigm shift from concentration on verbal English to interaction between visual and verbal English in English Studies. Specially, within a theoretical framework of multimodal social semiotics, the present paper illustrates what visual English is, examines how it represents and communicates meaning as a semiotic resource system, and identifies some characteristic features of visual English through an itemised, theoretically informed analysis of five advertisements as embodiments of visual English.

The focus of this paper is interpretation of the socially coded meanings represented by those advertisements through a text-image interaction in a semiotically-based interdisciplinary approach. Furthermore, it explores if there is any paradigmatic and/or syntagmatic markedness in those target advertisements, and discusses the visual as well as stylistic effects of any such markedness detected. On this basis, this paper generalises about some patterns of multimodal representation in the use of visual English, and briefly charts future directions for further semiotic research on visual English.

Keywords: visual English, advertising, semiotic codes, interdisciplinary approach

1. Introduction
1.1 Visual English as a culture-bound sign system

1.1.1 Visibility and ubiquity of visual English: The cultural context
Situated at an interface between a brief discussion of “visual culture” (Baldwin et al., 2004) in a digital age marked by an extensive use of “new communication technologies”
(Jewitt, 2004) as a background on the one hand and, on the other, English studies, this paper examines, semiotically, “visual English” (Goodman, 2007) in contrast to verbal English. The general aim is to explore features of multisemiotic signification characteristic of visual English. The term “visual English” was employed by Goodman (2007) as a label for a multi-medial, technologically-driven form of multimodal communication. Distinctive from verbal English which is largely dependent on the use of verbal signs for conveyance of meaning, visual English consists in visual signs that help to enhance effect of multimodal communication. Its rise can be ascribed to—among other things—the fast development of postmodernist visual culture facilitated by the popularisation of new communication technologies such as computer-aided digitisation of photographic images.

In broad terms, “visual culture encompasses all those socially standardized ways of thinking, acting and feeling towards the appearances of the world” (Baldwin et al., 2004, p. 366). This conception suggests a relation between humans as part of a culture and their interest in looks of things, persons, and relationships. In the West, looks carry much weight in a beholder’s appreciation or evaluation of things: “Western culture’s pervasive concern with the appearance of object makes it decidedly ocular-centric” (ibid., p. 367).

In Western society the privileging of graphic expression has been almost everywhere and over centuries, but it is the arrival of a modern era “that has heightened the significance of the visual” (Baldwin et al., 2004, p. 367), as was evidenced by the ubiquitous “advertising billboards, posters” as “part of the linguistic landscape” (Mooney & Evans, 2015, p. 87). As a “process of development” (Baldwin et al., 2004, p. 4)—the third sense of the term culture, visual culture has, by now, developed from a level of pervasiveness characteristic of a modern era up to the level of “hegemony” at which “visual—or more specifically pictorial—representations saturate everyday life” (Baldwin et al., 2004, p. 367). This “hegemony” or predominance of visuals is a dimension of a postmodernist society or culture. It is made possible by availability of new communication technologies and a resultant capability of electronically visualising scenic spots as observed by Urry: “The post-tourist ‘does not have to leave his or her house in order to see many of the objects of the tourist gaze. Especially with TV and video everything can now be seen, noted, compared and contextualized’ (1988, p. 37)” (Baldwin et al., 2004, p. 389). A clear example to illustrate those affordances is an online advertisement produced by Travel Republic, a travel agency, as seen below:
As shown above, this web-borne advertisement is a multimodal ensemble, comprising designated buttons (e.g. “Holidays”, “Flights”) and their underlines, special typography with its two highly salient, large “Travel Republic” as the name of a travel agency, and a photographic image. Technically, these component semiotic modalities are fused, and stylistically cohere into a single act of multimodal communication which conveys the following message vividly: a viewer of this advertisement is likely to be inspired by Travel Republic which recommends many attractive tourist destinations such as Florence, Italy as photographically presented here. This is an instance of visual English. There are numerous advertisements and posters that combine verbal and visual signs in a manner similar to the one shown above in their performance of promotional or persuasive functions. The integration of them for conveyance of meaning simultaneously through different channels of communication characterises visual English, the focus of this paper.

1.1.2 A brief survey of English studies: Rationale for study of visual English
Although visual English—as illustrated above—is ubiquitous in contemporary society, the teaching of and research on it is inadequate. Such inadequacy can be partly attributed to what English Studies have focused on for long. In academia, it is a consensus that English is not only a language, but also “a subject, or a discipline” (Eaglstone, 2009 [2002, 1999], p. 2). As a subject, English has been, in a sense, interdisciplinary, covering an impressive number of areas of concentration. For instance, in the nineteenth century, “the individual subject that was itself called English, which at this time included grammar, orthography, etymology, syntax, prosody, reading, literature, rhetoric, and occasional classes in elocution” (Renker, 2007, p. 16). This nineteenth-century fine tradition has been
largely carried forward up to the present day, and enriched by an expansion of a curricular scope to include various schools of linguistic thoughts ranging from semiotic linguistics (e.g. Shaumyan, 2006), Chomsky’s transformational-generative grammar, Halliday’s systemic-functional linguistics, and Sinclair’s corpus linguistics. These different schools of linguistic thoughts have enabled a more detailed, theoretically informed, and multi-perspectival linguistic study of the English language.

However, it merits special note that, for a very long time, studies of English as a language have been primarily concerned with its verbal elements—its sounds, morphemes, lexis, syntax, conceptual meaning as well as speaker meaning and, at a higher level of cognitive processing, its organisation of discourse structure. Such a multi-layered, systematic study over decades has yielded important insights into properties of various verbal elements of English. However, little academic attention has been paid to pictorial mode in which English is used. This is also true of the discussion of English as a university subject: the social political roles of English have been identified or proposed, but not its potential or possibilities when it is visually used: “English as an instrument of colonial and class domination and English as a socially progressive project” (Ellis, 2014, p. 3, emphasis in original).

Such distribution of attention leaves with scholars an area less explored: features and functions of visual English. Parallel to it, textbooks produced so far have not yet incorporated into them sufficient knowledge about visual English, or signs, sign systems, and semiotic analysis needed to understand visual English. Although advent of new communication technologies and their application in ELT have sparked research on the interrelationship between English studies and new literacy (e.g. Rowsell & Chen, 2014), yet few studies focusing on visual English have been reported. To redress this undesirable situation, this paper calls for a semiotic turn to visual English; that is, it is high time to conduct semiotically underpinned research on visual English and launch relevant teaching programmes.

1.2 Object of studies, aims, and significance

1.2.1 Advertisement as an object of the present study

Figure 1 as an example displays some compositional features of visual English. To more systematically explore the representational features of visual English from a semiotic perspective, this paper will examine—as its object of studies—three online film advertisements and two online advertisements for vehicles. They are all multimodal, but different in ideational function, spatial layout, and way of organising interactive meaning. The film advertised is *Jane Eyre* adapted from Brontë’s classic novel with the same title. It has been taken as an object of study for several reasons. First, the novel is a masterpiece that justifiably claims an enduring artistic value and, as such, it is often selected as a fine literary text to be taught in modules on English literature; second, it is expected to be academically rewarding to detect how film advertisements—a genre
different from both the original novel and the film version of it—represent, in a semiotic manner, the coded meanings which the novel and the film constructed and conveyed to the audiences. Parallel to the film advertisements are two advertisements for vehicles: one is the Mercedes SLK, while the other is KIA Motions. Now the products advertised are not one and the same, but vary a little: one is a car, the other, a lorry. The purpose of this selection is to explore if there is any patterns of advertising for commodities that are mass-produced. In future research, more advertisements for a great variety of products will be selected as samples.

1.2.2 The concept of visual English and specific aims of this paper

It is of paramount importance to state clearly at the outset that advertisements are chosen for analysis as a form of visual English. But conceptually, what is visual English? In retrospect, visual English is a term used by Goodman in his discussion of texts that use “some form of visual information alongside verbal language” (Goodman, 2007, p. 113). Indeed, in a context of visual culture “it is difficult to find a single text which uses solely verbal English” (ibid., p. 113). In response, Goodman has proposed some fundamental properties of visual English by means of a question: “to what extent can we say that any picture or graphic representation accompanying English words may be called ‘visual English’” (ibid., p. 113)? Within Goodman’s conceptual framework, visual English refers to “those many elements in a text which are visual rather than verbal in nature” (ibid., p. 113). While trailblazing to a certain extent, this conceptualisation might have placed more emphasis on the visual modalities than on English in the visual channel of communication. Strictly speaking, this might not fall nicely within the purview of English Studies as a discipline. To offer an alternative lens, so to speak, this paper will conceptualise visual English anew, and establish some patterns of visual English through a number of case analyses into the previously mentioned five advertisements. To show some advances in study of visual English enabled by this paper, it is relevant to reproduce Goodman’s primary concerns first.

In his discussion of visual English, Goodman identifies several main issues, and two of them are:

- the specific ways in which graphics and pictures can communicate, and the extent to which it is possible to make distinctions between English in the visual and verbal channels of communication;
- the specific way in which visual and verbal English can interact within a text, reinforcing each others’ messages or creating potentially conflicting meanings.

(Goodman, 2007, p. 113)

Of these two issues, the first one focuses more on the communicative functions of visual images, while the second is more closely related to multisemiotic features of meaning-making process of visual English. Therefore, it is a focus of the present study. With respect
to the general goal set in 1.1.1, this paper is intended to achieve the following aims:

1. Conceptualise visual English from a social semiotic perspective;
2. Analyse sample advertisements as a typical form of visual English to detect and describe representational and communicational features of visual English;
3. Detect and describe mechanisms for text-image interaction in instances of visual English.

1.2.3 Significance and an outline of contents
Examination of advertisements as a form of visual English can be conducted in a number of approaches, ranging from semiotics, media studies, cultural studies, multimodal discourse analysis, communication studies, stylistics and so on. To achieve the aims specified above (i.e. 1, 2, and 3), this paper will carry out planned research in an interdisciplinary approach. To ensure breadth of examination, theories of media semiotics, multimodal social semiotics and stylistics will be jointly applied. Advertisement or advertising is a favourite research topic in humanities and social sciences, which has often been addressed from a semiotic perspective. What differentiates the present study from the previous studies lies in its conceptual framework (see Diagram 1 in 2.1.1 below), and angle of vision (advertisements viewed as embodiment of visual English), cross-disciplinarity (applying key concepts in a number of disciplines). These distinctions embody the value of this paper. Epistemologically, the value or significance can be spelt out below:

(1) Theoretically informed exploration of a relatively new research area;
(2) Combination of conceptualisation with case analyses;
(3) Contribution to the construction of specialised knowledge about visual English in a interdisciplinary manner.

In terms of contents, Section 1 introduces the concept of visual English, states the object of study, aims, and value of this study. Section 2 conceptualises visual English. Section 3 analyses the sample advertisements as a form of visual English, while Section 4 reports on findings and proposes new directions for further research.

2. An Interdisciplinary Approach to Advertisement as a Typical Form of Visual English

2.1 Visual English versus verbal English

2.1.1 Some conceptual preliminaries: Twyman’s classification of modes of expression
Section 1 states the rationale for and the aims as well as value of the present study. This section describes an interdisciplinary approach to visual English. First of all, some theoretical foundations will be presented. In general, language is amenable to a range of expression made available by the verbal and visual media. In concrete terms, according
to an analysis performed by a British typographer Michael Twyman, language has several modes of expression, as is displayed in the diagram below:

Diagram 1. Abridged from modes of graphic expression (Crystal, 2010, p. 190)

As shown in Diagram 1, the modes of expression under the heading of “language” are Aural/oral (“spoken”) and Visual, the latter being further divided into “Graphic” and “Non-graphic”. Interestingly, Verbal (“written”) as a mode is also subsumed under the heading of “Graphic”, because orthography or spelling system of a language (e.g. English alphabet) consists in various shapes, thus graphic in nature. The present paper is placed within this conceptual framework, mainly exploring the interaction between verbal mode and pictorial mode used in visual English for multiplication of meaning. The following is an illustration.

2.1.2 Visualisation versus verbalisation of the title of Maugham’s famous novel
The title of Somerset Maugham’s world famous novel written in English as a language given below can exemplify the mode of verbal expression:

Example 1

*Of Human Bondage* (Maugham, 1915)

In nature, this title is a group of words which consist of a certain number of letters combined and sequenced according to certain English phonetic and morphological principles. In terms of presentation, they are linear, non-pictographic, but characteristically verbal. By contrast, the presentation of the same title (please see Figure 2 below) is not purely verbal, but is multimodal—the title is printed slantingly on a film poster, spatially over the book that bears the author’s name—Somerset Maugham, and flanked diagonally by the visual images of an actor and an actress who play, respectively, the role of a male protagonist and that of a woman protagonist in the novel:
Perceivable from the above, the composition as well as communication effect of the title *Of Human Bondage* in the verbal channel of communication (Example 1) and that in the visual channel—the title on a film poster (Figure 2)—are different. This is because the latter has several different semiotic resources, ranging from font, size of letters, spatial layout, colour and, most crucially, visual images of characters. These semiotic modalities are all present in visual English, and many of them are often absent from verbal English embodied in, for instance, just the title of Maugham’s novel in the verbal channel. Semiotically, when the title *Of Human Bondage* as a cluster of verbal signs is positioned between the aforementioned actor and actress on the film poster, it spatially establishes a linkage between them, vividly implying an interrelationship between the two main characters they act as. This connection is likely to excite a viewer’s curiosity about the film adapted from Maugham’s novel, possibly inducing them to ask a potential question about the connection: what is the “bondage” between the two characters like? This thought-provoking effect is produced by the text-image interaction, which is a fundamental property of visual English. It follows that advertisements (including poster advertisements) embody visual English, and are therefore a genre very appropriate for study as a specimen of visual English.

### 2.2 Name and nature of advertisement

#### 2.2.1 The concept of advertisement

As the object of the present study, “advertisements are forms of discourse which make a powerful contribution to how we construct our identities. At the same time, for adverts to work, they must use our commonly shared resources of language in ways that affect us and mean something to us” (Goddard, 2002 [1998], p. 3). There are two senses embedded
in this definition. First, a given advertisement shapes who purchases or sponsors the advertisement, or what it advertises. Alternatively, an advertisement describes persons involved or sponsors of the advertisement from a cultural perspective, because their identities are culturally determined, and characterise a product, or a service, or an organisation which it promotes. Second, an advertisement employs informative and emotive or persuasive language to exert an influence on a reader or viewer of it. This feature of advertisement is more closely related to the present study, and will be explored methodically. From the viewpoint of communication process, advertisement is a result of advertising as an act of commercially oriented communication. Therefore, to study advertisements is to study advertising. Technically, advertising can be variously defined:

[Advertising is] interpreting to the public, or that part of it which it is desired to reach, the advantages of a product or service. (American Association of Advertising Agencies, 1918, cited in Armstrong, 2010, p. 1)

Advertising is defined as any paid form of nonpersonal communication about an organisation, product, service, or idea by an identified sponsor. (Alexander, 1965, p. 9, cited in Belch/Belch, 2009 [2007 etc.], p. 18)

The 1918 definition specifies the nature of advertising, which is drawing public attention to the lead or superior position of a product (e.g. car) or a service (e.g. business consultancy), while the 1965 definition foregrounds its chargeable or commercial nature as well as—emphatically—the media through which advertising messages are conveyed and received. Concretely, “the nonpersonal component means that advertising involves mass media (e.g., TV, radio, magazines, newspapers) that can transmit a message to large groups of individuals, often at the same time” (ibid., p. 18). Understandably, different media resort to different semiotic modalities; for instance, TV uses visuals in a large measure, radio relies on verbal language for transmission of messages, whereas both magazines and newspapers can perform their multi-functions in a multimodal communication system. Also, different media afford achievement of different communication effect. It follows that to study advertising necessitates a look into medium as channel of communication. Furthermore, semiotics, its two branches—media semiotics, multimodal social semiotics, and stylistics all throw light—from different viewpoints though—on advertising as a promotional act of communication. Key concepts in these disciplines serve as theoretical foundations of a proposed interdisciplinary approach distinct in its own right, and will therefore be briefly described below.

2.3 An interdisciplinary approach to advertising research

2.3.1 Semiotic analysis of advertisements and Denesi’s media semiotics
In modern society advertising is encountered in all walks of life. Therefore, “Given its
obvious importance to understanding modern signifying orders, it is little wonder that advertising has become a target of great interest to semioticians” (Danesi, 2002, p. 178). Many scholars have pursued this academic interest. For instance, in their 2002 *Persuasive Signs: The Semiotics of Advertising* Beasley and Danesi defined “advertising as social discourse” (2002, p. 1) and “as art” (ibid., p. 151), highlighting the nature of advertising and its aesthetic appeal. In this book they presented a semiotic approach to advertising and made a case analysis into an advertisement for “high heel shoes” (Beasley & Danesi, 2002, p. 26).

Very importantly, in describing “creating a signification system” (ibid., p. 50) as a signifying process indispensable to advertising, the two scholars discussed roles played by “print media” and “electronic media” (ibid., pp. 77-79), which were also examined in “The Impact of Digital Media on Advertising: Five Cultural Dilemmas” (McAllister & Orme, 2017, pp. 71-79). In today’s technology-driven society, effects of advertising depend considerably on types of media used, and are treated from different perspectives. For instance, the above-mentioned discussion is intertextually related to and carried out more elaborately in a more specialised book entitled *Understanding Media Semiotics* (Danesi, 2002).

Among others, *Understanding Media Structure* (Danesi, 2002) specifies the general goal of media semiotics and raises three questions as guidance on how to undertake a semiotic study of media.

The primary goal of media semiotics is to catalogue and analyse these structures as they manifest themselves in media products.

In identifying and documenting media structures, the semiotician is guided by three basic questions:

1. What does a certain structure (text, genre, etc.) mean?
2. How does it represent what it means?
3. Why does it mean what it means?

(Danesi, 2002, p. 23)

Danesi’s work pinpoints the main concerns of media semiotics, and specifies its investigative foci in the form of questions. However, these three questions are implicitly semiotic, as no discipline-specific terms (e.g. signs) are used in the formulation of them. Furthermore, there is no clear mention of visual signs as an object of semiotics.

As if to complement Danesi’s work recounted succinctly above, Bignell’s work entitled *Media Semiotics An Introduction* charts an analytical process in unmistakably semiotic terms:

1. Identify the visual and linguistic signs in the ad;
2. See how the signs are organised by paradigmatic and syntagmatic selection;
3. Note how the signs relate to each other through various coding systems.

(Bignell, 2002, pp. 31-32)

In a sample analysis of an advertisement for Volkswagen Gold Estate (a German car),
Bignell took the above three steps, emphasised the interaction between verbal and visual signs and the former’s function: “The function of linguistic signs is to ‘anchor’ the various meanings of the image down” (Bignell, 2002, p. 40). In brief, media semiotics as reproduced above explores (1) the roles of media (e.g. pictures or visual images) and (2) text-image interaction in representation of coded meaning and communication of advertising messages. Parallel to media semiotics, multimodal social semiotics and stylistics also conceptually underpin a multi-layered study of advertisements as embodiment of visual English.

2.3.2 Kress’s multimodal social semiotic approach and stylistics of visual English

A social semiotic approach to visual analysis—which greatly facilitates a study of visual English—is theoretically derived from Halliday’s social semiotic theory of language elaborated in his seminal book *Language as a Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning* (2001 [1978]). This approach is orientated “to the interests of the sign-maker”; “to the environment in which meaning is made”, “to meaning and to the semiotic/cultural resources which are available for the realization/materialization of meaning as a motivated sign” (Kress, 2010, p. 57, emphasis in the original). Perceivable from these orientations, social semiotics focuses more on the sign-maker’s interests or intensions, the sociocultural context of meaning-making practices, and semiotic resources or modes available for construction of meaning. When this is integrated with multimodal discourse studies, it becomes a multimodal social semiotic approach—very appropriate for the present study.

As an excellent example of multimodal social semiotic analysis, Djonov and Van Leeuwen’s insightful work on “Normativity and Software A Multimodal Social Semiotic Approach” (2012) illustrates how to perform such an analysis. To begin with, it conceptualises norm and normativity adhered to in social discourse. Then it elaborates two key concepts—“markedness” and “foregrounding” useable to identify features of semiotic practices that depart from norm or normal patterns of behaviour. Specifically, “markedness exists when there is a difference in the value assigned to the options comprising a semiotic choice”; “…for example, in a binary opposition the unmarked option may be viewed as simpler, primary, more frequent, typical and/or widespread, and the marked a more complex, secondary/derivative, less frequent, unusual and/or special” (Djonov & Van Leeuwen, 2012, p. 120).

Parallel to and distinct from markedness, foregrounding is yet another conceptual apparatus employable to represent multimodal phenomena that are salient in certain respects. The exploration of foregrounding serves the purpose of finding out how “a single text (…) follows, breaks away from or establishes certain norms in order to achieve its overall effect” (Djonov & Van Leeuwen, 2012, p. 124). Given this role, the concept “foregrounding” is more concerned than “markedness” with how a text or multimodal semiosis produces a designed or desirable effect via accentuation of certain textual features or signs. It assigns much importance to the role played by the analyst as a sign recipient and interpreter in deciding on whether certain elements—either visual or verbal or both—are foregrounded signifiers.
Perceivable from the above, foregrounding is crucial to Djonov and Van Leeuwen’s version of multimodal social semiotic approach, so is to stylistics. In a sense, “stylistics is a method of textual interpretation in which primacy of place is assigned to language” (Simpson, 2014 [2004], p. 5, emphasis in the original). In the light of this definition, stylistics is more concerned with linguistic features of verbal signs in a meaning-making process. It overlaps with multimodal social semiotics in some respects, but possesses its own analytical apparatuses. One of the general aims of stylistics as a discipline is to identify and locate in texts or pieces of discourse under examination linguistic features that are “foregrounded” by means of various stylistic devices. One of them is deviation: “Deviation, which is a linguistic phenomenon, has an important psychological effect on readers (and hearers). If a part of a poem is deviant, it becomes especially noticeable, or perceptually prominent. We call this psychological effect foregrounding” (Short, 1996, p. 11, emphasis in the original). In Dojonov and Van Leeuwen’s work summarised above, the notion “deviation” was not really or fully underscored, although it usually gives rise to the effect of foregrounding. For this reason, it is sensible to apply this stylistic concept originally derived from statistics in discussion of the effect of foregrounding achieved via use of either verbal or visual elements in a signification process.

2.3.3 An interdisciplinary approach to advertisements as a form of visual English
So far key concepts in and methods of semiotic analysis, media semiotics, multimodal social semiotics and stylistics have been succinctly reviewed. Each of them has its theoretical assumptions as well as special analytical apparatuses, but all of them have a shared focus on mechanisms for creating a signification process. This common core is a foundation for combination of them as an integrated approach to advertising. In brief, based on a survey of approaches conducted above for conceptual and methodological underpinnings, the present paper proposes an interdisciplinary approach that encompasses those key concepts and analytical methods. Schematically, this approach takes the form of a 3-step research process spelt out below.

Analytical procedure
1. Describe briefly the contents of chosen advertisements as composite signifiers and identify networks of various codes in them;
2. Investigate how texts and images in those advertisements are paradigmatically and syntagmatically interrelated or interacted to represent meaning semiotically;
3. Detect if there are markedness and foregrounding in paradigmatic and syntagmatic selections; if yes, interpret their socially coded meanings, establish patterns if any, and identify their visual as well as stylistic effects.

The three steps listed above are logically interrelated. They are so sequenced in order for the intended analysis to uncover semiotic properties of the target advertisements, which can be deemed representative of multisemiotic features and communication effects of visual English.
3. A Multi-Dimensional Analysis of Advertisements as Embodiments of Visual English

3.1 Online advertisements for the film *Jane Eyre*

3.1.1 A synopsis of the novel *Jane Eyre* and its film adaptation

The set of advertisements to examine first are three online advertisements for the film *Jane Eyre* adapted from Charlotte Brontë’s Victorian novel that has the same title. Beautifully crafted and published in 1847, *Jane Eyre* is a Bildungsroman: it vividly depicts the eponymous woman character’s growth and her gradually gained intellectual independence. Equally significantly, it typifies a romance, which is “a work of prose fiction in which the scenes and incidents are more or less removed from common life and are surrounded by a halo of mystery, an atmosphere of strangeness and adventure” (*The Reader’s Encyclopedia*, Benét, 1973, cited in Childs, 2000, p. 1).

Indeed, ascribable to its sophisticated presentation of deep love, labyrinthine, unpredictable, gripping plot development, and a mysterious atmosphere, Brontë’s novel has been a constant object of narrative study for over 170 years. Here is a succinct summary of the story enriched by some insightful comments made by two famous British scholars: “Jane Eyre, the character whose name forms the title of the novel, begins life as an orphan, undergoes many difficulties working as a governess, and finally marries the man she loves, Rochester, who is her social superior and a man of wealth. On one level, the novel is a rags-to-riches story. On another level, it is a novel of love, mystery and passion which poses profound moral and social questions” (Carter & McRae, 2001 [1997], p. 268). Due to this many-faceted nature and its melodramatic narrativisation, the novel has been adapted for the screen. In retrospect, the film has been very popular with generations of viewers. In this socio-cultural context, how have advertisements for the film *Jane Eyre* semiotically represented its aesthetic appeal to audiences? This question will be explored in the next sub-section.

3.1.2 Different signs and text-image interaction in the advertisements for *Jane Eyre*

Figure 3. An online advertisement for the film *Jane Eyre* (1)
a. Barthes’ classification of text-image relations and text-image interaction in Figure 3

Figure 3 as an advertisement presents an eye-catching scene from the film, thematises love multimodally, and is a good specimen of visual English in which words, phrases, or sentences appear in the visual channel of communication. This means that verbal signs are superimposed in visual semiotic modes such as pictorial images. In this sense, to examine visual English is to explore the text-image interrelationship or interaction.

In semiotics, Barthes is a very famous pioneer of research on advertisements and news photography. As far back as 1960s he already started to explore how images create and convey meanings. One of his chief contributions in this area of concentration is his classification of text-image relations reproduced below:

Diagram 2. Barthes’ classification of text-image relations represented graphically as a systemic network (Bateman, 2014, p. 35)

Interpretable from the above, Barthes classified the relationships between texts and images in terms of their respective weight and proportion to the whole bounded visual space. If texts are more prominent, they “amplify” images, or make more connotative interpretations of otherwise elusive images, and specify their meanings. Conversely, if images proportionately outweigh texts, they work as illustration of otherwise abstract concepts which texts represent. However, if texts and images are more or less of equal status, they work together to “relay” or jointly transmit unified meaning to the audience. Barthes’ classification provides a framework; nevertheless, the key words “amplifies” and “reduces” could be substituted by contextually more appropriate words, such as “specify” and “concretise”, as shown below.

In broad terms, the structures of bounded visual spaces (the top-down path of the taxonomy, the left-right path of the flowchart) are often modeled on forms of social organisation. Following a left-right reading path deemed conventional in Western society, a viewer can easily perceive that the advertisement realises an image act (i.e. the picture) first, and then a verbal communicative act (i.e. the advertising text—“A love story as fiercely intelligent as it is passionate”). The image and the text are interrelated through common thematisation of love. In the picture, the facial contact of the actor and the actress iconises a Hallidayan behavioural process of doing the kissing, thus prototypically signifying manifestation of love. In the text, the word “love” unmistakably points out the
theme of the film, and therefore specifies the meaning constructed through iconisation of a kiss between two lovers. If the text or advertising jingle under discussion anchors the meaning of the message conveyed by the picture, the latter concretises its content.

b. Paradigmatic markedness and its coded meanings
Parallel to this multimodal interaction identified above, some paradigmatic markedness foregrounds a special feature of the film. Semantically, the lexical bundle “A love story fiercely intelligent” is somewhat deviant from a collocational norm. Denoting a remarkable ability to apply knowledge and skills, the adjective “intelligent” is not typically or frequently deployed to modify the word “story”, let alone the thematically informative phrase “love story”. An extract of a number of example sentences from authoritative dictionaries provides evidence:

1. I have chatted with him and he seems to be educated, humorous and intelligent.
2. In this case, however, the event was in fact the result of an intelligent designer.
3. There have been some intelligent arguments made against the war.
4. We’re still too travel tired to offer anything like an intelligent answer.

(Source: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/intelligent)

Easily inferable from the above examples, the adjective “intelligent” is usually collocated with nouns that denote human beings (e.g. “he”, “designer”), result of a cognitive process (e.g. “arguments”, “answer”), but not words referring to happenings in macrouniverse, such as story or events. Therefore, the use of “intelligent” as a paradigmatic selection departs from the norm, and is stylistically marked. When it is employed to post-modify the phrase “a love story”, it personifies the story to a certain extent, so that a socially conditioned reader of this text is prompted to endow the film with great thinking ability (indicated by the adverb “fiercely”) characteristically possessed by human species. By extension, the use of the adjective “intelligent” helps to bring out the singular intellectual power of the film to set a potential viewer thinking. Furthermore, the syntagmatic sequencing of the words in the text prioritises the attachment of what “intelligent” means to the love story unfolded in the film, because the adjective “intelligent” occurs prior to another evaluative adjective “passionate”: “as fiercely intelligent as it is passionate”. In short, such paradigmatic and syntagmatic arrangements construct the meaning of stylistic codes: the choice of the adjective “intelligent” is stylistically salient, thus constructing in a reader a schema of a love story different from the norm and adding to the good effect of the advertisement.
Compared with Figure 3, Figure 4 is more impregnated with semiotically coded meanings. They are derived from the operation of social codes (e.g. bodily codes), textual codes (e.g. stylistic codes) and interpretative codes (e.g. perceptual codes; see Chandler, 2002, p. 149 for a detailed account of various semiotic codes). An itemised interdisciplinary analysis is expected to show (1) what coded meanings different signs in Figure 4 represent, and (2) how the paradigmatic and syntagmatic arrangements facilitate the interaction of the text and the image, which, in turn, creates a signification system.

c. Textual codes (e.g. stylistic codes)
On the left of Figure 4 is an advertising text: “From the timeless classic comes this year’s most romantic love story.” At first glance, a reader may not find this jingle as catchy as the one in Figure 3, because there is hardly any apparent paradigmatic markedness. Nevertheless, the semantic contrast between two phrases—“the timeless classic” (denoting a judgement made over a long period of time) and “this year” (referring to the present time)—is stylistically important, because it signifies the high quality of the novel published in 1847 and its enduring artistic value: the love story unfolded in the novel will be shown on the screen this year. Such a connection between the past and the present foregrounds the novel’s aesthetic appeal that transcends the boundary of time. Moreover, inversion (i.e. the syntactic structure “From…comes…”) as another stylistic trait not only emphasises the importance of the original source of the film for its success, but also puts much end weight on the phrase “most romantic love story”, implying that the film has great genre-related emotive power. Comparatively, then, if the advertising jingle in Figure 3 promotes some characteristic features of the contents of the film, the text in Figure 4 accentuates its long-lasting aesthetic appeal via the operation of some stylistic codes.
d. Social codes (e.g. bodily codes), and text-image interaction

Visible in the left region of Figure 4 for the shirt of the actor who plays the role of Rochester, the key phrase “most romantic love story” is clearly illustrative of visual English—English used in visual semiotic modes. Furthermore, the word “love” establishes the photographically coded meaning of the message conveyed by the bodily contact between the two characters: they are embracing, and about to kiss each other, which is a clear sign of love. Also, in addition to their proximity and physical orientation to each other, the two characters’ facial expression enhances the thematisation of love: Rochester is looking down at Jane smilingly, while Jane is tilting her head up to Rochester, eager for a kiss and, crucially, has her eyes closed, iconising her indulgence in the glow of love. Such is a filmic technique termed as close-up, which not only visualizes intensity of love, but also centralises the role of Jane in the film. The spatial layout of this advertisement enables the image to embody love, while the key phrase “love story” anchors what the embracing signifies.

e. Perceptual codes

Seen from Figure 4, the left arm of Jane is visually proximate to a building—Thornfield Hall in the film. The angular shape of Jane’s arm is such that it is kind of pointing downward to the Hall which is visually above the title of the film—*Jane Eyre*. These visual paradigms portray, semiotically, Jane as a “figure” or a “dominant shape” set against a “background” or a “ground” (see Chandler, 2002, p. 150 for an explanation of these terms) consisting mainly in the colour black and the woods seeable on the bottom right-hand corner of Figure 4. This spatialisation outlines the contour of Jane, multimodally indexes the relation between Jane, Thornfield Hall, and a typographically large and heavy two-word text—*Jane Eyre*. In turn, such a visual index strikes in a viewer’s mind a cord of association between the eponymous heroine, an isolated hall, wild landscape surrounding the Hall, and “night, depth, hatred, heaviness, fear” often connoted by black (Prado-Leon et al., 2006, pp. 189-190). The enactment of the interaction between that indexing and a viewer’s possible resultant cognitive process helps the viewer create a mental image of “the most romantic love story”, and therefore performs a good interpersonal function in the process of signification. Overall, the representation of the coded meaning under discussion is made via juxtaposition of such oppositional elements as the affectionate hug, the unfathomable depth of a black region as a background, and wildness as well as remoteness of the landscape as the setting of the love story. A perceptual organisation of this kind deviates from the social norm, and therefore arouses a viewer’s interest in the film. Comparatively, if Figure 3 resorts mainly to paradigmatic markedness—which is stylistic in nature—for a good effect of a film advertisement, Figure 4 achieves a comparable effect through motivated visualisation of genre-related features of *Jane Eyre* that shows a remarkable romantic love story. In this connection, colour codes are semiotically very important as well, and will be discussed as follows.
f. Colour codes
Technically, the use of colour is one of “filmic techniques” that fall into the broad category of “textual codes” (Chandler, 2002, pp. 157-160). Colour as a signifier plays an important role in the establishment of social semiotic signification systems, because “Colour is defined first of all as a social phenomenon. It is the society that ‘makes’ the colour, that gives it its definitions and meanings, that constructs its codes and values…” (Pastoureau, 2008, p. 16, cited in Van Leeuwen, 2011, p. 3). This means that the coded meanings of colours are socially conditioned or conventionalised; that is, it is people as members of a given society who usually associate certain colours with certain meanings, or establish connotative meanings of those colours. Over a span of two centuries many scholars explored the interrelationships between colours and their relations with humans’ state of mind, as is the case with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe who examined the coded meanings of colours in his seminal book *Theory of Colours* (1970 [1812]): “It was Goethe who first formulated the idea that colour is primarily affective (colour, he said, ‘is immediately associated with the emotions of the mind’, (ibid., p. 304))” (Van Leeuwen, 2011, p. 22). Alternatively, colours symbolise various human feelings or emotions.

The theory of colours recapitulated above can be aptly applied to the use of colour in film advertisements. For instance, brown or yellowish brown, which is the colour of Jane’s trimmed garment and of the landscape in Figure 4, conventionally connotes “tranquility”, “naturalness, primordiality, constancy” (Danesi, 2002, p. 41). To use Kress and Van Leeuwen’s social semiotic terms for symbolism (2006, pp. 105-106), Jane is a carrier who bears the colour yellowish brown as a symbolic attribute “in which the attribute establishes the meaning or identity of the carrier” (Van Leeuwen, 2011, p. 19). In other words, yellowish brown as a signifier brings out some personality traits of Jane as a woman character: in Thornfield Hall as a serene setting, Jane is normally quiet, and especially so when contrasted with Rochester as an eloquent master of the Hall; furthermore, Jane remains most of the time her natural self, that is, she is true to her innermost emotions, unaffected, and keeps her basic requirement for respect intact; most importantly, despite some emotional setback, Jane’s feelings for Rochester are fundamentally unchanged—a sign of constancy, as is evidenced by her final return to join him when Thornfield Hall was set aflame and destroyed. In terms of visual design, interestingly, the colour of the landscape is also in yellowish brown. It is not accidental, but motivated, helping two visual signifiers to stylistically cohere into one homogenous colour scheme that contrasts considerably with black, the colour of the background.
So far how meanings of various semiotic codes are represented in Figures 3 and 4 has been explored. Conceptually, representation “can be defined more precisely as the use of ‘signs’ (pictures, sounds, etc.) to relate, depict, portray, or reproduce something perceived, sensed, imagined, or felt in some physical form” (Danesi, 2002, p. 3). As analysed above, both verbal signs (e.g. words) and visual signs such as images of characters, a building and a landscape are used to represent meanings and convey them to the viewer. In this process of constructing and communicating meanings, the interaction between the verbal and visual signs is crucial to multimodal signification. This semiotic feature characterises visual English and differentiates it from verbal English in that the former uses not only linguistic signs, but also many other semiotic resources—e.g. pictorial images and colour as shown in the analysis of Figure 4—to represent and communicate both denotative and connotative meanings.

g. Social codes (e.g. bodily codes) and interpretative codes (e.g. perceptual codes)
The bodily codes and perceptual codes in Figure 5 operate differently from those in Figures 3 and 4. In the latter two, the two characters depicted have a very close bodily contact, are physically orientated to each other, and wear a facial expression embodying gentle feelings of love. By contrast, the two protagonists in Figure 5 are not physically orientated to each other, but are set apart, symbolising some psychological distance between them. More conspicuously, their facial expression hardly ever reveals soft feelings of love; instead, the two characters look very serious, and Jane even seems to be somewhat vigilant. These bodily codes deviate from the social norm of expression of love. Perceptually, Jane Eyre in Figure 5 is in brownish crimson, thus a figure foregrounded against a very dark background. However, despite the usually positive connotations of the vivid colour crimson, which might symbolise warmth, pleasure, love, or even passion, Jane does not look happy at all. Such a portrayal is paradigmatically marked, implying
some tension between conflicting emotions shown in the film.

**h. Colour codes**

As demonstrated in the above multi-layered analysis of Figure 4, colour scheme contributes a great deal to signification or construction of meaning in advertising. This role is also true of Figure 5: it brings into focus the difference between two otherwise closely related characters in the film *Jane Eyre*. Different from Rochester who wears a white shirt in Figure 4, Rochester is enveloped in a black cloak or outer garment in Figure 5. Noticeably, black almost frames Figure 5: the upper, the left, a considerable part of the right and the lower portion of it are all in black. To an average viewer or reader of this advertisement, such colour manipulation may not seem to be very conducive to signifying or connoting a love theme of the film that presents a “most romantic love story”, because black is not popularly or customarily used to highlight love or expression of love. Ideationally, from a social semiotic perspective, a romantic love story—either verbally narrativised or cinematically shown—conventionally depicts love or intimate, passionate relations between two characters in a nice setting. As far as its interpersonal interaction with an audience is concerned, a film that presents a romantic love story is often socially expected to create a rosy, pleasant, and delighting atmosphere, thus bringing vicarious pleasure in sweetened living to the viewer. Furthermore, it is more often than not vivid colours such as red, yellow, and pink that are normally associated with love and, by extension, a romantic—rather than tragic—love story, because red conventionally connotes “passion, sexuality”, yellow signifies “liveliness, sunshine, happiness” (Danesi, 2002, p. 41), while pink is often metonymically related to “femininity” (Prado-Leon et al., 2006, p. 190) which is an important attribute of a woman that usually attracts men, thus a catalyst for romantic love. This association is based mostly on positive meanings of the word “romantic”, (i.e. marked by the expression of love, showing feelings of love, and related to love) as is demonstrable in the following example sentences from Oxford dictionaries:

1. Should you go for the same old dozen red roses, a box of chocolates and dinner out in a romantic eatery?
2. In the course of their investigation, Berlin begins to develop a romantic attachment to Helena.
3. She struck up a romantic relationship with a young Italian man living in the apartment below and made friends easily.
4. Thus began an on-again, off-again romantic relationship that culminated in their marriage on January 17, 1985.

(Source: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/romantic)

Inferable from the above, the word “romantic” used in those example sentences represents either pleasant occasions marked by presence of colourful flowers, or friendly, intimate relations between two persons, or marriage as a fine result from a romantic
relationship. More importantly, the colour of those flowers is red—“red roses”—which is often conventionally emblematic of expression of love.

i. **Textual codes (e.g. stylistic codes) and text-image interaction**

The meanings of the colours, the bodily codes and the perceptual codes interpreted above are visually constructed and conveyed to the viewer. As discussed, the use of the colour black signifies a coded meaning that does not typically underlie the expression of love or a romantic relationship. In this case, what does it imply? A close stylistic analysis into the advertising jingling **“An Epic Tale of Love, Secrets and Passion”** and the text-image interaction can help to explore some answers.

First of all, the noun “Epic” used adjectivally as a pre-modifier is revelatory of (1) what feature of the film this advertisement attempts to foreground and, in this connection, (2) what the colour black may signify. Such informing power is derived from the conceptual meaning of the noun. Technically, “epic” denotes a literary genre: “Throughout most of Western literary history, until the rise of the novel, epic and romance were the dominant forms of extended narrative” (O’Connell, 2014 [1990], p. 177). Within this broad definitional framework, epic is a literary form employed to tell a story. More specifically, “Aristotle defined epic as a representation in dignified verse of serious actions (Poetics 5). Typically, these serious actions have concerned war; a synonym for epic has been heroic poetry; the heroism defined by a martial ethos….valour and might are the ground upon which more complex values are developed” (ibid., pp. 177-178). Accordingly, an epic is a story about “military heroism” (ibid., p. 177), or about “the great deeds of a heroic figure or group of figures” (Peck & Coyle, 2016, p. 35).

When this ontological sense is extended to the novel *Jane Eyre*, the latter is endowed with some fundamental properties of an epic, and so is, logically, the film adapted from the novel: the film shows some commendable deeds of the heroine Jane, and eulogises such values as dignity, independence, courage embodied in heroic deeds (e.g. saving Rochester by throwing water on him when his room was on fire). Compared with the other modifiers used in Figures 3 and 4, namely, “fiercely intelligent”, “romantic”, the word “epic” chosen in Figure 5 grants the film a higher status: it is not just an ordinary love story, but a massive work of aesthetic merits and magnitude comparable to that of an epic. At the same time, since epic concerns war, depiction of casualties in it is inevitable. In society, the colour black is conventionally associated with them. Therefore, black seems to saturate the bounded visual space of Figure 5, implying existence of some tragic elements in the love story.

Along the above line of interpretation, the noun “secrets” used in the advertising text **“An Epic Tale of Love, Secrets and Passion”** also suggests contents other than a plain romantic relationship between Rochester and Jane. To a viewer who has read the novel, it refers to a series of odd happenings, such as a strange laugh, a mysterious fire in Rochester’s room at night and, most strikingly, the existence of Rochester’s rough and lunatic first wife, Bertha Antoinetta Mason, who was locked in an attic, kept unknown to Jane, thus a deep dark secret. To visualise such a contextualised meaning,
black is deployed, since it is often associated with night, darkness and, by extension, mysteriousness. Apart from it, to a viewer of this advertisement who has not read the novel yet, the multimodal association between “secrets” and black helps to excite their curiosity about the contents of the film, thus adding to the advertisement’s aesthetic appeal. In a sense, this match between the word “secrets” and the colour black, or vice versa, epitomises an effective interaction between the text and the image, enriching this advertisement’s coded meanings which are more pronounced than its counterparts in Figure 3 and 4. Within Barthes’ classificatory framework, the colour black as a visual element symbolises, to a certain extent, something hidden, unknown, and formidable, while the word “secrets” hints at what the colour black might connote.

j. Findings and new questions
So far three online advertisements for Jane Eyre—Figure 3, Figure 4, and Figure 5—have been examined in an interdisciplinary approach, which involves an application of some key concepts in semiotics, its two branches, and stylistics. Through the close scrutiny several genre-related findings have been obtained, and they are summarised below:

1. The advertising texts are stylistically salient in one way or another, either due to paradigmatic markedness (e.g. “fiercely intelligent” in Figure 3) or via extended use of certain value-laden modifiers (e.g. “epic” in Figure 5);
2. The bounded visual space of the three advertisements is semiotically codified into several distinct, connected regions through establishment of visual syntagmatic relations (e.g. images of the two characters and a landscape in Figure 4); these regions interact multimodally and highlight certain characteristic features of Jane Eyre in a collaborative manner;
3. The bodily codes play a key role in representing semiotically constructed meanings which the advertisements were produced to convey, and components of nonverbal communication (e.g. physical orientation in Figure 4) contribute a great deal to effective signification;
4. The colour codes operate as a special advertising strategy, effectively enacting the text-image interaction and generating connotative meanings of some advertising messages (e.g. the use of black in Figures 4 and 5).

To what extent are these features also true of advertisements for other products, for instance, vehicles? Furthermore, to what degree could these features make patterns, and be translated into defining features of visual English? For answers based on results of investigation, the next sub-section will analyse two advertisements for vehicles.

3.2 Online advertisements for some internationally well-known vehicles

3.2.1 Advertising creativity and advertising standards
Conceptually, “Advertising creativity is the ability to generate fresh, unique, and appropriate ideas that can be used as solutions to communication problems” (Belch &
Belch, 2009 [2007, etc.], p. 252). Accordingly, three attributes are considered criteria for judging creativity: “fresh”, or unprecedented, “unique”, synonymous with unparalleled, and “appropriate” which means “a creative idea must be relevant to the target audience” (ibid., p. 252), or, more explicitly, a creative advertisement should supply information about products or services which customers need. Measured against this yardstick, the three advertisements for Jane Eyre are varyingly fresh: unusual use of language (Figure 3), innovative spatial layout and stylistically salient use of language (Figure 4), symbolic use of the colour black and clever enactment of text-image interaction (Figure 5). As shown by the aesthetic appeal of the above features, the integration of stylistically effective use of verbal language and innovatory realization of image acts jointly develops creative advertising. To regulate measurement of advertising creativity, a number of scholars have conducted some research and established certain standards for the evaluation of advertisements. They are reproduced below:

1. Does this advertising position the product simply and with unmistakable clarity?
2. Does this advertising bolt the brand to a clinching benefit?
3. Does this advertising contain a Power Idea?
4. Does this advertising design in Brand Personality?
5. Is this advertising unexpected?
6. Is this advertising single-minded?
7. Does this advertising reward the prospect?
8. Is this advertising visually arresting?
9. Does this advertising exhibit painstaking craftsmanship?

(D’Arcy, Masius Benton & Bowles’s Universal Advertising Standards, quoted in Belch & Belch, 2009 [2007, etc.], p. 256; Jian’s emphasis)

Since advertising is taken as an embodiment of visual English—the focus of the present study—rather than an object examined entirely for its own sake, the standards highlighted above in bold are more ontologically related to the achievement of this paper’s aims. They are the first, the third, the fifth, and the eighth standards. As such, they will be referred to as some of the criteria for judging creativity in two advertisements for cars in the next sub-section.

3.2.2 Semiotic metaphor as a means of integrating semiotic resources for signification
As discussed early on in this paper (see 1.2.2 The concept of visual English for a full account), visual English distinguishes itself from verbal English in its characteristic resort to multisemiotic resources for representation of ideas, feelings, atmosphere or mood. These resources include verbal signs, pictures, drawings, and colour. Among others, a fresh and appropriate combination of pictures and verbal signs to map features of source domains on to target domains is especially contributive to constitution of advertising creativity. This is because the combination functions as semiotic metaphor, and represents people and/or objects from a cognitively unexpected perspective, thus refreshing audiences’ world
schemata and grabbing their attention. The term “semiotic metaphor” is used to emphasise the importance of the resource integration principle (Baldry & Thibault, 2005, p. 18, original italics) in signification or meaning-making. More specifically, “O’Halloran sees semiotic metaphor as a basic process for managing the integration of meanings across semiotic modes” (Bateman, 2014, p. 184). This conceptualisation marks off a semiotic turn in defining metaphor, implies existence of mechanisms for “meaning multiplication” (ibid., p. 7), will therefore be resorted to as a conceptual apparatus in an interdisciplinary analysis of advertisements for two vehicles in 3.2.3.

Many scholars have researched on how multimodal metaphor and pictorial metaphor work (e.g. Forceville, 2016; Bateman, 2014; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006 [1996], etc.). The above two types of metaphor are varying comparable to semiotic metaphor in ways of generating meaning. Therefore, the above-mentioned scholars’ approaches and findings can facilitate an analysis of advertisements for vehicles. For example, Forceville’s case analysis of a car advertisement embodies an exemplary analytical procedure (Forceville, 2016, pp. 226-228):

1. Identify the number of domains in the advertisement, and distinguish between source and target domains;
2. Explore the interplay between the pictorial part and the text;
3. Construe the advertisement as a multimodal metaphor and establish a pattern underlying metaphorisation of the meanings which the advertisement is intended to represent.

This procedure and the one specified in 2.3.3 “An interdisciplinary approach to advertisements” will be integrated as a combined thus enriched procedure to be followed in the next sub-section.

3.2.3 Semiotic metaphorical signification in advertisements for vehicles

Two advertisements for vehicles will be analysed with a focus on how semiotic metaphors multiply meaning and contribute to constitution of advertising creativity. The first one is shown below:

Figure 6. An online advertisement for Mercedes SLK as a German car
a. Types of domains
This advertisement is about one of “possible worlds” (Stockwell, 2002, p. 92) where a man and a car are suspended in the air. It is defined as one of possible worlds because the man and the car are represented in “alternative ways of reality” untrue in our actual world, and are therefore termed “possible worlds” in semantics (Kearns, 2000, p. 55). A quick look at the brand name “Mercedes SLK” embedded in the long text and the visual images of the car and the man suggests that, not unreasonably, the car is the focus of attention, thus the target domain, while the man facing the audience seems to be endowed with a supernatural power to fly like a Superman and, in this sense, functions as a source domain. The transference of features from the source domain to the target domain underlies the way in which this car advertisement as a semiotic metaphor is run. That way is analysable via a close examination of how various codes in Figure 6 operate to enact the interaction between the pictorial part and the texts.

b. Social codes (bodily codes, commodity codes)
To the audience who have read or heard of the story about Superman as a fictional superhero, the mediated meanings of the flying man’s bodily codes in Figure 6 are not difficult to establish. First, his denotative features are easily perceptible: e.g. he looks very smart, apparently possesses unusual physical power to fly or remain suspended in the air at will, and is orientated to the audience. Second, some connotative interpretations can be made of the image of this new version of Superman: he can go wherever he wants to, enjoys travelling at great speed and moves along any path without hindrance. His posture suggests these connotations. Furthermore, crucially, proximate to the yellow car on its right and a short text as an advertising jingle below it, the image of this new Superman—as it were—triggers transference of the attributes identified above to the car as the target domain.

As a product advertised, the car is presented in commodity codes. It looks brand new, stylish, in yellow, which often symbolises “liveliness, sunshine, happiness, tranquility, peacefulness, etc.” (Danesi, 2002, p. 41). This vivid colour matches the brightness of sunshine, the yellowish sky due to the radiation of the sunshine, and the brownish landscape. Such harmony symbolises the great suitability of the car for the vast, rugged and rough, “wild” landscape, thus showing the tremendous power of the “hp supercharge engine”—the most critical physical property of a car. Furthermore, the visual syntagmatic relation between the man on the left and the yellow car on the right is most unusual, because it deviates drastically from the social norm: in our actual world, or the real physical world we inhabit, no man and no car are seen gliding almost side by side through the air from one place to another. Therefore, this juxtaposition of the man and the car is semiotically motivated, because it foregrounds similarity in a supernatural power to fly between the car and the man. The similarity implies that the power to fly as one important connotative feature of the man as the source domain is transferred to the car as the target domain. In this transference, the V-shaped, whitish ropes suspended from somewhere higher up look like part of a huge hot-air balloon or a parachute. They are tied to the car
and, so to speak, carry it in a forward movement. Those ropes are not only unusual but also very instrumental, signaling to the audience that, as if magically aided by a hot-air balloon or a parachute, the new Mercedes SLK is empowered to move in the air with ease and is thus able to take its owner or driver anywhere under the sun.

c. Textual codes (stylistic codes), text-image interaction and advertising creativity
This is the advertising message conveyed by the visual syntagmatic and paradigmatic markedness: the pictorial part of this semiotic metaphor is visually deviant, but has vivified the representation of the coded meaning that the new model of Mercedes is hugely powerful. Formulaically, the semiotic metaphor could be represented as follows:

POWER TO TRAVEL ANYWHERE IS ABILITY OF AN ENTITY IN THE AIR TO FLY AFAR.

In construction of this mediated, inferable metaphorical meaning, the two texts also contribute a great deal. Stylistically, the evaluative adjective “extreme” in the first text “As extreme as you” and the adjective “wild” in the clause from the second text “as wild as you want it to be” are chosen from two somewhat related lexical sets. From the viewpoint of lexicology, “words are grouped into lexical sets as a series of semantically related options from which a coherent text can be constructed” (Carter, 1998, p. 53). For this advertisement, the two lexical sets could possibly be (1) “extreme”, “great, exceptional”, or “excessive”, “utmost”, and (2) “wild”, “unruly”, “uncontrollable”, “crazy”. These two sets are not semantically identical, but share some commonality in connotative interpretations of the semiotic metaphor: adjectives from these two sets can be employed to foreground the superb mechanical performance of the car, and “extreme” as well as “wild” are more suitable than others because they are more commonly used and will expectantly be better understood.

Strictly speaking, text 1 is an elliptical one; when the missing part is supplied in a plausible manner, the connotative meaning of the adjective “extreme” will become clearer: The new Mercedes SLK is as extreme as you. Superimposed on the space immediately below the flying man or the man suspended in the air which visualises the notion of being remarkably above common standards, the adjective “extreme” sends out a strong signal: the car is indescribably extraordinary! In this text-image interaction, the use of “wild” is stylistically salient as well. First, it echoes the sense which the adjective “extreme” has fostered, thus reiterating the connotative meaning of extraordinariness; second, it is not a usual collocate of any word or phrase that functions as a brand name, such as Mercedes SLK in the present semiotic metaphor. As such, it is an instance of paradigmatic markedness. Illustrated by the yellow car suspended from the whitish ropes above the long text, the stylistically deviant use of the adjective “wild” effectively grabs the audience’s attention to the external look of the car and, by extension, its magic power.

This is how, within Barthes’ classificatory framework (see 3.1.2 Different signs and text-image interaction), the texts anchor or specify the otherwise elusive connotative
meanings of the two visual images and, simultaneously, how the latter concrete the rather abstract senses of “extreme” and “wild”. Furthermore, as far as advertising creativity is concerned, the semiotic metaphor does “position the product simply”, but not “with unmistakable clarity”. Nevertheless, this is where the artistic appeal lies: it sets the audience thinking about the meanings of the innovative pictorial part. As analysed above, Figure 6 is visually arresting, because the visual images are cognitively deviant, or disconforming with the social norm. But this visual design embodies a power idea which this advertising hinges on: as spatially laid out, nothing is impossible for the new Mercedes SLK because it is “extreme” and “wild”.

Whether or not an advertisement contains a Power idea determines, to a considerable extent, whether or not that advertisement is creative. By definition, “The Power idea is the vehicle that transforms the strategy into a dynamic, creative communications concept” (Belch & Belch, 2009 [2007, etc.], p. 256). In Figure 6 the “dynamic, creative communications concept” is embodied in the pictorial part and its interaction with the two texts—especially with the evaluative catch-words “extreme” and “wild”. Is this kind of Power idea also entertained and functioning in other advertisements for vehicles? An interdisciplinary look into the following advertisement will provide some answers.

Figure 7. An online advertisement for KIΛ Motions

![Image of KIΛ Motions advertisement](image)

**Figure 7. An online advertisement for KIΛ Motions**

_**d. Social codes (commodity codes), types of domains and mapping**_

Figure 7 is an online advertisement for a lorry—a large, heavy, and powerful motor vehicle for transporting goods. The substance and form of this advertisement’s expression and content are comparable to those of the advertisement for the Mercedes SLK (Figure 6). Specifically, it is a photograph about a possible world semantically, visually and thematically constructed, which semiotically metaphorises the great carrying capacity of the lorry and the extraordinary horsepower of the engine. As the logo clearly
designates, this advertisement is developed for a KIA product—a lorry as a commodity presented in its centre. Accordingly, the lorry is a target domain, while the elephant which symbolises heaviness and strength is the source domain. Technically, how are the denotative features of the elephant transferred to the lorry as the target domain? And how is creativity constituted in this semiotic metaphor, one that represents and integrates meanings across several semiotic modes such as visual images, colour, and linguistic signs? Several dimensions of this advertisement are worthy of an exploration for plausible answers to the above questions. Overall, the advertisement frames a possible world largely constructed with a weird pictorial part, because the visual image of a gigantic elephant standing on the lorry picking up peanuts has truth value only in this advertisement: in our actual world, no goods are loaded on to a lorry in this amusing but inefficient method. Therefore, the sequencing or combining of the image of a lorry and that of an elephant in that way deviates from our social norm, and is apparently odd.

Nevertheless, such “semiotic blending” (Bateman, 2014, p. 184) visualises the solidity of the lorry’s structure: it could sustain exceedingly heavy weight of tones of peanuts and of a huge elephant—“The average African elephant weighs between 2.5 and 7 tons, and the average Asian elephant weighs anywhere from 2.5 to 5.5 tons.” (Source: reported by Terry Duran at https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-average-elephants-weight-in-tons)

From this angle, the visual syntagmatic relation between the lorry and the elephant obtains in an innovative manner, and is in a way aesthetically more appealing than the interrelationship between the flying man, so to speak, and the yellow car in Figure 6. This is because the lorry and the elephant have been brought into direct contact by the advertiser via some digital technologies. As a result, the advertisement is remarkably creative, ably transferring unmatchable strength to lift up and carry goods as elephant’s denotative feature to the lorry as a target domain. Also, the semiotic blending visibly and plausibly demonstrates to the audiences the extreme or tremendous power of the engine.

e. Textual codes (colour codes, stylistic codes), text-image interaction and advertising creativity

The colour scheme is also conducive to the advertisement’s aesthetic appeal. One striking visual feature of Figure 7 is that it is almost saturated with crimson, a rich deep red colour that can, sometimes at least, be associated with “love, heat, pleasure, strength” (Prado-Leon et al., 2006, p. 190). This pervasive deep red serves as a background colour, implying accentuation of “strength”. Visible from the advertisement, the deep red colour surrounds the whitish lorry and the brownish elephant, which becomes two “figures” against the crimson as a background. Alternatively, because of the difference in colour, they become the foci of the audience’s attention. Furthermore, white is the colour of the lorry, while brown, the colour of the elephant, which respectively connote “peace, lightness (weight) (ibid., p. 190) and “naturalness, primodality” (Danesi, 2002, p. 41). Such colour manipulation in the spatial layout implies that, despite its own lightness, the lorry can carry and transport excessively heavy goods, and that like the elephant, which is
the largest and most powerful animal on land from the nature now, the lorry can claim an unsurpassable power of its engine.

Stylistically, the advertising jingle “Load it up with more” verbally represents and interprets the coded meaning of the elephant using its matchless trunk to grasp and raise a peanut, thus establishing a firm link between the linguistic signs and the visual image. In addition, the word “more” is more or less in red, which enhances the conveyance of the coded meaning of strength. Furthermore, the four adjectives in their comparative degree—“Wider, longer, stronger, simply better”—are phonologically rhyming, thus concisely bringing out the improved dimensions of this lorry, and cleverly foregrounding the competitiveness of 2700 as a new model of KIA Motions. This stylistically salient choice of words enacts the text-image interaction, and projects a Power idea to the audience: it is presented in a single, elliptical sentence, able to “revolve around the clinching benefit” (Belch & Belch, 2009 [2007, etc.], p. 256), and enables the audience to perceive the commendable characteristic features of the lorry. In short, the advertising creativity rests mainly with the ingenious mapping of the elephant’s denotative features on to the lorry as the target domain, which constitutes a fantastic semiotic metaphor represented as

CARRYING CAPACITY IS GREAT STRENGTH OF ELEPHANT TO BE ALWAYS ABLE TO GRASP AND LOAD UP MORE.

4. Advertisements, Multimodality and Visual English

4.1 Text-image interaction as a prototypical multi-semiotic feature of visual English

So far five sub-sections have been devoted to an interdisciplinary analysis of advertisements for a film and two vehicles respectively. 3.1.1 recapitulated the contents of the film Jane Eyre as a basis for an interdisciplinary analysis of the film advertisements, while 3.1.2 examined how three online advertisements used different semiotic resources to attract the audience’s attention to the contents and the style of the film. In nature, the examination or analysis is semiotic, with some consideration of the socio-cultural contexts. The focus was (1) on the ways in which meanings of some semiotic codes were represented, and (2) on the text-image interaction within Barthes’ classificatory framework. The findings show that socially meaningful bodily codes and colour codes are crucial to production of a good effect of the film advertisements. Furthermore, two representational features are especially noteworthy. First, love as a theme of the film Jane Eyre remains invariable across the three advertisements, and two thirds of the visual images that represent it are similar; however, the advertising texts weaved to represent the theme vary considerably. Therefore, in Barthes’ terms, texts that “anchor” the coded meanings of those images “amplify” the latter via extension, elaboration, and explanation. As a product-related trait, it features prominently in the text-image interaction in the three film advertisement.

Very importantly, this interaction between two modes of communication in film advertisements—linguistic signs and visual signs—epitomises multimodal communication.
As a newly shaped form of multimodal communication, visual English draws on multimodality as a fundamental property of many semiotic resources (e.g. linguistic signs, photographs, recordings, etc.) for making a multi-layered representation of meaning and for conveying the meaning through different channels of communication, as was demonstrated in the above detailed analysis of the advertisements. This conception has proven valid by the findings about the three film advertisements under discussion. It can be further corroborated by findings from the itemized, interdisciplinary analysis of the two advertisements for vehicles, and will be discussed later in this sub-section. But first of all, what is multimodality?

Multimodality is a pivot on which modern advertisements as a typical form of visual English hinges. Therefore, it is necessary to briefly review what multimodality denotes, and what its theoretical assumptions are. Many scholars have researched on multimodality, regarding it “as a semiotic perspective”, “as a tool for cultural research”, “as a way to analyse contemporary narrative processes” (Maiorani & Christie, 2014). One scholar relates it to communication and language: “Put simply, multimodality approaches representation, communication and interaction as something more than language” (Jewitt, 2011 [2009], p. 1). These are methodological views of multimodality. Ontologically, multimodality has been conceptualised as “the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 20). This definition contains three constituent elements: semiotic modes, design, and semiotic product or event. Accordingly, multimodality can be considered a property characteristic of a semiotic artifact out of planned combination of different semiotic modes (e.g. verbal signs, pictorial images, sounds, etc.). As such, it was easily perceivable in all the online advertisements analysed in 3.1.2 and 3.2.3, and therefore conceptually underlies visual English. In this connection, what are some basic assumptions that theoretically underpin multimodality? Broadly speaking, there are four theoretical assumptions about multimodality, which can help to gain a sound understanding of it:

1. Language is part of a multimodal ensemble;
2. Each mode in a multimodal ensemble is understood as realising different communicative work;
3. People orchestrate meaning through their selection and configuration of modes;
4. The meanings of signs fashioned from multimodal semiotic resources are, like speech, social.


Looked at closely, these theoretical assumptions are conceptually compatible with the tenets of social semiotics reviewed in 2.3.2. In a sense, the single most important message sent out by these assumptions is that production of meaning via integration of various semiotic modes or resources is socially conditioned. As such, multimodality can be a point of departure for or a focus of attention in a social semiotic study of many semiotic artefacts, well including advertisements as an embodiment of visual English. In fact, this has been the case with the analysis of those five advertisements.

In the scrutiny of the advertisements for two vehicles, for instance, various semiotic
codes have been identified, their coded meanings interpreted and, more closely relevant to the specific aims of this paper, the text-image interaction has been explored in detail within Barthes’ classificatory framework—with some slight revisions though. The findings show some interesting ways of selecting and using semiotic resources different from those used in the film advertisements:

1. Paradigmatically or syntagmatically innovative constitution of semiotic metaphor as a means of representing or constructing meanings;
2. Less use of bodily codes, but consistent use of stylistic and colour codes for a better communication effect;
3. More dynamic and dramatic text-image interaction between the pictorial parts and the advertising texts as a mechanism for enriching multimodal communication.

It merits note that, as conceptualised and stated early on (e.g. 1.2.2), advertisements are a typical form of visual English; therefore, the above features as well as those identified in the analysis of the three film advertisements are expected to be found, in theory, in various instances of visual English. In study of visual English, logically, efforts should be made to find those features and, futuristically, some new features also characteristic of visual English. This leads to the final sub-section of the paper.

4.2 Future directions for further semiotic research on visual English

4.2.1 Summary
Overall, on the basis of a theoretically-informed, detailed analysis of a number of advertisements as an embodiment of visual English, this paper has expanded the scope of a definition of visual English made in a form of question by Goodman (2007, p. 113). In the main, the value of this intellectual endeavour lies in its potential to draw some academic attention to a research area less explored in English Studies and, subsequently, to identify or chart new directions. Now to provide a comprehensive view of visual English, some important aspects of it generalisable from the detailed case analyses made in this study are listed below.

a. Visual English defined anew
From a social semiotic perspective, visual English is a form of multimodal communication that integrates various semiotic modes or resources (e.g. recordings of conversations, visual images, linguistic signs, etc.) for representation of socially coded meanings (e.g. meanings of bodily codes, commodity codes, stylistic codes) and conveyance of them simultaneously through several different channels of communication. It is a largely new media-based, technologically-driven form of English, and while sharing some common core with verbal English, it has some distinctive features.
b. Some defining semiotic features of visual English

1. Frequent and often artistically appealing use of visual signs for concretisation and vivification of some otherwise rather abstract meanings meant to be communicated;
2. Enactment of some cognitively demanding text-image interaction for constitution of communicational creativity;
3. Assignment of importance to the operation of stylistic codes in multimodal communication;
4. Use of figurative language (including but not limited to semiotic metaphor) in construction of certain coded meanings (e.g. meanings of commodity codes) for meaning multiplication.

These features have been identified in the present study of visual English via a close analysis of some advertisements; therefore, the list could be lengthened with more findings from future research.

c. Embodiment of visual English

Visual English is most typically used and found in the following genres:

1. Advertisements of various kinds
2. Web pages as a multimodal genre
3. Textbooks that contain many multimodal texts
4. Newspapers and magazines that carry many multimodal texts
5. Visual narrative
6. Comic strips

4.2.2 A new research agenda

In retrospect, the present study has endeavoured to apply a social semiotically-based interdisciplinary approach to study of visual English. Also, a systematic collection of qualitative data, that is, advertisements, is an intended step to take. Strictly speaking, however, the data collection has not yet been statistically underpinned. Furthermore, informant studies, content analysis (Krippendorff, 2013), and mixed methods research (Dörnyei, 2007) have not yet been tried out for a higher degree of informativity. This is some room for improvement. Furthermore, to expand the scope of research on visual English, a future research agenda has been drawn up and presented below:

1. A cognitive semiotic approach to web pages as interactive embodiment of visual English
2. Visual English: an eco-semiotic perspective on new curriculum development for ELT
3. Development of semiotic competence as ability in visual English
4. Visual English: research methodologies, experiments, and interpretations
5. Cognitive semiotic analysis of visual narrative: spatialisation of interiority
6. Comic strips as humorous and dramatic form of visual English
Visual English as an epoch-making development of the English language is intellectually appealing in many respects. Among others, it integrates verbal communication with visual arts and, as such, justifiably claims some due aesthetic value. Furthermore, it opens up a vast plain, as it were, for interdisciplinary studies as the core of twentieth-century university English education. For these reasons, it will be rewarding to conduct more systematic, thorough and innovative research on visual English.

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References


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**Appendices: Sources of figures and diagrams**

Online dictionary
https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/intelligent

Figure 1. An online advertisement for Florence, Italy as one of glamorous city break destinations
Source: from an email sent to Jian Luo by Travel Republic on Sunday, 18 February 2018, 21:01:36 GMT+8
Travel Republic: holidays@email.travelrepublic.co.uk

Diagram 1. Modes of expression (Crystal, 2010, p. 190)

Figure 2. A poster for a film adapted from Maugham’s novel *Of Human Bondage*
Diagram 2. Barthes’ classification of text-image relations represented graphically as a systemic network (Bateman, 2014, p. 35)

Figure 3. An online advertisement for the film Jane Eyre (1)

Figure 4. An online advertisement for the film Jane Eyre (2)

Figure 5. An online advertisement for the film Jane Eyre (3)
Source: https://uk.images.search.yahoo.com/search/images;_ylt=AwrJ6tV7dJ1aZHsA_C1NBQx;_ylu=X3oDMTBSz29xY3ZzBHNNYwNzZWFWyY2Gec2xrA2J1dHRvbq-?p=Advertisements+for+Jane+Eyre&fr=sfp&fr2=p%3AS%2Cv%3Ai%2Cm%3Asb-top&ci=UTF-8&n=60&x=wrt&y=Search&id=7&iurl=https%3A%2F%2Fimg.fdb.cz%2Fdvdobaly%2F0%2F0954a17cce63f84baf3b7e7f3as.jpg&action=click (Last accessed on 3 March 2018)

Figure 6. An online advertisement for Mercedes SLK as a German car
Source: http://cs.brown.edu/courses/csci0240/exercises/student_work/car_ads/jpeg/kelsey_car_ad2.jpg (Accessed on 13 June 2017)

Figure 7. An online advertisement for KIA Motions