

LINGUISTIC DEVICES IN ADVERTISING TO EXPRESS IMPLICITNESS

<https://doi.org/10.59982/18294359-26.1-ld-25>

Narine Manukyan

PhD in Philology, Associate Professor

YSU, English Chair N2

manukyannarine@ysu.am

Abstract

Street advertisements are considered to be visual patterns with short messages which include deep meanings and informative character. Using different linguistic and paralinguistic means advertisers convey ambiguous information which should be comprehended and covered by audience. The emphasis is on creativity of making informative speech.

This study is the observation of intentional implicit meaning in advertisement. The paper has a pragmatical nature. Through multilayered analyses, an attempt is made to reveal different perceptions of the same advertisement, its purposes, subtext as well as the intentional and unintentional meanings the advertisings can convey.

In the paper the same message in advertisement is studied and interpreted through different linguistic and paralinguistic methods such as elliptical sentence, incomplete sentence, hint, ambiguity and metaphor. The analysis of the research material indicates that in some cases the interpretation depends on structural reconstruction, but in most cases the presuppositions – the background knowledge – help us to cover the potential meanings of the message.

Keywords: *Advertisement, implied meaning, intention, intended message, ellipsis, metaphor, ambiguity.*

Introduction

Implicitness is a defining characteristic of modern advertising discourse. Rather than stating information directly, advertisers often rely on suggestion and strategic omission to communicate their messages. This approach not only engages the audience more actively but also enhances the memorability, aesthetic appeal and persuasive power of advertisements. The use of implicitness allows messages to bypass resistance, evoke emotions and appeal to shared cultural knowledge, making them more effective than purely explicit statements [Cook, 23].

Within advertising, implicitness is most commonly expressed through five principal mechanisms:

1. Elliptical sentences
2. Incomplete sentences
3. Hints
4. Ambiguity
5. Metaphor

Each of these techniques reveals the audience's cognitive and interpretive abilities, transforming them from passive recipients into co-creators of meaning. By examining these strategies in detail, we can better understand the complex interplay between language, image and interpretation that covers succeeded advertising.

In this paper, we will analyze the ways of expressing implicitness in advertising, refer to the comprehension of potential meanings, illustrate how they function in real-world examples and discuss their unique effects on audience perception.

Implicitness in advertising can be realized through both *linguistic* and *paralinguistic* contexts.

Linguistically, implicitness is expressed through structural features such as elliptical and incomplete sentences, where grammatical elements are omitted but meaning is preserved due to context. *Paralinguistic* implicitness, on the other hand, arises from the broader communicative or pragmatic context, often realized through hinting, metaphor and ambiguity. In these cases, meaning is not only shaped by the structure of the sentence but also by the interplay between what is said and what is left unsaid, inviting the audience to draw inferences based on cultural knowledge, presupposition or the broader advertising discourse.

Elliptical sentences are a prominent feature of both spoken and written English, characterized by the deliberate omission of words or phrases that are inferable from context. The omission, known as ellipsis, is not random but governed by syntactic, pragmatic and discourse principles. Elliptical constructions allow for brevity, emphasis and stylistic effect, making them especially valuable in contexts where space, time or rhetorical impact is at a premium, such as headlines, slogans or casual conversation [Halliday & Hasan, 88].

In advertising, elliptical sentences are especially prevalent. The economy of expression in such constructions creates a sense of intimacy and directness, while also allowing the audience to project their own needs and desires onto the message. By requiring the audience to mentally fill in the missing elements, elliptical sentences foster engagement and make the message more memorable.

Incomplete sentences, as defined in linguistic literature, are utterances in which one or more of the main syntactic positions are not overtly expressed but are understood from context. While grammatically “incomplete,” such sentences are communicatively complete within their discourse environment as listeners or readers can easily infer the omitted elements from shared knowledge, prior discourse or situational cues. These sentences can't be confused with elliptical ones as here everything is said as full grammatical explicit structure but the sentence can be extended depending

on presuppositions. This reliance on context for interpretation means incomplete sentences are intrinsically linked to implicitness: the speaker or writer intentionally withholds part of the message, trusting the audience to supply what is missing. This phenomenon is not merely theoretical but a feature of everyday conversation, literary style and crucially advertising language.

In advertising, incomplete sentences are frequently used to create intrigue, provoke curiosity or make the message feel more conversational and direct. This technique can also make an advertisement's message more adaptable and universal as the omitted elements are filled in by each audience member's personal context, desires or experiences. Incomplete sentences are not only a rhetorical technique for suspense or dramatic tension, but also a practical tool for fostering implicitness and personal engagement in advertising [Kazmi, 362].

Hinting is a core method for expressing implicitness in advertising. In communication, meaning is often conveyed indirectly with the audience invited to infer additional information beyond what is explicitly stated. In advertising, short, suggestive statements frequently prompt the audience to infer positive qualities of the product without making direct claims [Levinson, 211].

Hinting is also a communicative strategy in which the message is implied rather than stated directly. This approach is widespread in advertising as it enables the message to remain subtle while still influencing the audience. For instance, instead of instructing the consumer to buy, an ad might say "*We live only once*" indirectly suggesting to buy not to save.

Advertisements often rely on presupposition, presenting information as if it were assumed rather than asserted. Implicit messages function as hints that guide the audience toward favorable interpretations of the product without explicit statements. Rather than presenting direct claims, advertisers frequently rely on implicature, indirect speech acts and presupposition to communicate persuasive meanings. These strategies encourage the audience to infer positive associations with the product while maintaining a subtle, engaging communication style.

Ambiguity is a widespread phenomenon in natural language, referring to the presence of two or more possible meanings within a single word, phrase or sentence. This allows the same expression to be understood in multiple ways, creating an inherent flexibility in communication. Ambiguity arises from the lack of a one-to-one correspondence between linguistic forms and meanings, a fundamental characteristic of natural languages [Chomsky, 14].

In advertising, ambiguity is commonly categorized into **lexical** and **structural ambiguity**. *Lexical ambiguity* occurs when a word or phrase has multiple meanings, either because different interpretations are related (polysemy) or unrelated (homonymy) [Saeed, 63].

By allowing multiple interpretations, ambiguity appeals to a wide audience and encourages personal involvement in decoding the message, making communication more effective and persuasive. Its presence invites consumers to engage more deeply with the message and helps create highly effective, memorable and even humorous campaigns.

When applied to advertising, these linguistic strategies become especially significant. The persuasive power of advertising often relies on its ability to suggest, evoke and imply rather than to state overtly. By employing implicitness through carefully chosen linguistic mechanisms, advertisers encourage consumers to become active participants in constructing meaning. This process not only increases engagement and memorability but also creates space for personal identification, emotional resonance and cultural adaptation [Kazmi, 361].

Ultimately, the effectiveness of modern advertising lies in its strategic use of these linguistic devices. By weaving implicitness into their messages, advertisers go beyond simple information transmission, shaping perception, influencing attitudes and building enduring brand identities. This



study underscores the importance of linguistic analysis for understanding the mechanics of advertising discourse and highlights the central role of implicitness in the ongoing evolution of persuasive communication.

In the following paragraphs we will analyze some modern advertisements from the point of view of the above-mentioned phenomena and criteria.

1. NIKE – “JUST DO IT”

Nike’s “Just Do It” exemplifies an **elliptical sentence** from a linguistic perspective because it deliberately omits both the grammatical subject *you* and the object *it*, relying on the audience’s ability to infer these elements from context. Such ellipsis, governed by pragmatic principles, invites the individual to insert themselves into the slogan and define their own challenge or goal which enhances personal identification and engagement. The slogan’s universality and flexibility arise precisely because of these omissions, making it a model of implicitness in advertising.

If the same message were recast as an **incomplete sentence**, it might appear as “Ready to...” or “Time to...,” leaving the action or outcome unstated. This structure, typical of incomplete sentences, is characterized by a syntactic break or suspension. It encourages the audience to provide the missing information, thus, increasing suspense and personal involvement.

As a **hint**, the slogan could become “Some goals are closer than they seem” using suggestion and indirectness to prompt the audience toward action while maintaining subtlety. As a hint, it has more variants to be interpreted such as “Don’t think too long”, “Be the first to do it”, “Many people have done it, do it too”, etc.

Finally, if expressed through **ambiguity**, a slogan like “It’s your move” could be interpreted in multiple ways - referring to sports, life choices or personal motivation, thus, multiplying possible associations and allowing each viewer to construct their own meaning. Each version covers a different linguistic or interlinguistic mechanism to achieve implicitness, demonstrating the versatility and impact of carefully chosen advertising language.

From a metaphorical perspective, “Just Do It” operates as a conceptual metaphor, framing abstract personal goals and challenges in terms of concrete action. The pronoun “it” functions metonymically, standing in for the specific objective each individual interprets personally. This interplay of metaphor and metonymy enhances the slogan’s universal appeal, allowing each audience member to project their own ambitions onto the phrase. Unlike homonymy where ambiguity arises from multiple unrelated word meanings, the slogan’s subtlety depends on ellipsis and context-driven interpretation, emphasizing personal engagement rather than lexical

ambiguity.

2. VOLKSWAGEN BEETLE – “THINK SMALL”

Volkswagen’s “Think Small” is an example of an **incomplete sentence** in linguistic terms, as it lacks both an overt subject and a finite verb. The incompleteness is intentional. By omitting these core grammatical elements, the slogan challenges readers to interpret what it means to “think small” and why they should do so. This device draws the audience into the act of meaning-making, encouraging them to reconstruct the full proposition and thus internalize the brand’s message.

If the slogan were **elliptical** instead, it might read “Think small, drive efficient,” omitting repeated or obvious material in a coordinated structure and thus compressing the message for brevity and rhythm. As a **hint**, the ad could state “Not all great things are big,” employing suggestion and indirectness to guide interpretation without direct instruction.



Using **ambiguity**, “Size matters” could be adopted, a phrase that allows for both literal and ironic readings - inviting viewers to reconsider their assumptions about value and status. Each approach uses a distinct linguistic feature - omission, suspension, suggestion or multiplicity of meaning - to create implicitness and engage the audience.

From a metaphorical perspective, “Think Small” frames abstract values of efficiency, humility and practicality through the concrete concept of size. The term “small” operates metonymically, standing for both compact cars and the broader ideals the brand embodies. Unlike homonymy, which relies on lexical ambiguity, the slogan’s impact derives from its incomplete sentence structure, which invites personal interpretation and engagement. By combining metaphor with intentional omission, the slogan encourages audiences to internalize the brand’s message and construct their own meaning.

3. MCDONALD’S - “I’M LOVIN’ IT”

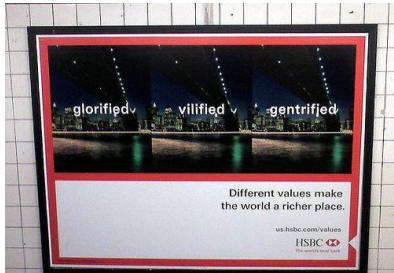
“I’m Lovin’ It” is classified as an **elliptical sentence** because, in linguistic terms, it omits the explicit object of “loving” and the reason for the emotion. The slogan’s effectiveness comes from its

open structure, which invites consumers to fill in what “it” refers to - whether taste, experience, or atmosphere, thus personalizing the message and making it universally relatable.

Analyzing the slogan as an **incomplete sentence**, it should be interpreted as “It changes an opinion about ...” or “So good you’ll...” which suspends the thought and requires the reader to complete it, leveraging the psychological impulse for closure.

As a **hint**, it can be interpreted as “Happiness is always close” and sound as a suggestion “Try it too”, alluding to emotional satisfaction without direct reference to food or drink.

If **ambiguity** was employed, a slogan can be referred to both the brand or a special taste, and could be interpreted as referring to food, experience or even a mood, allowing each consumer to



assign their own meaning. Each type - elliptical omission, incomplete suspension, indirect hinting or semantic ambiguity - demonstrates a distinct way of fostering implicit engagement in advertising.

From a **metaphorical** perspective, “I’m Lovin’ It” transforms the concrete act of eating into the abstract experience of joy and satisfaction, employing the conceptual metaphor “**Eating is Experiencing Joy.**” The pronoun “it” operates metonymically, standing in for the specific food, meal or brand experience that each consumer interprets personally. Unlike homonymy, the slogan’s openness does not rely on lexical ambiguity but on ellipsis and context-driven interpretation which invite individual engagement. By combining metaphor with metonymy, ellipsis, incomplete suspension, hinting and semantic ambiguity, the slogan creates a multi-layered implicit message, fostering personal connection and making the brand experience universally relatable.

4. HSBC – “DIFFERENT VALUES” CAMPAIGN

HSBC’s “Different Values” campaign is a textbook case of **ambiguity**. The billboards display a single image labeled in different contexts, creating lexical and conceptual ambiguity. This multiplicity of possible meanings is the hallmark of ambiguity as a linguistic device, prompting viewers to acknowledge cultural diversity and relativity without direct explanation. Here the emphasis is on perception of the client about the same thing, which is codified in the same photo.

If the campaign adopted an **elliptical** approach, it might express “Different cultures, different views” omitting explanatory clauses and inviting the reader to infer the nature of those differences. The ellipsis of subject and predicate leave the restoration of the sentence to the reader with potential versions such as “The attitude can make the same place ...” or “Investments cause the object to be ...”, etc.

An **incomplete sentence** like “More than one way to...” would suspend the action, prompting curiosity and involvement.

As a **hint**, “See the world through new eyes” would use suggestion to encourage openness and understanding without specifying how. Thus, ambiguity, ellipsis, hinting all provide distinct linguistic routes to implicitness, each shaping audience interpretation in unique ways.

From a metaphorical perspective, HSBC’s “Different Values” campaign uses the term “values” to represent not only financial worth but also cultural beliefs and priorities, framing a conceptual metaphor: **“Financial Terms Represent Human and Cultural Principles.”** The campaign’s images and wording function metonymically where a single visual or lexical element stands in for broader cultural or ethical systems. Unlike homonymy where meanings are unrelated, the polysemous nature



of “values” leverages related multiple interpretations, enhancing ambiguity. By combining metaphor, metonymy, ambiguity, ellipsis, incomplete suspension and hinting, the campaign engages audiences cognitively and emotionally, prompting reflection on cultural diversity and personal interpretation.

5. COCA-COLA – “OPEN HAPPINESS”

Coca-Cola’s “Open Happiness” billboard campaign exemplifies hinting as a mode of implicitness. The slogan provides an imperative “open” and an abstract noun “happiness”, yet never directly states that drinking Coca-Cola will result in happiness. Instead, it subtly suggests that opening a bottle of Coke is equivalent to opening oneself to positive emotions and joyful experiences. This indirectness is the hallmark of hinting: the audience is guided toward the intended association but must make the final interpretive leap themselves, which increases both the memorability and personal relevance of the message.

Expressed as an elliptical sentence, the ad might read “Happiness is opened”, “You can open the bottle of happiness”, “You can open happiness” or “Get happiness opening the bottle” omitting some parts of the sentence and thereby inviting the audience to reconstruct the meaning and link it to the act of enjoying Coca-Cola.

If rendered as an incomplete sentence, it could say “Whenever you open...” leaving the object unstated and prompting the viewer to finish the thought, whether that is opening a bottle, a moment or an experience.

With ambiguity, a phrase such as “Refresh your moment” could be used, where “refresh” could refer to both the drink and to a new perspective or feeling, allowing a range of interpretations. Thus, while Coca-Cola’s “Open Happiness” primarily relies on hinting and presupposition, the campaign’s emotional and persuasive intent could also be achieved through elliptical, incomplete, or ambiguous structures, each bringing a distinct nuance and level of consumer engagement.

From a metaphorical perspective, Coca-Cola's "Open Happiness" transforms the concrete act of opening a bottle into an abstract experience of joy, framing the conceptual metaphor "Consuming Coca-Cola is Experiencing Happiness." The words "open" and "happiness" operate metonymically as the physical action represents the broader emotional experience. Unlike homonymy the slogan's interpretive richness arises from its metaphorical and metonymic structure, as well as the inherent ambiguity of "open," which allows audiences to infer multiple layers of meaning. By combining hinting, ellipsis, incomplete suspension and lexical ambiguity, the campaign engages viewers cognitively and emotionally, inviting them to construct a personal association between the product and positive experiences.

Conclusion

Above analyzed advertisements utilize implicitness to transform consumers from passive recipients into active interpreters and co-creators of meaning. The examples tend to prioritize abstract universality and aspirational tone foregrounding contextual immediacy, humor and collective identity. This contrast reflects broader cultural tendencies: the former seeks global applicability and individual resonance, the latter - local intimacy and group cohesion.

In sum, the effectiveness of implicitness in street advertising is universally acknowledged but its linguistic realization is shaped by the interplay of structural choice, cultural codes and audience expectations. The study of these differences not only enriches our understanding of advertising discourse but also highlights the dynamic relationship between language, society and persuasion in the public sphere.

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Submitted on 06.04.2026.
Sent for review on 06.05.2026.