

# Advertising across cultures

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## 1. Introduction

The main aim of this paper is to investigate some of the strategies used in advertising (and schematized in the Appendix) in order to highlight its sociocultural impact and specificity. What happens in the market place is not the primary focus here – since the factors that determine the effectiveness of individual ads in boosting sales remain unclear even to experts. Rather, the ads<sup>1</sup> under examination will be investigated as textual objects (that is, as both *process* and *product*) instantiating the specific, and at times sharply contrasting sociocultural belief and value systems of the various communities for, in, and by which they are produced. Such an analysis implies a socio-semiotic approach that takes the text as

a sociological event, a semiotic encounter through which the meanings that constitute the social system are exchanged [...] and the social reality is created, maintained in good order, and continuously shaped and modified. (Halliday 1978: 139)

In this perspective, as Giaccardi (1996: 37) rightly points out,

la pubblicità attinge [...] da un repertorio di *topoi* [...] che costituiscono il sistema di significati a partire dai quali una comunità sociale e un sistema culturale dà senso alla realtà esterna e alle relazioni tra i propri membri; repertorio che, naturalmente, è insieme presupposto e rinforzato, riconosciuto e orientato dai discorsi pubblicitari.

More specifically, advertising acts through a process of selection<sup>2</sup> from this repertory whereby significant, sometimes latent trends in the evolving belief and

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1 The texts analyzed in the present paper are drawn from a corpus of about 200 printed and televised ads, in English and in Italian, collected between October 1995 and September 1996 and selected from within six main categories: cars, household appliances, food, cleaning products, cosmetics, and public utility services (e.g. bank services, public transport, etc.).

2 I fully endorse Bussi Parmiggiani's view (1988: 127) that "quello che esiste e quello che *non* esiste nelle rappresentazioni commerciali, il modello e l'antimodello, sono aspetti complementari ed ugualmente interessanti. Solo con queste cautele è

value systems of a given cultural community are simultaneously crystallized in a simplified, 'reassuring' version and continuously enhanced. In other words, far from simply reflecting consolidated social reality and role relationships like a mirror, advertising discourse is a powerful indicator of current social changes and may even contribute to making these changes more evident and rapid through the reinforcement effect of its selection mechanisms:

le rappresentazioni mediali dei fenomeni sociali sono usate dai soggetti come *risorse* per orientarsi, per comprendere, per allinearsi, nelle proprie interazioni quotidiane. (Wolf 1992: 122)

In line with these underlying working assumptions, the discussion will focus on three intersecting areas: *i*) investigation of the main aspects of a recent 'paradigm shift' in advertising practice and strategies whereby the individual *customer*, as opposed to the abstract mass of *consumers*, is at the centre of attention (see, e.g., Bonferroni 1996a); *ii*) analysis of cultural/linguistic specificities as they emerge in the search for the best 'unique selling proposition' in national campaigns; and *iii*) contrastive (i.e. cross-linguistic/cross-cultural) analysis of some transnational campaigns in English and Italian, with a view to highlighting transformations, omissions and adaptations which affect the visual and verbal encoding and decoding of the corresponding ads.<sup>3</sup>

Two notes of caution are in order here: firstly, what the present paper will be dealing with is not translation proper, but a process of "reterritorialization [...]" which forms part of the strategy of selling the product" (Parks 1995: 37)<sup>4</sup> in 'different' markets and which, although involving cross-cultural mediation and the search for pragmatic equivalence in much the same way as in translation proper, may determine such radical transformations that it often becomes extremely difficult to recognize the advertised product across countries. Secondly, no attempt will be made to provide a set of generalizations on, or objective readings of, the ads analyzed, since the former would certainly prove

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accettabile l'affermazione di McLuhan, secondo il quale [...] la pubblicità può rappresentare per i posteri un documento di estremo interesse per quanto attiene alla vita quotidiana di una comunità."

- 3 To abide by the house rules, the pictures of the ads had to be omitted. Every effort has been made to avoid impairing the clarity of treatment.
- 4 At this stage, without entering into a value judgement of Parks' criticism of *Rethinking Translation*, a thought-provoking book edited by L. Venuti (1992) in defence of the translator's "visibility" and of the geopolitical function of his/her activity, it may be interesting to focus on what I see as a significant point of contact between the reinforcement effect of the 'reterritorialization' process and one of Venuti's claims (op. cit.: 10) about the translator's function, i.e. "[his/her] potential role in precipitating social transformation."

to be extremely volatile given the multi-faceted, dynamic nature of social reality, while the latter would hardly be exhaustive in the light of the – often intentional – polyfunctionality of advertising messages. Rather, the main concern of this paper will be with shedding some light on sociocultural specificities which may often seem natural, neutral, or even go unnoticed when the ads are taken in isolation.

## 2. New trends in advertising practice and strategies

A relatively new trend, which is particularly evident in Italian ads traditionally directed at a female audience, consists in emphasizing the co-operative role of the man in family life by introducing male characters as protagonists. This is a new but perceptible trend which tends to narrow the distance between genders, cited by Giaccardi (1996: 235) as a feature distinguishing Italian from British ads:

Negli spot italiani le differenze tra i generi sono più nette che in quelli inglesi (nei quali per esempio, uomini sensibili, premurosi e disinvolti nelle faccende domestiche o nella cura dei figli sono più comuni). Viene assolutamente evitata ogni ambiguità relativa all'identità sessuale: le relazioni eterosessuali sono le uniche che possono apparire sullo schermo e non sono mai rappresentate coppie di amici o di amiche.

Although Giaccardi may have a point, things *are* changing. It is true that Italy does not have as long a feminist tradition as the UK or the US and tends, on the whole, to perpetuate consolidated gender roles, like that of the man as 'pater familias' and of the woman as a 'nursing mother', or to portray men as choosers, or in action, and women as the chosen, or static objects of vision. However, men are beginning to take on traditionally female roles in Italy, too, and the only aspect which still seems to distinguish neatly the two sociocultural contexts is Italian men's greater clumsiness in doing the housework, not their lack of sensitivity. Indeed, sensitivity tends to be emphasized, especially when men are portrayed as women would like them to be: see, for instance, the ad for Rasoi Wilkinson ("Per uomini belli dentro"), and that for Rasoi Bic Select, "il rasoio per uomini sensibili", where "sensitive" metonymically stands for "having sensitive skin", as is made clear by the various balloons, which replace human faces, blowing out when touched by razors other than Bic Select. As for the kind of sexual relationships represented on the screen, one of the latest Italian commercials for Diesel Jeans – where the protagonist eventually goes for an explicitly homosexual relationship –, as well as the one for Deodorante Axe – where a girl who has worn her boyfriend's deodorant risks being sexually

harassed by other girls on the bus – are only two, yet two very clear, instances of a recent reversal of the general tendency observed by Giaccardi.

Even the allegedly neater separation of gender roles in Italian ads is patently contradicted, for instance, in the TV spot for *Le Minivoglie di Matilde Vicenzi*, where a pregnant man is talking to female friends about the name he has chosen for the baby ("Matilde, se è femmina"). This rather unusual name aims, of course, to anticipate the brand name of the biscuits advertised (which will be revealed only in the pay-off). What is really innovative, in terms of the communicative/selling strategy adopted, is that here, in sharp contrast with other campaigns (cf. the *Candy* campaign discussed below, where the main narrative pattern is unequivocally that of a dream), it looks as though the situation is absolutely real. The initial sequence thus has a shocking effect in that it breaks one of the most sacrosanct stereotypes, the laws of nature. Only at the end is the audience made aware that it was just a dream and somehow 'reassured' by the re-establishment of traditional roles: the man suddenly wakes up and says to his wife, who is pregnant: "Niente, un sogno. Ero incinto e avevo continuamente le mini voglie", with a significantly deviant use of language, again to anticipate the brand name.

A further case in point is one of the latest Italian TV ads for *Candy*, in which it is the man who, in his dreams, is haunted by the nightmare of doing the washing-up or the laundry. The spot ironically captures the inevitability of sharing responsibility for everyday chores while reinforcing the positive, though as yet not universally interiorized, values which go with it – for example, fostering harmony within the couple, or encouraging a more active role for the father and a closer relationship with children. Note the mutually reinforcing effect of the slogan "*Candy. La tranquillità è di casa*" and of the final song saying: "I've got peace for you and me, living together in harmony". Even Italians who have only a basic knowledge of English will not fail to grasp the key words "peace", "you", "me", and maybe even "harmony" – very similar to the Italian word *armonia* and pronounced as a separate tone group, which makes it even easier to catch. The pay-off at the end of the commercial (where the wife says: "Ho scelto. E' *Candy*") is there to remind us, or reassure us as the case may be, that, when it comes to buying this type of product, the final choice lies with the woman. The ultimate message is that *Candy* appliances are so reliable and efficient that they do their job beautifully even when left in the hands of a sweetly incompetent, yet ready-to-help husband (an image which, at least in the second part, is apparently meant to symbolize the 'ideal' husband). Now, this is *my* reading of the message, one which I would label 'heart-tugging ad' since I take the use of irony not as a cruel representation of a typically Italian trait but as an attempt to play down the inevitability of the difficult transition to a new,

perhaps not yet widely accepted, social role for the man.<sup>5</sup> Be that as it may, the 'multiplicity of voices', always open to various interpretations from different social positions and thus appealing – or not – in different ways to individual text receivers, is a crucial element which many contemporary ads would appear to show awareness of – and actually at times seem to play on –, perhaps in order to deal with one of the most typical paradoxes of advertising practice: having to sell the same product to completely different individuals, or rather, claiming to transform each of us into a unique individual despite the commodity offered being the same. The latter claim (i.e. the singling-out function) is in line with the tendency to produce highly individualized advertising messages, so that the *mass media* come to be perceived as *my media* (see Manetti 1996: 53).

The Candy campaign is also a good case in point to illustrate the current shift in emphasis from the intrinsic qualities of the product to the psychological and interactional dimensions of the audience. In what have been labelled "the hedonistic Eighties" the qualities of the advertised product were often presented as automatically transferable to the consumer through the act of purchase. In the Nineties, in contrast, the centrality of the audience and its active role in the receptive/interpretative stage are common parameters for advertising campaign planning: individuals are seen as more responsible, informed, demanding, as well as able and willing to select from the ad, through perceptual defence mechanisms, the messages and meanings that are relevant to the fulfilment of their own real needs and expectations, whether these involve the search for information, aesthetic pleasure for its own sake, emotional involvement, or all three. In other words – if advertisers' words are anything to go by –,

se la pubblicità ha insegnato fino ad oggi soprattutto ad agire sull'emotività, per creare un posizionamento immediato e una notorietà di marca e prodotto, bussando alla prima porta della casa dell'essere umano, una comunicazione che punti ad essere completa non dovrà mai trascurare di bussare anche alla seconda porta, considerandola quale essenziale punto di arrivo, unendo così negli stessi messaggi sia l'emozione che la ragione (Bonferroni 1996b: 71).<sup>6</sup>

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- 5 Cf. the spot for Omino Bianco Color, where a handsome man in his thirties, who has made his red T-shirt fade by washing it at 60°C, says: "Poi Claudia mi ha detto che i colori si lavano a 30°C, ma con Omino Bianco Color." In this case, the alleged superiority of the woman is stated not so much in terms of "choosing the right product", but of "knowing how to do the right thing" and the transfer of this 'know-how' to the man is presented as easy and natural (i.e. socially acceptable), without any threat to his identity (no irony is involved).
- 6 This approach is known as *publigiornalismo*, a term coined by Bonferroni in 1974 to denote the synergy between advertising and journalistic techniques. "L'approccio

Very often, then, emotion continues to be exploited as an attention-getting device which serves to create a favourable attitude to being persuaded, but it is the appeal to the consumer's rationality and active participation in the dialogue with the selling company that is deemed to pave the way to the hoped-for behaviour. Factual, and at times highly technical, information is nowadays in great demand among customers. Many ads offer Internet sites and freephone numbers – besides more traditional prize-winning coupons – to encourage preferred consumers' responses and to reiterate the standard metaphor of abstract companies displaying human attributes. The anthropomorphic representation of the company is particularly frequent when public utility services are offered: compare the slogans for Midland Bank ("the *listening* bank") and for Banca Commerciale Italiana ("la banca con la quale *parlare*"), on the one hand, and those for Omnitel ("Vi *diamo ascolto*") and British Telecom ("Let's *talk*"), on the other: they display significant differences in terms of the monologic vs. pseudo-dialogic nature of the interaction elicited, but are all based on "WE-YOU" polarity (see also Bussi Parmiggiani 1988: 100 ff.).

### 3. Some cultural/linguistic specificities in national campaigns

There are cases, of course, where the ad is so visibly language- and/or culture-specific that literal translation would be meaningless, if not actually impossible or counter-productive.

A first example of such extreme cases is the Italian ad for "One-a-day", which plays on the association between the advertised vitamins and a natural, responsible lifestyle. The association is evoked by the authoritative status of the testimonial (Giuliana Cordara, member of the Fondazione Bellerive), which ascribes plausibility<sup>7</sup> to the message, and it is then reinforced in the pay-off by the creation of the original idiom "una scelta di vitamine", which is possible only in Italian since the word *vitamine* graphically contains the word *vita*. Thus, the message displays also memorability, which is vital in terms of the overall effectiveness of the ad.

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di comunicazione da cui parte il publi-giornalismo [consiste nel] concentrare gli sforzi creativi nel momento dinamico in cui la necessità del cliente incontra il prodotto, [...] rendendo sempre più esplicito [...] il 'momento magico' in cui il prodotto rivela pienamente la sua funzione nei confronti della necessità che si vuole risolvere" (Bonferroni 1996b: 75). Cf. the function of the connective "so" in the American ad for Mitsubishi sports cars analyzed below.

7 Plausibility, memorability, emotionality, topicality, suggestivity, language manipulation, and comprehensibility are the seven principles governing, according to Reiss (1976), all effective "operative texts" and appearing to be particularly relevant to advertising discourse.

The ads for Caffè Mauro<sup>8</sup>, Caffè Vergnano<sup>9</sup>, British Rail<sup>10</sup>, and Leerdammer<sup>11</sup> are based on (mis)quotations (from Leopardi, Wordsworth, and Dante, respectively) which would not be as easily recognizable as in the originals if they were ever literally transposed into a foreign language and culture. The frequent borrowings/adaptations from literary texts are one of the reasons why advertising is often referred to as a 'bastard art', parasitically drawing from more dignified, or at least prior, forms of expression. Of course, it is not the intrinsic literary value of the text quoted that matters (and sometimes not even its intended meaning, as the ad for Caffè Vergnano shows), but the extent to which it is likely to be remembered and associated with the brand image and the product. Intertextuality is a powerful attention-getting device, often used in advertising to enhance memorability. The poetic function (in Jakobson's terms) of the creative uses of language made in advertising discourse is always instrumental to its primary conative function, which is why Leech (1966: 66) considers it no more than a sub-literary genre. Moreover, when taken together, the ads for Caffè Vergnano and Caffè Mauro show that advertising not only quotes, more or less faithfully, from literary texts, but also quotes itself.

A similar example of a strictly national campaign in Italy is the ad for Arma dei Carabinieri ("Carabinieri. L'Arma della gente") portraying a Carabiniere cap and reading: "Se credi che sia possibile costruire un paese migliore non te lo toglì più dalla testa. Maresciallo dei carabinieri, uniforme ai tuoi ideali." Unlike Caffè Vergnano, this 'product' is unlikely to be ever exported and the ad will never get translated, apart, perhaps, by translation students interested in the remarkably challenging use of metaphors. And even if these students could find appropriate translation equivalents, the target text would be unlikely to touch the same emotional chords or evoke the same historical tradition and tragic events immediately brought to the Italian reader's mind by the original ad.

There are also cases where the ad is relevant only within a given culture because the campaign was originally conceived only for the foreign market. The

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8 "E degustar m'è dolce in questo mar. Forte come il mare, caldo come il sole, intenso come il cielo, generoso come la sua terra, sincero come la sua gente. Così è Caffè Mauro. Passione e gusto per le cose buone. Carattere deciso e intenso aroma. E degustarlo è dolce in terra come in mare. Caffè Mauro. Cuore Mediterraneo."

9 "Aveva concluso che l'espresso ideale è quello la cui schiuma sostiene il peso dello zucchero per il tempo sufficiente a recitare il verso leopardiano 'E il naufragar m'è dolce in questo mare'. Il suo caffè? Ovviamente, Vergnano."

10 "Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her."

11 "'Amor che a nullo amar perdona/mi prese del costui piacer sì forte/che come vedi ancor non mi abbandona.' Leerdammer. Il più irresistibile formaggio tra i buchi."

English slogans for STET<sup>12</sup> and Buitoni Fresco<sup>13</sup>, as well as the Italian one for Atkinsons aftershave<sup>14</sup>, belong to this category and rely on widespread Western cultural stereotypes which, if hypothetically backtranslated for the market where these products originally belong, would sound too banal to arouse interest. The stereotypes are easily recognizable: "Italy is the cradle of art" (a message which is reinforced also graphically in the ad); "Italy has a genuine culinary tradition"/"Italians love food"; "England is synonymous with refinement and self-control".

It goes without saying that cultural specificities conveyed through non-verbal language may also be a source of extreme difficulty in the 'reterritorialization' process. In the first version of the Italian spot for Clio Nouvelle, the main character is asked "Cosa conta oggi nella vita?" and then lists, as his top-priorities, "le donne", "i soldi", and "il potere", 'assets' which are shown to be attainable – in a 'reassuring', oversimplified presentation of real life – thanks to his Clio Nouvelle. The main strategy adopted in the ad is the breaking up of expectations, as created by the stereotypical construal of these values as ends in themselves or status symbols. More specifically, the ad exploits the intentional ambiguity of a witty succession of close-ups and enlarged frames<sup>15</sup>, which symbolizes the clash between how the 'traditional' consumer (i.e. the 1980s-type) would expect these values to be portrayed, on the one hand, and how they appear to be interpreted by more mature consumers, on the other (as means to an end, i.e. the achievement of a better lifestyle in terms of happiness, harmony, serenity).

It is noteworthy that it took two hours for the producers of Saatchi & Saatchi to get the American actor Dominic Taylor to mime the listing of priorities by raising his thumb first, rather than his forefinger as is usual in, and specific of, the American culture. The very fact that a lot of extra time (and money, for that matter) was spent on integrating the verbal part of the message with the 'right' (i.e. situationally and culturally appropriate) non-verbal one, shows that the latter was deemed to be a bearer of meaning in its own right. It is true that, once

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12 "Communicating is an art. STET. Telecommunications in Italy and the world."

13 "When we say Buitoni Fresco is freshly made in Italy, we mean freshly made in Italy. Buitoni Fresco. Share the Italian love of food."

14 "L'educazione non è più importante. O no?"

15 More specifically, "women" are epitomized by the main character's mother dancing with her son; the word "money" is accompanied by a close-up on several piles of five-hundred lira coins to be used (as the following enlarged frame shows) to play table football with friends; finally, "power", symbolized by the main character lifting his arm and pointing to an imaginary door, is exercised by sending out a mischievous dog, as is revealed when the initially ambiguous shot from below is shown to represent the dog's viewpoint.

adequately transferred, this detail is likely to have gone unnoticed by the Italian audience, but this is precisely the effect that the producers had originally wanted to achieve: failure to adapt to the 'target' culture would almost surely have weakened the ultimate persuasive intent of the ad.

This last example leads us nicely into the problems involved in transnational campaigns, since it testifies that – as a spokesman for Publicis, one of the most important advertising agencies in the world, notes –

the strategic issue facing brand names across Europe in the volatile 90's is the translation of strong brand concepts across borders, not merely the translation of advertising stimuli [...], so as to deliver the *best* solution for each market, not necessarily the *same*. (Publicis-FCB ed., 1994: 2)

As a consequence, the 'translating' activity involved in transnational campaigns requires and enacts – perhaps more visibly than in other discourse genres – a careful process of cultural mediation which inevitably entails omissions, additions, and adaptations in the effort to achieve the same perlocutionary effect (i.e. persuasion).

#### 4. Transformations, adaptations and omissions in a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspective

When various campaigns for the same product are created, more or less simultaneously, in different countries, substantial adaptations may become mandatory or be preferred in order to achieve greater effectiveness, for example through the appeal to well-established cultural stereotypes and associations.

The English and Italian slogans for Ford Escort ("Everything we do is driven by you" vs. "Và dove ti guida il cuore") are a nice example of the "bella infedele" (and advertising is perhaps the only genre in which such an epithet can be taken as a compliment). The only common elements are: *i*) the choice of similar verbs ("guidare" and "drive", both of them ambiguously used, on the surface, both in their literal and metaphorical meanings); *ii*) the shared secondary "poetic" function, reflected in different, yet equally evident rhythmical and phonological patterns; and, finally, *iii*) the recognizable intertextual allusions – notably, the echo, in the English slogan, of other campaigns such as, for example, Mc Donald's ("At Mc Donald's, we do it all for you"), and, in the Italian one, the variation on the title of Susanna Tamaro's best-seller *Va' dove ti porta il cuore*, which everybody in Italy is presumed to have at least heard of.

Apart from these three common elements, everything else is different, with all the emotional and sociocultural overtones carried by the respective choices. Differences regard participant roles ("you" as agent vs. "ti" as goal), voice

(active vs. passive), mood (declarative vs. imperative), and discourse strategies (in the English ad, the strategy of end-focus which, combined with the passive voice, results in the personification of the company serving your needs and placing *you* at the helm; in the Italian ad, conversely, the choice of the word "cuore" – which symbolically represents the car – and of the imperative mood is aimed at legitimating uncontrolled emotions and natural needs while exhorting the reader to let him/herself be carried away). In short, the English ad appeals to rationality (= you drive/are in control/dictate what we do) whereas the Italian one appeals to emotions (= your heart drives you).

The examples which follow reiterate the importance of comparative analysis by highlighting textual, discursal and ideological specificities which might go unnoticed in an intra-linguistic perspective. On first reading, the English and Italian versions of the campaign for Plénitude de l'Oréal ("Delays the signs of ageing" vs. "Cancella i segni dell'invecchiamento") certainly sound like more faithful renderings of the core message than the two versions of the Ford Escort campaign, partly because they seem to appeal to motivations widely accepted as valid, at least vis-à-vis their context of creation (i.e. having smooth, good-looking skin). Yet they display remarkable conceptual differences, in that they foreground different interpretations of what the product is for (*prevention*, in the English ad, vs. *therapy*, in the Italian ad). Similar considerations can be made with regard to the English and Italian slogans for Chrysler and Saab: the first two ("Chrysler. Built to set you free" vs. "Chrysler. Automobili per gente libera") foreground different assumptions (*freedom* as a universal goal which is to be achieved by each individual vs. *freedom* as the identifying feature of a restricted, yet paradoxically undefined sociocultural group), as well as clear oppositions between instrumental and symbolic (i.e. fostering self-expression) uses of the product. The other two ("Saab. Beyond the conventional" vs. "Saab. Per ragioni personali") respectively focus on the intrinsic qualities of the product and the individual motives of the consumer.

Radical transformations are also made when a given concept (e.g., that of "car design" or of "quality"), which might seem to be fairly universal, is apparently held to strike different chords across countries. The same happens when the product/brand image is manipulated to fit and reinforce the assumed needs, values and expectations of specific social groups across the world. To restrict the analysis to the field of car ads, an example of the first situation is the campaign for Toyota Carina E, whereas the second circumstance is epitomized by the ads for Mitsubishi leisure and sports cars.

In the Italian campaign for Toyota Carina E, the focus is clearly on the end, static *product*, i.e. the car, portrayed in an abstract physical setting (a showroom) and used as an icon to evoke elegance, refinement, and distinctive choice, as testified by the indexical function of the colour chosen to represent the model

-- black – and by the explicit, perhaps irritating flattery of one of the key sentences in the body copy ("E' l'auto di chi sa scegliere"), a concept which is reiterated in the slogan ("Idee guida"). In two separate versions of the UK campaign, the slogan is significantly absent and the emphasis is consistently placed on the technological *process* of construction: the Carina E is portrayed in various Toyota plants during the assembling stage, and the colour chosen for the car is metallic grey, which, in car ads, is usually associated with high technological standards. In yet another version – which was faithfully reproduced in Germany, another country where design and quality are synonymous with high technological performance – the car is not an end in itself, i.e. a status or lifestyle symbol portrayed in a static, abstract physical setting, but it is a means to an end, i.e. the instrument chosen by the testimonial, Didier Auriol, in typical slices of his professional and private life, as is made evident by the natural settings chosen to portray the car in motion, as well as by the final sentence of the bodycopy reading "Now [i.e. after winning the 1994 World Rally Championship with a Carina E] Didier can make his way home. In his Carina E".

In the Italian ad, one cannot fail to notice the explicit reference – which would be less meaningful in a country that, like Germany or the UK, can rely on a strong currency – to the haunting, typically Italian ghost of inflation ("Toyota Carina E. La qualità è una valuta forte"). Toyota is presently trying to conquer a significant slice of the Italian market after managing quite well to catch up with competing brands in other European countries. This is confirmed by the significant insertion of the brand name in the Italian heading, whereas only the model is invariably mentioned in the English and German headings. Of course, when it comes to conquering a new market, Toyota does not hesitate to exploit typically Italian fears: "In un mercato dove tutto perde valore, Toyota Carina E rappresenta una rara eccezione [*perchè* = there is a logical gap the reader is asked to bridge through a causal connection] è l'auto pensata per garantirvi un'affidabilità che non ha timore del tempo, come testimonia il prestigioso riconoscimento ricevuto dal TÜV [=Technischen Überwachungs-Vereine], l'ente tedesco che certifica la qualità dei prodotti".

In the English and German ads featuring Didier Auriol, the persuasive strategy consists mainly in trying to obtain the reader's *emotional* adherence to the testimonial's authoritative, yet inevitably subjective opinion. In the Italian ad, conversely, persuasion ultimately depends on the reader's *rational* adherence to the impartial authoritativeness of science, embodied by TÜV. Germany is stereotypically associated with high technological standards and so German quality assessment bodies are presumed to be particularly severe and reliable. More recent Italian campaigns for this model retain the emphasis on the product as a status symbol and reinforce the appeal to the authority of TÜV through

verbatim quotations from its assessments (which appear in the original language in the heading, followed by the comment "E se lo dicono i Tedeschi c'è da fidarsi", and are translated literally in the bodycopy).

As for the campaigns for Mitsubishi, the huge differences that emerge between the Italian and the US ads regard both recurrent macro-topics and strategies (whether verbal or visual) for selecting and arranging information. The following table attempts to schematize the key elements in two of these ads, in order to highlight the contrasting themes emerging from their parallel organization into heading, bodycopy and pay-off.

HEADING	HEADING
APPEAL TO INDIVIDUALIZATION "My mother wanted me to have piano lessons. My father [...]. So here I am"	APPEAL TO GROUP MEMBERSHIP " <u>Chi è chi</u> guida [= sceglie = compra] Space Runner"
<b>BODY COPY</b>	<b>BODY COPY</b>
FIGHTING AGAINST OPPRESSIVE SOCIAL/MORAL CONVENTIONS "Whenever you want to do something, somebody <u>expects</u> something else. And <u>of course</u> , you always <u>satisfy them</u> "	ADAPTING TO SOCIAL CONVENTIONS "Chi sa prendersi il suo spazio <u>rispettando</u> chi gli sta intorno"
RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION; NEED TO ESCAPE; COURAGE TO SAY "NO"  "But is the <i>real</i> you always going to <u>take a back seat to the wishes of others</u> ? Aren't <u>your own desires</u> just as important?"	NEED FOR & REWARD IN SOCIAL RECOGNITION AND INTEGRATION; DESIRE TO SAY "YES" "Il portellone laterale [...] <u>rende facile l'ingresso trionfale in un'altra dimensione</u> " [...] "Le ampie superfici vetrate consentono una <u>visione della strada, e del mondo, in cinemascope</u> "
PRODUCT AS A MEANS TO AN END [= freedom to explore]; SEDATIVE FUNCTION "For <u>that little voice inside you</u> , we build leisure and sports vehicles..." "Cars that are <u>created to impress only yourself</u> "	PRODUCT AS AN END IN ITSELF [= status symbol]; REASSURING FUNCTION "Chi <u>sa di piacere</u> sceglie Space Runner"
RICH IN EMOTIONAL DETAILS; NO TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS, but METAPHORIZATION OF TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS "... wide range of cars. All share certain <u>values</u> . Like <u>vivid</u> performance. <u>Solid</u> comfort. <u>Genuine</u> utility. And space to <u>stretch out and be yourself</u> ."	MEAGRE IN EMOTIONAL DETAILS; RICH IN INFORMATIVE CONTENT  "Con trazione 2WD o 4WD [...], motore leggero e compatto - 1.8 16 valvole, 122 cavalli - soddisfa il desiderio di prestazioni vivaci. Space Runner: quattro versioni, anche con ABS ed airbag"
<b>PAY-OFF</b>	<b>PAY-OFF</b>
"Impress yourself"	"Space Runner. Per piacere"

What is immediately evident in the Italian ad is the ambiguous interpretation of the heading, when taken in isolation. The ambiguity depends on the absence of intonation cues, which would immediately clarify whether the illocutionary

force is that of an indirect request for information (paraphrasable as "Se vi state chiedendo Chi è / chi [*meaning "colui che"*] guida Space Runner, continuate a leggere"), or that of a statement ("Chi è chi" [*meaning "Who's who"*] / guida ...) fulfilling a singling-out function. The ambiguity can of course be resolved by scanning both the co-text and visual context (including the layout of the words in the heading and the refined urban setting), but the important thing is that the ambiguity is there, and is immediately perceivable to all those who are aware that there is such a thing as an Italian "Who's Who" book. The aim, of course, is to catch the attention of the reader, while appealing to the prospective customer's aspiration to become a member of this exclusive group.

In the English heading there is no linguistic ambiguity. Yet, one specific textual choice is particularly revealing and effective: not so much the transparent use of the first person singular, however important this may be in targeting the ad on a given audience, but the use of the causal connection "So" which – as Vestergaard & Schrøder (1985: 118) put it – "links the utopia visualized in the ad to [the individual's] surrounding reality". Here, the reference to Boorstin's well-known conception of advertising as a "self-fulfilling prophecy" would seem to be almost automatic: as Giaccardi (1996: 251-252) perceptively notes,

Dal punto di vista dell'efficacia persuasiva gli spot sono probabilmente profezie non avverate [...]. Ma la loro capacità di offrirsi come risorse per definire la realtà sociale [...] si esplica soprattutto come forza di trasformare le implicature conversazionali [...] in forme di rappresentazione convenzionali [...], di rafforzare i campi semantici coerenti con il proprio modo di rappresentare la realtà [...]; in altre parole, [...] di creare un senso di familiarità e di naturalezza attorno ad alcune forme di esperienza che essa rappresenta. [...] La definizione di Boorstin va quindi rivista: gli spot sono forse, piuttosto, *socially fulfilled prophecies*.

More specifically, the connective "so" ideally freezes, in the reader's mind, the moment when the ad character made his decision to change the rules of the social game and, looking into himself, found unsuspected ways to impose his unique personality, "the real [him]". But, more importantly, the connective "so" is one of causal enhancement: it contains a dynamic element and symbolically represents the leap into a new, exciting dimension where self-expression is possible. The dynamic element resides in the gradual process of identification by the reader with the main character and is rendered linguistically through the significant shift from the abstract "I", in the heading, to the concrete, highly-individualized "you", in the bodycopy.

In short, the contrasting overall messages of the two ads are: "Look what you can do if you *abandon* your social group and choose to be – and impress – yourself" vs. "Look what you can do if you *enter* the social group of 'Who's

Who' and adapt to its conventions". Thus, it is not unreasonable to claim that the two ads portray the American Dream vs. the Italian Dream – if such a thing can be said to exist. Indeed, especially in another version of the US ad, there are a lot of explicit references to the stereotypical values and meanings associated with the American Dream, notably:

- a) freedom ("When I was just a kid, my bike was the freedom to explore. When I was a teenager, my motorcycle gave me the open road. And in my 20's, a beat-up convertible was a ticket to heaven. Now it's my son who is free to dream. So here I am.");
- b) right to self-expression and individual choice (cf. "We're all different – different dreams, and different hopes [...] Find the car for the real you", in the bodycopy, and "Cars as different as you" and "Designed for the Individual", in the pay-off and the slogan respectively), a message being reinforced, at the pre-discursive level, by the strategic choice to present different models of the same car in one single ad, which is significantly not the case in Italy;
- c) the 'dynamic essence' of the American Dream, being fulfilled through gradual, progressive achievements: in this version of the ad, dynamism is conveyed through a series of lexical chains centred on the concepts of 'growth' ("Kid"; "teenager"; "in my 20's"; "Now [that I am an adult]"), 'expansion' in the scope of the territory explored ("open road"; "heaven"; "here"), and 'greater potentialities' ("bike"; "motorcycle"; "beat-up convertible"; "Mitsubishi car"); finally, of course,
- d) the fact that the Dream is handed down from father to son, which assumes the importance of transmitting positive values to our children because children are our future.

The good news is that, for those who choose Mitsubishi cars, the American Dream can come true ("So, here I am [in a dream world]"). And so can the Italian Dream, for that matter. The contrasting invitations to fight against, or to adapt to social conventions (i.e. to impress oneself vs. to impress others), are reflected in, and reinforced by, the physical settings chosen for product presentation in the various versions of the ad: wild natural settings evocative of pioneer 'rugged individualism', in the US ads, vs. an extremely refined urban setting, in the Italian one. This contrast, which is of course a metaphor for "what matters in life", is paralleled by the different, somewhat 'magic' powers ascribed to the product in the two contexts and epitomized in the corresponding metaphors: intangible powers ("That little voice inside you") vs. tangible powers ("ingresso trionfale"/"visione in cinemascope"). The presentation of the product in the US ads as a kind of sedative, which offers a solution to the strains of modern life by removing the symptoms rather than the cause, is in line with a paradox typically found in car ads, which consists in getting into a car to flee

from that same unbearably congested and polluted world which cars have contributed to creating.

##### 5. In place of a conclusion

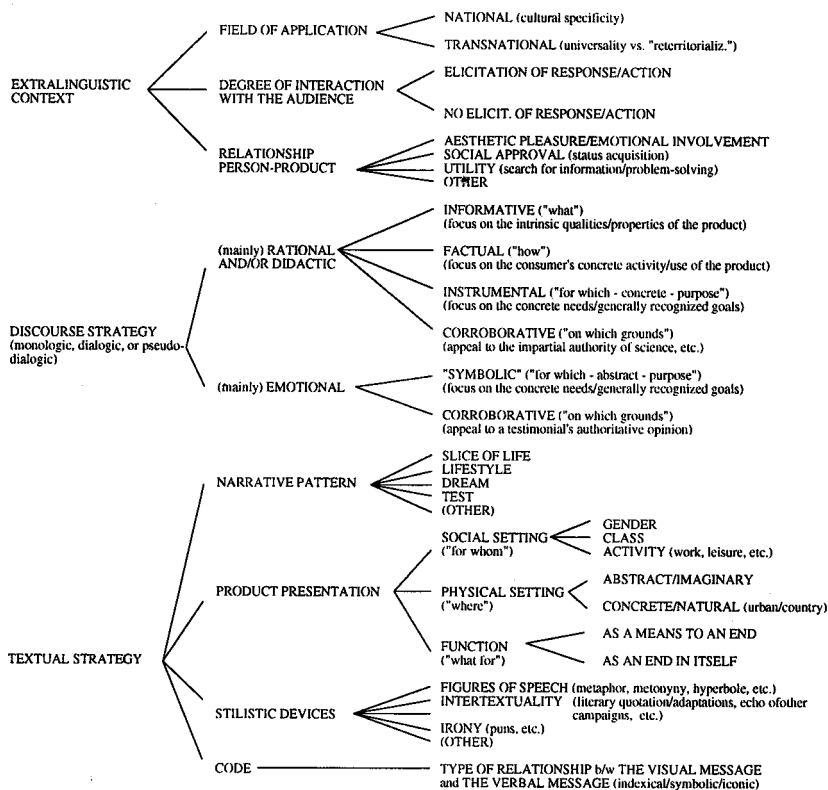
It is beyond the present scope of the analysis to provide any general conclusion about the distinguishing features of English and Italian ads which may reasonably claim acceptance. Yet, if the above treatment has achieved its intended purpose, some essential elements should have emerged which can open up interesting prospects for further research. Firstly, the tendency of advertising discourse to highlight not only commonly-held views, but also latent trends in the dominant, however multi-faceted, sociocultural belief and value system of a given community, as well as its potential role in precipitating changes through the disruptive impact of strategies aimed at playing off common expectations. Secondly, the notion of ad texts as 'resources' and, consequently, the inherent 'heterophony' of advertising messages – an aspect which is particularly challenging for the linguist who is concerned with exploring the potentialities of language and the polyfunctionality of texts and which would seem to emerge more clearly from the contrastive study of transnational campaigns than from the analysis of single ads, since the latter might tend to overemphasize their surface 'monoreferentiality' (in the restricted sense of their 'precise targeting of the message on a given sociocultural group'). Thirdly, and closely related to the previous aspect, the fact that advertising discourse offers useful implications for the teaching of language *as* (not simply *and*) culture and for the fostering of language awareness in the student – tasks which are made easier if a comparative (cross-linguistic/cross-cultural) perspective is adopted.

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Appendix



[adapted and expanded from the checklist for car ads in Giaccardi, 1996: 139]