

**MASTER TROPES  
IN ENGLISH MAGAZINE ADVERTISEMENTS:  
A SEMIOTIC TOPIC-VEHICLE APPROACH\***

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper investigates three master tropes (viz. simile, metaphor, and metonymy) in English magazine ads, taking a semiotic topic-vehicle approach to identify and analyze the three tropes. The purpose of the investigation is twofold: to see (i) if the topic-vehicle approach can account for the three tropes in English magazine ads and (ii) if the three tropes occur in independent phrases the same as they occur in complete clauses. It is concluded that the semiotic topic-vehicle approach, including the concept of complex tropes derived from it, is generally applicable to the three tropes in English magazine ads and that every type and subtype of a trope assuming the form of a complete clause can also take the form of an independent phrase.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The language of advertising is a prominent genre of text in which various tropes occur. It is estimated that the average American is exposed to over 3,000 ads a day (Kilbourne 1999). As Featherstone (2001: 76) puts it, "most advertising is constantly striving for novelty, for effective and striking devices which will overcome the 'fatigue' of audiences over-exposed to advertising." Because tropes commonly entail a semantic or conceptual departure from the norm, they have come to be used as catchy devices that turn skimmers into readers. Not surprisingly,

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tropes were found in 36.4% of ads in *Time* magazines over the entire period from 1954-1999 (Phillips and McQuarrie 2002). Thus advertising language provides a considerable corpus for examining various tropes.

In this paper we shall consider three master tropes in English magazine ads—namely simile, metaphor, and metonymy—in the light of the topic-vehicle approach modified and presented in Shie (2004), which draws upon views on metaphor advanced by Black (1962), Ortony (1993), and Richards (1936). The basic assumption here is that meanings in print advertising media are communicated by signs, be they linguistic or graphic. Thus semiotic analysis can account for the meanings of print ads and the ways in which they work. According to the Swiss linguist de Saussure (1974 [1915]), signs construct our perception and understanding of reality. He sees the sign as having two inseparable components: the signifier and the signified. The signifier is a semiotic vehicle expressing the sign, such as a slogan, a logo, and a picture. The signified is the concept that the signifier evokes in our mind. The American philosopher Peirce (1958) classifies signs into three major categories, namely symbols, icons, and indexes. A symbolic sign signifies its referent by convention, with an arbitrary connection between the signifier and the signified. For example, the word *car* is a symbolic sign of an automobile. An iconic sign resembles its referent, as is the case in which a photograph of a car represents the image of that real car. And an indexical sign points out or stands for something in existential relation to its referent. Thus smoke is an index of fire.

The topic-vehicle approach will be outlined in the beginning of each of the four sections below. Suffice it to say here that the topic-vehicle approach treats both simile and metaphor as a trope of analogy, and metonymy as a trope of contiguity and causality. Each of the three tropes functions as a sign in print advertisements, consisting of two component parts that correspond to the signifier and the signified. In a simile or metaphor, the theme is analogized as the semiotic vehicle; in a metonymy, the semiotic vehicle is indicative of the metonymical referent. By virtue of their analogical nature, simile and metaphor are regarded as a type of iconic sign. And in view of its causal or indicative nature, metonymy is considered to be an indexical sign. All the three tropes involve a semiotic vehicle, which is taken to be a signifier that is motivated rather than arbitrary.

One contextual feature of contemporary magazine ads is that they usually contain graphics, including photos, pictures, and logos. These are

also meaningful signs. They may sometimes interact with verbal tropes and constitute a system of signs in the ad. But this paper focuses on the verbal tropes occurring in headlines, slogans, copy, and trade names partly because of space limitations and partly because of the difficulty in obtaining permission to reproduce some important advertising pictures for the present paper.<sup>1</sup> The two main questions we shall address are as follows:

- (i) Can the topic-vehicle approach account for the three main tropes in English magazine ads?
- (ii) One textual feature of English magazine ad is that they often contain independent phrases, which are semantically or functionally equivalent to a complete clause. Do the three tropes occur in independent phrases the same as they occur in complete clauses?

The ads to be examined and analyzed in this article are primarily from recent years' issues of large-circulation English magazines available in Taiwan, including *People*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Discover*, *Redbook*, *Information Week*, *Business Week*, *PC Magazine*, *US News & World Report*, and *Better Homes and Gardens*.

In Sections 2, 3, and 4, we shall explore simile, metaphor, and metonymy in English magazine ads respectively. And Section 5 is concerned with complex tropes, in which two or more tropes are integrated or blended together.

## 2. SIMILES

According to the semiotic topic-vehicle approach, the simile in the English language is a trope based on an analogy between an overt (i.e., directly phrased) theme and an overt vehicle, linked by a comparison marker such as *like*, *as*, and *more...than*, as in *Her hair is like silk*, where the theme *her hair* is represented via the vehicle *silk*. The vehicle is a nonarbitrary signifier motivated by analogical perception and understanding of reality. Between the analogical theme and vehicle there

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<sup>1</sup> In spite of my efforts to contact those advertisers, they gave no response to my applications.

are one or more common features or aspects—known as ‘the ground’—that serve to qualify the theme. For example, in the simile *Her hair is like silk*, the ground may be softness or fineness, which is implied rather than overtly stated. But the ground of a simile may also be put into words, as in *Her hair is as soft as silk*. The amounts or degrees of the shared property may sometimes be compared via the comparison marker *more...than* or *less... than*, including the inflected form *-er*, as in *Her hair is softer than silk*. Regardless of various comparison markers, the vehicle signifies the theme in the sense that the softness or fineness of *silk* calls forth the concept of softness or fineness of *her hair*. On account of such analogical signification, simile can be construed as an iconic sign. A simile and a photograph are both icons. But a photo as an icon represents the signified merely by virtue of most, if not all, of its own features, while a simile represents its theme via salient features of something else. It should be stressed that the signification of a simile involves only one or a few features of its vehicle. These features constitute the ground of the simile. All the other features of the vehicle are irrelevant to the signification process. The large proportion of the irrelevant features (or the small proportion of the relevant features) constitutes the tension of a simile. The ground and the tension are both essential elements of a simile as an iconic sign.

For the sake of selling a product/service, a commercial advertisement needs to reinforce the brand name and communicate distinctive features of the product/service to the audience. Similes in advertisements are usually utilized to convey brand information or to make a claim about the advertised product/service. The advertised product/service naturally becomes the analogical theme of an advertising simile. The vehicle of the simile signifies the theme by highlighting the theme’s distinctive features to which the advertiser wishes to call potential customers’ attention, evidenced in the following examples:

- (1) A battery that works as hard as you.  
(Intel Centrino mobile technology)
- (2) The cable weighs less than the mouse.  
(United Technologies elevator steel cables)
- (3) Like milk, your tools need to be fresh.  
(Microsoft)
- (4) A face is like a work of art. It deserves a great frame.  
(i. a. Eyeworks’ glasses)

In examples like these, distinctive features of a product are highlighted via the ground of a simile. It is worth noting that, in using a simile, copywriters usually highlight the distinctive features of the product through an overt ground, as is the case with (1)-(3). For one thing, the ground of the simile in (1) is 'working hard,' which is a feature that is thought to be common between the mobile product and the product user. For another, the ground in (2) is lightweight. The comparison between the cable and the mouse is analogical in the sense that the weight of the cable is represented through the lightweight of the mouse.<sup>2</sup> The theme and the semiotic vehicle are widely dissimilar. All the features of the vehicle but 'lightweight' are irrelevant to the signification process. As such, the tension of the simile is quite high. When it comes to similes with a covert ground, as in (4), copywriters would often explicitly point out the intended ground in the sentence that follows the simile so that the signification of the simile becomes more accessible. Thus in (4) the highlighted common feature between a face and a work of art is that both of them deserve a great frame. After all, it is desirable that consumers get the advertising message without difficulty.

We have seen that the vehicle of a simile signifies the theme by explicitly or implicitly highlighting the common features between the two. This is particularly useful in getting across the valuable features of products being advertised. For example, the word *tools* in (3) refers to computer software. To paraphrase the simile, computer software is like milk in respect of the fact that both of them need to be fresh. As noted in the body copy, Microsoft customers can get the latest tools, technology, and information delivered to their doors. Thus computer software has been signified by milk. Thanks to the ground (i.e., needing to be fresh), the simile has effectively represented the valuable feature of the product by analogizing two seemingly uncomparable things coming from two disparate semantic or conceptual fields. The comparison of two unlike things that are otherwise not comparable reflects a conceptual distinctiveness or departure from the norm, which often makes a simile catchy. Therefore, a simile frequently occurs in print ads as the hook, the initial piece of attention-seeking language used to draw readers in, as is the case with (2)-(4).

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<sup>2</sup> It can be noted that this simile involves an element of hyperbole, a figure of speech used for effect or emphasis in which the connection between the vehicle and the signified is that of exaggeration.

In ordinary English, similes occur as a sentence or clause. Both of the theme and vehicle are overtly stated in the sentence or clause. And yet the following similes in English magazine advertisements appear as phrases rather than complete sentences or clauses:

- (5) Presentations as easy as child's play.  
(3M Personal Multimedia Projectors)
- (6) The Samsung SyncMaster 21" monitor. More positions than a yogi.  
(The Samsung 21" Monitor)
- (7) Roams like a cell phone, without the additional charges.  
(Compaq N610c Notebooks)
- (8) Tough as a tiger.  
(The Tudor Hydronaut watches)

These examples indicate that similes in English magazine advertisements may occur as an independent phrase. The independent phrase may derive from a sentence with a copular verb deleted, as in (5), where the theme and vehicle are both represented in the simile. The independent phrase may also have the vehicle built in without any expression of the theme, but the theme can be inferred from the textual context, as in (6), or from the situational context, as in (7)-(8). The similes in (5)-(8) are all advertising headlines. Thus these similes must be about what is being advertised. From some additional linguistic as well as pictorial signs, the readers can infer the theme of the simile easily. To illustrate, the theme of the simile in (6) is *the Samsung SyncMaster monitor*. In the ad, this product name is juxtaposed with the independent simile phrase *More positions than a yogi*. Above the two phrases is a picture of three LCD monitors showing a yogi in three different yoga positions respectively. Each of the monitors is facing a different direction (see Appendix One). In the body copy the simile is extended as follows: *Rotate right. And Hold. Swivel left. And hold. The largest monitor with the most movement in its class is here....* Drawing on the linguistic and pictorial signs, the readers can see that what the yogi signifies is the monitor. Or rather, the yogi serves as an icon of the monitor.

As to the simile in (7), the theme is a Compaq Notebook, which can also be inferred from the main picture in the ad, showing a Compaq Notebook. Along similar lines, the simile in (8)—*Tough as a tiger*—ties in effectively with the pictorial sign in the ad, showing the Tudor

Hydronaut watch. In the main picture we see the world's leading professional golfer Tiger Woods teeing off. The image of Tiger Woods is used to signify strength and resilience. The trade name and the reproduction of the Tudor Hydronaut watch in the ad suggest that the theme of the simile *Tough as a tiger* is the Tudor Hydronaut watch. And the vehicle *a tiger* highlights the distinctive feature of the product (i.e., toughness) that is intended to occupy the public mind. The professional golfer featured in the ad helps to anchor the signification of the simile.

On the whole, the theme of the simile in an independent phrase is still overt. The overt theme is expressed in the independent phrase or its co-text (i.e., elsewhere in the linguistic text of the ad); otherwise, it is expressed via the trademark.

Shie (2004: 49-50) claims that the minimal textual stretch of a simile is a sentence or clause. The phrase beginning with a comparison marker (as in *tough as a tiger*) in a simile is cognitively inseparable from the theme. The theme must be present within the same sentence or clause. At the first glance the similes in (5)-(8), which occur as independent phrases, do not seem to support the treatment of simile as a sentence or clause. And yet a special linguistic feature of advertising English is that it frequently contains independent phrases that are equivalent to a sentence in function and meaning (cf. Cook 1992: 109; Leech 1966: 16; Rush 1998). Expressing a complete thought, they are able to operate as a sentence or clause in all sections of a magazine ad, including the headline, body copy, and signature line. They display phonological and orthographic signs of sentence status, such as a rise-fall stress pattern and the occurrence of an end mark (e.g., a period or exclamation mark), as in:

- (9) Moissanite. Unique. Sophisticated. That's me. That's moissanite. A stunning level created by Charles & Colvard with spectacular brilliance and spark. A statement of my individuality. ... (Landau jewelry)

Such independent phrases can be taken to be the abbreviated version of a complete sentence or clause. They are not instances of sentential nominalization, which turns a sentence into a phrase without loss of any lexical content, as can be seen in *the critics' hostile reception of the play* and *The critics received the play in a hostile manner*. But some lexical content or concept (usually the theme) may be left out in an

independent-phrase simile without being represented by a linguistic signifier, as in (7) and (8). Such a simile serves particular functions in advertising discourse. Among other things, the missing or covert part and the resulting brevity bring forth the effect of the advertising hook—the initial small piece of language that draws bored readers in and makes them decode the simile actively.

Independent phrases in English advertisements, whether in a headline or in a body copy, can be translated into a complete sentence. For instance, *Tough as a tiger* in (8) is an advertising shorthand for *The Tudor Hydronaut watch is tough as a tiger*. Since independent phrases are briefer, they can be used for effective and economical presentation of products or services in print advertising, whose space is limited and often very expensive. At the same time, an independent phrase is the foregrounded content of a complete thought. Thus an independent phrase can focus on what the copy writer intends to emphasize. Given that an independent phrase that signifies a complete thought is semantically and functionally tantamount to a complete sentence, we can treat such an independent phrase as a type of clause or sentence. Therefore, the independent phrases in (5)-(8), each of which expresses a simile, cannot be viewed as genuine examples that disprove the claim that the minimal textual stretch of an English simile is a sentence or clause.

### 3. METAPHORS

As noted earlier, signs fall into three basic types: symbols, indexes, and icons. Peirce (1955) subcategories icons as images (e.g., a portrait), diagrams (e.g., a floor plan), and metaphors. Thus metaphors are included as a subtype of sign. The pity is that there is no further elaboration on metaphor as an iconic sign in Peirce's writings. In recent times, iconicity has been found to be pervasive at various levels in ordinary language (Bybee 1985; Haiman 1980; Hiraga 1994). The most notable linguistic iconicity is revealed in verbal metaphors. In terms of the topic-vehicle approach, a metaphorical sign signifies its theme as the vehicle by virtue of an analogy between the theme and the vehicle. Analogy is similarity, as of features or functions, between unlike things that are otherwise not comparable. Every metaphor involves a theme and a vehicle. Specifically, the theme is the purport or concept representing the subject of a metaphor, and the vehicle is (i) an image that signifies



the theme or (ii) a qualifying concept or entity for the theme. Between the theme and the vehicle there exists an analogy. In virtue of the analogy, the vehicle highlights certain features of the theme while the theme depresses or downplays less contextually pertinent features of the vehicle. Meaning is thus transferred or extended from the vehicle to the theme on the part of language. The theme and the vehicle may be (but need not be) a whole conceptual domain, general field, or a complex system, as is the case in which one metaphorizes human beings as plants. The theme and vehicle may also be something specific, as in *My girlfriend is a red rose*. As dyadic elements of a metaphorical sign, the theme and the vehicle are not always put into words in a verbal metaphor. Both of them may be overt (i.e., expressed verbally) or covert (i.e., not expressed verbally), as will be observed later in this section.

As a linguistic sign, a verbal metaphor may be characterized as a syntactically acceptable piece or stretch of language of which at least one constituent cannot be taken literally and of which the intended meaning as a whole is based on an analogy. A linguistic metaphor involves nonliteral use of language. The verbal nonliterality is attributable to the assimilation of two unlike things or two unlike systems of things. In most cases, the verbal nonliterality entails a deviation from conventional usage, which makes verbal metaphors enticing means to draw and sustain readers' attention to the ad. Like a simile, a metaphor is a trope based on analogy. And yet a metaphor involves nonliteral use of language with semantic extension, while a simile is literal use of language without semantic extension. Thus in the metaphor *MSN8 is a filter* (that blocks junk e-mails), the software is signified as a filter. Used in a nonliteral sense, the word *filter* is carried over from where it usually occurs to a context in which it is not usually found. As a consequence, the range of the senses of the word is extended, temporarily or otherwise. By contrast, the simile *MSN8 is like a filter* does not cause any semantic extension. Every word in the simile is used in its normal sense. The comparison marker *like* suggests that the concepts 'MSN8' and 'a filter' are not identical but similar in certain respects. Similes qualify as a type of trope because of their conceptual departure from the norm in respect of comparison, as we have noted in the previous section.

A verbal metaphor in English can occur as a one-word utterance, a phrase, a complete sentence, a passage, or even a whole piece of writing. For example, the trade name of a product behaves like a common noun in some instances. We can refer to a Ford Mercury Sable as *a Sable*, in

which case the car is signified as an animal. The phrase *a Sable* is a metaphorical sign in its own right. We can also address the car as *Sable*. The one-word utterance *Sable* is a verbal icon of the car. In addition, a compound word may also be metaphorically constructed. Take, for instance, *Tablet PC*. A Tablet PC is a laptop computer that is as simple to use as a pad and pen. We can write, draw, scribble, and erase directly on the screen. Thus the compound *Tablet PC* can be thought of as a PC metaphorically signified as a tablet (a pad of writing paper glued together along one edge). Another example of a metaphorical compound can be seen in the headline of an ad featuring Panasonic KX-TA624 Phone System: *When you have a house to die for, you need a killer phone system*. Taken by itself, the compound *killer phone system* is metaphorical, with the theme 'the phone system' signified via the vehicle 'a killer.' The metaphorical signification is anchored by a sentence in the body copy: *Panasonic presents a phone system that buries the competition*. Thus the claim for the product is that the Panasonic phone system is able to defeat its rival phone systems in the market.

Personification signifies something nonhuman (the theme) via a human being (the vehicle). Involving nonliteral use of language based on an analogy, personification can be taken to be a subset of metaphor. Many trade names and advertising slogans are instances of compounds or phrases of personification, such as *Ford Explorer*, *Business Messenger* (Yahoo), and *Business Partner* (Mazda).<sup>3</sup> Personification allows copy writers to use the images of or knowledge about human beings per se to represent important product/service features. Thus the distance is diminished between the product/service and the target audience.

Very often a verbal metaphor takes the form of a complete sentence in advertising English, whether it functions as a statement, question, command, or exclamation, as may be seen from the following examples:

- (10) Creating a Rolex is truly a journey, one that often takes up  
to a year.  
(Rolex watches)

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<sup>3</sup> Other examples include *Mr. Clean* (disinfectant), *Good Friends* (Ginna-Raisin Crunch), *Every Day of the Week Warrior* (Ford Escape), *Omega Speedmaster*, *Toyota Highlander*, *Fresh Mates* (moist wipes), *Fantasy Brain* (online tool), *The New Value Frontier* (Kyocera digital processors), *Master of Complications* (Frank Muller watches), and the like.

- (11) Do your vehicles have driving intelligence?  
(Continental electronic stability program)
- (12) Change your spare to a flat.  
(Nordic Track aerobic exerciser)
- (13) Fly first class. Set yourself free. In a new Durex condom.  
(Durex Ultra Comfort condoms)
- (14) When you retire, you're not about to sit on the sidelines.  
(Metlife annuities)

In the above sentences, the theme and vehicle of a metaphorical sign are directly phrased or linguistically covert but traceable. Both the theme and vehicle are put into words in (10), with *creating a Rolex* represented as *a journey*. As with a long journey, *creating a Rolex* is said to be a sustained and oriented activity. The theme of the metaphorical question in (11) is overt and the vehicle covert linguistically. The automobile is personified as having intelligence that can be measured. The question helps involve readers in the ad, making them read the ad for the answer. Turning next to the metaphorical command in (12), the vehicle is overt while the theme — the waist of a target customer — is covert. The metaphor signifies the waist as a tire. Representing the disappearance of a bulging ring of fat round the waist as a flat tire, the copywriter has added to the advertising message a humorous effect that generates a feeling of pleasantness toward the product. The command not only seeks to make readers act but makes a personal connection to them, bringing forth a sense of one person addressing personally to them (cf. Myers 1994: 47-8). The metaphorical sentence in (13) exhibits a similar semiotic structure, where the overt vehicle is used to express the covert theme. The command *Fly first class* should be ascribed to the lovemaking-as-flying metaphor. The textual context alone makes it clear that the word *condom* occurs as an overt theme signified via the covert vehicle 'an airliner.' Sex is an embarrassing topic. Such a metaphor is used to imply unspeakable messages. Consumers have to draw conclusions about the product from the metaphorical expressions. The statement in (14) arises from a metaphor that analogizes life as a sporting event, where both the theme and vehicle are covert. The assured retirees can continue to do the things they love with an annuity that offers them a secure income, as if they were active players in the sporting field or court.

Taken together, these examples of advertising metaphor indicate that

the theme and vehicle can be linguistically overt or covert at the sentential level. Thus there are four types of possible combinations: an overt theme coupled with an overt vehicle, an overt theme with a covert vehicle, a covert theme with an overt vehicle, and a covert theme with a covert vehicle.

We have earlier noted that independent phrases in English advertisements are semantically and functionally equivalent to a complete sentence or clause. Given that four types of possible combinations of metaphorical theme and vehicle can be found in a complete sentence, the four types of combinations should also occur in independence phrases. This is true of independent phrases in English magazine advertisements. Consider the following examples:

- (15) Now to Xiamen, China's garden by the sea.  
(Thai Airways International)
- (16) Where to go for your PC and everything its heart desires.  
Gateway.com  
(Gateway PCs and PC accessories)
- (17) The love child of protein and chocolate.  
(Kellogg's Krave Energizing Snack Bar)
- (18) Aged longer to taste smoother.  
(Evan Williams whiskey)
- (19) Another giant leap for technology.  
(Motorola technology)

Xiamen City is metaphorized as a garden in (15). Both the theme and vehicle are verbalized in the independent phrase. The analogy is pointed out in the copy: Xiamen is "a cosmopolitan blend of beautiful parks and historical landmarks" (*Time*, Dec. 23, 2002). In the independent phrases in (16), the themes are overt, but not the vehicles. The independent phrase points to a website. The target customers are invited to click on to that website for the latest prices on PCs and thousands of accessories. The overt theme is a PC, signified via the covert vehicle 'a person.' The PC is represented as having a heart that desires its own accessories. As to (17), the covert theme—Kellogg's Krave Energizing Snack Bar—is signified via *the love child*, which is linguistically represented in the phrase. The copy that follows reads: "The ecstasy of chocolate sinfully embracing the nutrition of vitamins, minerals, calcium and protein" (*Time*, Aug. 25, 2003). Thus the analogy highlights a clandestinely

pleasurable sensation. Further along, the theme and vehicle of the metaphorical phrase in (18) are both covert. There are three pictures in the ad. In the middle is a reproduction of a bottle of Evan Williams whiskey. On the left is a portrait of a homely young girl in plain clothes, captioned 'Before Aging.' On the right is another portrait of the same girl, captioned 'After Aging.' The girl after aging wears a scanty and revealing outfit, whose face, body, and hairstyle look much more attractive, as shown in the following rough sketches of the original pictures:



It is obvious that the covert theme of the metaphorical phrase *Aged longer to taste smoother* is Evan Williams whiskey and the cover vehicle is the growing girl. The interesting vehicle has highlighted one important feature of the theme: The longer the whiskey is aged, the better it gets. Finally, the independent phrase in (19) is a metaphor for the progress of Motorola technology. Printed around the independent phrase are a series of seven small photos of various Motorola products. The metaphorical phrase arises from forward movement as a sign of progress. It can also

be observed here that the theme and the vehicle are both covert. The expression *another giant leap* in the independent phrase suggests the covert vehicle 'forward movement,' and the covert theme 'Motorola's technological progress' primarily follows from the products being advertised. To be brief, Motorola's technological progress is signified as a forward movement.

It ought to be obvious that the semiotic structures of independent-phrase metaphors are quite parallel to those of sentential metaphors. Phrases and sentences are grammatical concepts, while tropes and metaphors, as semiotic concepts, may assume a variety of grammatical forms. In the light of the theory of conceptual metaphor (Gibbs 1994; Johnson 1987; Kovecses 2002; Lakoff 1987, 1988, 1990, 1993; Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999; Lakoff and Turner 1989; Sweetser 1990; Turner 1991, 1996), metaphor is a conceptual model that generates coherent clusters of various linguistic expressions. In other words, verbal metaphors reflect the surface realization of conceptual metaphors. Since independent phrases, as we have already seen, are commensurate with a sentence in function and meaning, a metaphorical independent phrase can be thought of as the conceptual equivalent of a metaphorical sentence.

It is noticeable that verbal metaphors in English magazine ads are often under-coded and require readers to draw conclusions about the advertising message. Without explicitly spelling out the signification of a verbal metaphor, copywriters provide verbal and visual cues for readers to make sense of the metaphor. These interpretative cues are contextual support that casts light on the covert theme and/or vehicle of the metaphor, reducing the difficulty of comprehending the metaphorical sign. The audience may rely on textual cues and advertising images to decode metaphorical signs. According to McQuarrie and Mick (1996) and Toncar and Munch (2001), the pleasure in solving the puzzle of a trope can lead to increased attention to the ad and make it more memorable.

Metaphorical signification can be viewed as a device for "tickle advertising" (Simpson 2001), which communicates advertising messages indirectly and, accordingly, necessitates greater participation and more decoding effort. If readers are intrigued and comprehension is not immediate, they are more likely to participate in the advertising (Bernstein 1974; Simpson 2001). In addition, verbal metaphors often convey an indeterminate range of thoughts or meanings. For example,

the metaphor of a girl as a rose could be used to implicate her beauty, the transience of her beauty, her thorny character, or her fresh scent. But it has been shown in this section that metaphors in English magazine ads are usually more or less determinate by virtue of their contextual support. Following the verbal and visual clues in the ad, readers can recover the intended signification of metaphor within the otherwise indeterminate range. After all, advertisers have to make sure that readers' attempts to comprehend the metaphor in the ad will not be unavailing.

#### **4. METONYMIES**

As has been indicated earlier, symbols, icons, and indexes are three major types of signs. Metaphors have been treated as an iconic sign in the previous section. In this section, metonymies will be analyzed as an indexical sign.

An index is a sign whose signifier brings about a deictic or contiguous relation with its signified (Peirce 1955). Al-Sharafi (2004) further extends the notion of index to include that of causality. In recent times, metonymy is often described as a trope based on contiguity and causality. Thus it can be said that in a metonymy, one thing comes to signify another on account of a contiguous or causal relation, as is the case in which *hand* signifies *manual worker*. Within the topic-vehicle approach, what is signified in a metonymy is referred to as 'metonymical referent' (or 'referent' for short), and the signifier as 'vehicle.' Thus in the metonymical utterance *All hands on deck*, the expression *hands* is the semiotic vehicle for the metonymical referent 'members of a ship's crew.'

The relationship between the vehicle and the metonymical referent is based on contiguity or causality. And yet the concept of contiguity is fuzzy. Cognitive linguists (e.g., Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Radden and Kovecses 1999) have identified some common metonymical schemas, casting light on the nature of metonymical concept. In order to define and clarify the conceptual basis of metonymy within the topic-vehicle approach, Shie (2004) has delineated various metonymical associations in terms of twenty metonymical schemas, namely knowledge structures that motivate metonymical signs, including time for event or activity,

effect for cause or vice versa, body part for faculty, and so on.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, synecdoche is treated as a type of metonymy on the ground that the part-for-whole or whole-for-part association fits in well with the overall framework of metonymical schemas.

In general, the twenty metonymical schemas proposed in Shie (2004) can account for verbal metonymies in English magazine ads. The following examples show some metonymical schemas:

- (20) Never miss a moment.  
(Sony camcorders)
- (21) Wake up and smell the cash.  
(Maxwell coffee)
- (22) May the manager with the most brains win.  
(The Fantasy Brain online tool)

The word *moment* in (20) signifies a significant activity in a brief period of time that a camcorder can capture. Thus *moment* is used in a time-for-activity metonymy. We can see the operation of metonymy in the process of this instance of lexicalization, in the sense of creation of a lexical sign and sense. The word *moment* is a lexical sign of the concept 'an indefinitely short period of time.' The time-for-activity metonymy makes it possible for *a moment* to signify 'a significant or memorable activity that takes place within its indefinite time frame' in the advertising context. Example (21) is the headline of an ad for Maxwell coffee. The word *cash* is a sign of the aroma of a cup of Maxwell coffee, shown in the illustration of the ad. The semiotic association of the vehicle with the metonymical referent can be seen from the main point of the body copy: The consumers could win a prize of one million dollars. Maxwell coffee could contribute to the winning of the cash. Thus there exists an effect-for-cause metonymy. And the word *brains* in (22) is a conventional metonym of a body part for faculty, denoting the manager's intellectual power. The ad is for Fantasy Brain, an online tool

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<sup>4</sup> We shall illustrate these three metonymical schemas in (20), (21), and (22) respectively. The other metonymical schemas presented in Shie (2004) include part for whole or vice versa, genus for species or vice versa, material for object, property for entity, container for contents, place for people or vice versa, place for institution, venue for event or activity, physiological reaction for feeling, object for user or vice versa, producer for product or vice versa, clothing or accessory for wearer, instrument for effect or result, trademark for product, company name for share price, and eponym for thing associated.



that puts dashboard technology in the hands of baseball managers. Accordingly, not only does the word *brains* in (22) signify a baseball manager's intelligence, but it also serves as an index to the online tool Fantasy Brain. The ad features a baseball manager and two players in their dugout, watching the game (see Appendix Two). The visual and trademark help readers to grasp the metonymical referent.

I have found a few instances of metonymy that seem to go beyond the scope of the twenty schemas presented in Shie (2004). This indicates that the twenty schemas are not exhaustive. To the best of my knowledge, two metonymical schemas have never been dealt with in the literature on English tropes, namely 'price for product' and 'signifier for signified or vice versa.' Both of them occur in English magazine ads, as illustrated below:

- (23) How can you make two months' salary last forever?  
(The Diamond Trading Company)
- (24) Two heads aren't always better than one.  
(The DuPont Mini-Sip milk pouch)
- (25) Bring your family on a business trip. Carry your memories  
in your pocket.  
(The Palm handheld)
- (26) Ideas move faster in color.  
(Ricoh networked color laser printers)

The phrase *two months' salary* in (23) is an index of a diamond engagement ring. The ring is supposed to be cherished by its possessor for the rest of her life, hence the ever-lasting value. The price-for-product signification is obvious. Similar metonymical signification can be observed in (24). The word *head* literally denotes one side of a coin. In the ad, one picture of a carton of milk is shown next to another picture of two coins, with an equality sign in between, signifying that a carton of milk is worth two coins. Besides, one picture of a pouch of DuPont Mini-Sip milk is displayed next to another picture of one coin, again, with an equality sign in between, indicating that a pouch of DuPont Mini-Sip milk is worth one coin (see Appendix Three). As the saying goes, a penny saved is a penny earned, which is the benefit of switching to the milk pouch. The conclusion is that cartooned milk is not always better than DuPont Mini-sip milk. If we take the price of a product to be a property of that product, then we may as well think of the metonym in

(23) or (24) as a property-for-entity one. With regard to (25), the word *family* as well as *memories* is the vehicle for the metonymical referent 'family pictures stored in the Palm handheld.' The family pictures signify the traveling businessman's family or memories about his family. Thus *family* and *memories* are both a signified-for-signifier metonym. Much the same can be said of (26). The word *ideas* in (26) can be construed as the language or visuals that a Ricoh networked color laser printer receives and prints out. The signified is used for the signifier. Broadly stated, verbal metonymies in English magazine ads tie up with the accompanying illustration and trademark, which often point to the metonymical referent.

The metonymies we have examined so far involve an overt vehicle represented by a noun or noun phrase while the referent is covert. The use of such metonymies is primarily referential in nature. According to Ibanez (2000) and Radden and Kovecses (1999), metonymy is a cognitive process in which one conceptual entity, the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity within the same idealized cognitive model. Taken together, the verbal carrier of a referential metonymy is a noun or noun phrase. But some metonymies in English magazine ads are predication or propositional rather than referential. Their metonymical referent and vehicle are both overtly represented in the sentence, usually in the form of 'A + the verb *to be* + B,' where the B term is a predication that is made about A. And the whole sentence expresses a proposition. The following examples should suffice to make the point:

- (27) It's pure class and elegance.  
(Oris watches)
- (28) Quality is now an acronym: PT.  
(Chrysler PT Cruiser)
- (29) Happiness is having chocolate back in your life.  
(Hershey's Chocolate Candy)

The coordinated phrase *class and elegance* in (27) expresses the salient properties of the Oris watch. The reference of the pronoun *it* is made to the Oris watch, which can be understood from the trademark and the picture of the Oris watch in the ad. The whole sentence in (27) constitutes a property-for-entity metonymy, with the metonymical referent represented in the subject position and the vehicle in the

predicate. As to (28), the acronym *PT* serves as the vehicle of the signifier-for-signified metonymy. The metonym refers to the Chrysler PT Cruiser. In addition, the whole sentence in (28) is also metonymical, expressing a proposition. One important property of the car (i.e., quality or excellence) is used as the vehicle through which the Chrysler PT Cruiser is signified. The metonymical referent is postposed in the sentence to achieve the end focus on the advertised product. By the same token, the propositional metonymy in (29) contains both an overt vehicle and an overt metonymical referent. The cause *having chocolate back in your life* is an index to the effect *happiness*. According to the words on the pack of chocolate shown pictorially in the ad, the chocolate advertised is sugar-free. Thus the consumer can have a carefree feeling of joy while eating the chocolate.

We have earlier noted that, as the foregrounded content of a complete thought, an independent phrase in advertising English is semantically and functionally equivalent to a sentence. We have also seen that the verbal carrier of a referential metonymy is a noun or noun phrase while a propositional metonymy is represented by a sentence. From the foregoing, it is reasonable to infer that referential and propositional metonymies should arise in an independent phrase as well. Examples such as the following support this inference:

- (30) A city that eats Japanese, Spanish, French, and Italian.  
(Kuala Lumpur)
- (31) A land of sensations.  
(The Dominican Republic)
- (32) MACANUDO. An American Passion.  
(Macanudo cigars)
- (33) Sleep Better on Air!  
(The Select Comfort mattress)

The noun phrase *a city* in (30) refers to the citizens or tourists in the city, who eats Japanese, Spanish, French and Italian foods. A place is used as an index of people in that place. In the metonymical independent phrase in (31), the vehicle and metonymical referent are both directly phrased. The underlying proposition the independent phrase expresses is that the land (the Dominican Republic) causes sensations. Thus the independent phrase is an effect-for-cause metonymy, with the vehicle *sensations* in apposition to the metonymical referent *land*. In (32) the

trade name *MACANUDO* is a trademark-for-product metonymy, referring to Macanudo cigars. The trade name and the independent phrase *An American Passion* are juxtaposed in the ad. They correlate with each other and invite two metonymical readings. On one reading they mean that Macanudo cigars cause an American passion; on the other they mean that an American passion makes Macanudo America's best-selling premium cigars, as can be seen from the ad's body copy. Both of the two readings reflect a complete thought or a complete propositional content. Finally, there is a synecdoche, or a part-for-whole metonymy, in the advertisement headline in (33). The body copy of the ad states that the Select Comfort mattress does not rely on springs or water, but on a cushion of air, helping to reduce uncomfortable pressure points. By virtue of the important function of the cushion air in the mattress, the word *air* in (33) serves as an index of the whole mattress. The ad shows a young couple sleeping profoundly on a Select Comfort mattress. It should be clear that (33) is not an imperative sentence but an independent phrase, which is short for 'This couple sleep better on the Select Comfort mattress.'

It can be seen from the examples cited in this section that metonymies in English magazine ads exercise several noteworthy discourse functions. First of all, metonymies often make economical use of language. They are particularly suitable for print advertising, for which the space is usually at a premium. Since the vehicle of a metonymy can be expressed more briefly than its referent, a metonymical piece of language can often be used to accomplish an economy of language. Thus *Sleep better on air* is more economical than *Sleep better on the mattress that relies on a cushion of air* or *Sleep better on the Select Comfort Mattress*.

Secondly, use of metonymy may have the effect of highlighting a contextually important property of the advertised product or service. As an index of the above-mentioned mattress with a cushion of air, the word *air* represents a highlighted property of the mattress to which the advertiser indirectly calls the target customers' attention.

Finally, metonymic signification brings to mind some meaning that is not directly stated in the advertising text. A typical function of meaning implication is served, for instance, via the metonymical headline in (26): *Ideas move faster in color*, where the noun *ideas* signifies printed matter the Ricoh color printer produces. The headline is suggestive of the effectiveness of image communication with the Ricoh networked color

printer, targeted at on-demand printing, business graphics, internet downloads, and the like. Taken literally, ideas do not move, and neither do they have any color. In fact, ideas have been metaphorized as objects in motion in the headline. Thus the headline contains not just a metonymy but a metaphor. The two tropes interact with each other through a shared semiotic component. The concept 'ideas' serves not only as the theme of the metaphor but also as the vehicle of the metonymy. In this sense, the metaphorical theme has been blended with the metonymical vehicle. This is an instance of what might be called 'a complex trope,' which will be explored in the following section.

## 5. COMPLEX TROPES

Linguistic signs in advertising texts can be read in relation to such nonlinguistic signs as logos and pictures. The combination of linguistic signs with graphic ones characterizes magazine ads. In fact, it is also possible that semiotic integration occurs at the linguistic level, involving two or three 'figures' of speech. Some verbal tropes have mixed iconic and indexical features. Such tropes are referred to as 'complex tropes' within the topic-vehicle approach. In a complex trope, two or more tropes are integrated or blended into one, be they of the same kind or different types. Thus, for example, two metaphors may coexist in the same linguistic sign, and so may one metaphor and one simile. Instances of complex tropes can be identified in English magazine ads. Take two examples cited in the previous section, repeated here as (34) and (35):

- (34) Two heads aren't always better than one.  
(The DuPont Mini-Sip milk pouch)
- (35) Quality is now an acronym: PT.  
(Chrysler PT Cruiser)

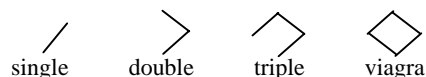
Two metonymies are blended in the phrase *two heads* in (34). The phrase is a part-for-whole metonymy in that it is indicative of 'two coins.' At the same time it is a price-for-product metonymy since it denotes, as we have seen in the previous section, 'a pouch of DuPont Mini-Sip milk.' And the propositional metonymy in (35) involves integration, rather than blending, of two different metonymies in two different linguistic constituents. On the one hand, the acronym *PT* refers

to a car, which is a signifier-for-signified metonymy. On the other, the whole sentence identifies quality with the car, presenting the important property of the car with a property-for-entity metonymy.

As a matter of fact, two metaphors may also be blended or integrated in one single sentence, as attested by the following examples:

- (36) For Rafael Palmeiro and so many other guys, VIAGRA is  
a home run.  
(Viagra tablets)
- (37) Straight Jacket is a firewall between you and the solar  
blast furnace.  
(Oakley sunglasses)

The metaphor of Viagra as a home run in (36) is illustrated in the ad with four route diagrams of baseball runners, captioned 'single,' 'double,' triple,' and 'Viagra' respectively. The first diagram shows the route of base running from home plate to first base, the second diagram the route to second base, and the third diagram the route to third base. The last diagram, captioned 'Viagra,' shows the route of a home run batter making it all the way from base to base to home plate, as shown in the following rough sketches of the original diagrams (see also Appendix Four):



Thus the words and diagrams in the ad jointly portray the underlying metaphorical sign: LOVE MAKING PERFORMANCE AS BASE RUNNING, with the metaphor VIAGRA AS A HOME RUN blended into it. Turning next to (37), the registered trademark Straight Jacket stands for the product being advertised: Oakley sunglasses. The sunglasses are metaphorized as a firewall, and the sun as a blast furnace. The two metaphors have been integrated in the same figurative sentence, in addition to the trademark-for-product metonymy.

Simile and metaphor may also coexist in a complex trope. For example:

- (38) So you can have that just-cleaned feeling you get from the

dentist—every day. And, for under \$8, the price is as refreshing as the clean.  
(Crest toothbrushes)

- (39) Pictures speak louder than words.  
(Sanyo mobile projectors)

A just-cleaned feeling can be refreshing because it has the effect of making the experiencer energetic again after having been tired. But the price of a toothbrush cannot be spoken of as being refreshing in the same literal sense. As in (38), unless understood to be refreshing metaphorically, the price cannot be likened to a just-cleaned feeling. Therefore, simile and metaphor are blended into a complex trope in the second sentence in (38): *The price is as refreshing as the clean*. By contrast, example (2) is a pure simile without any metaphor blended into it, repeated here as (40):

- (40) The cable weighs less than the mouse.  
(United Technologies' elevator-lifting steel cables)

Since a cable and a mouse are measurable and comparable in weight, to say the sentence in (40) is to make a literal statement. Returning to complex tropes of simile and metaphor, it can be observed that (39) involves nonliteral use of language. The word *speak* is used metaphorically. Pictures can convey a message but do not speak in the literal sense of the word. Neither do words convey a message orally like a language speaker. Thus blended into the simile in (39) are two metaphors: PICTURES SPEAK and WORDS SPEAK.<sup>5</sup>

A complex trope may also consist of metaphor and metonymy, as in the following:

- (41) OKAY. FIBER & TAST BUDS, BE FRIENDS.  
(Good Friends Ginna-Raisin Crunch)  
(42) We are already on the road to a greener tomorrow.  
(Toyota)

The use of *FIBER* for healthy food in (41) is an instance of

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<sup>5</sup> The sentence in (39) is a variant of the proverb *Actions speak louder than words*. Such a relationship between two texts is known as 'intertextuality' (cf. Goddard 1998: 69-78), the use of a new text altered from a recycled old text.

synecdoche, or part-for-whole metonymy. And *TAST BUDS* may be read as a metonymical sign too. On account of the schema of body part for faculty, 'taste buds' stand for the sense of taste. At the same time, a request is addressed to 'fiber' and 'taste buds' as though they were two people at odds, which is a case of personification. Let us move on to the advertising headline in (42). The body copy of the ad is concerned with Toyota's commitment to environmental action in connection with fuel-efficient, low-emission automotive technology. The headline in (42) grows in part from the metaphor of Toyota's long-lasting environmental campaign as a journey. The headline also represents the conventional metaphor of times as bounded spaces. 'A green tomorrow' stands for the destination of the metaphorized journey. Beyond that, since our natural environment is largely green, the color green has come to signify environmental protection. For that reason *a greener tomorrow* is an index of the future time when our environment is better protected. The signifier-for-signified metonym *green* is blended with the times-as-spaces metaphor to form a complex trope.

Correspondingly, complex tropes reside in independent phrases in English magazine ads, as exemplified in:

- (43) Uplifting architecture, bathed in natural light.  
(Hong Kong International Airport)
- (44) Sharp Minds, Sharp Products.  
(Sharp LCD TVs)
- (45) The muscle car with brains.  
(The Infiniti M45)
- (46) Baked to a finish as tough and enduring as the American spirit.  
(Falcon Northwest gaming PCs)
- (47) Smells Like Summer. Cleans Like Spring.  
(Mr. Clean Antibacterial Limited Disinfectant)
- (48) Thai, smooth as silk.  
(Thai Airways International)

Two metaphors are amalgamated in (43). The factive stationariness of the architecture is represented as a fictive upward movement, and the natural light as water. The whole independent phrase conjures up an image of a being in upward motion immersed in pleasant water. With respect to (44), two metonymies arise simultaneously. The word *mind* is



a conventional index of a person of great mental ability. Furthermore, a producer-product metonymy links *sharp minds* with *sharp products*. The products, Sharp LCD TVs, have sharp picture quality. And the producers are marked by keenness and accuracy of perception. Either use of the adjective *sharp* is metaphorical.

The independent phrase in (45) is an instance of a complex trope into which one metaphor and two metonymies are blended. The car is metaphorized as a person. The two metonymical signs of body part for faculty—*muscle* and *brains*—highlight two important properties of the car, namely power and intelligence. As for (46), the independent phrase depicts layers of paints of the personal computer, which can be seen from the body copy. The paints are literally tough and enduring. But the comparison of the paints with the American spirit in respect of how they are tough and enduring presupposes that the American spirit is tough and enduring, which is metaphorical. Therefore, the independent phrase in (46) involves not only a simile but a metaphor as well. Turning next to (47), two independent phrases are juxtaposed to form an antithesis, where *spring* represents *spring-cleaning*, and *summer* stands for *the scent of summer citrus*. It is not difficult to infer the metonymical referent ‘the scent of summer citrus’ because the ad shows a bottle of Mr. Clean Disinfectant marked ‘summer citrus.’ The trademark in the ad also indicates that the themes of the two similes are Mr. Clean Disinfectant. In a word, the two independent phrases in (47) are both a complex trope of simile and metonymy. Moving on to (48), the trademark *Thai* is a metonym for ‘flying Thai,’ indicating an association between the trademark and the service provided. The independent phrase can be read as short for the complete sentence *Flying Thai is smooth as silk*. At the same time, the smoothness of silk is not the same as the smoothness of a flying trip, the latter being an iconic extension of the former. Therefore, the complex trope in (48) is composed of a simile, metaphor, and metonymy.

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this article we have analyzed three major types of tropes in English magazine ads. The analyses reveal the underlying dualistic structures of simile, metaphor, and metonymy. A simile or metaphor is an iconic sign built on its analogical theme and vehicle. And a metonymy is

an indexical sign involving a contiguous or causal relation between the vehicle and referent. By and large, the semiotic topic-vehicle approach, including the concept of complex tropes derived from it, can account for how the three master tropes work in English magazine ads.

Independent phrases frequently appear in English magazine ads. As a trope can occur in a complete clause, so, too, can that trope occur in an independent phrase. We have seen that, where the three master tropes are concerned, every type and subtype of a trope that assumes the form of a complete clause can also take the form of an independent phrase. This finding renders further support to the view that independent phrases in English ads can be thought of as the conceptual equivalent of a complete clause.

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#### **APPENDIX ONE**

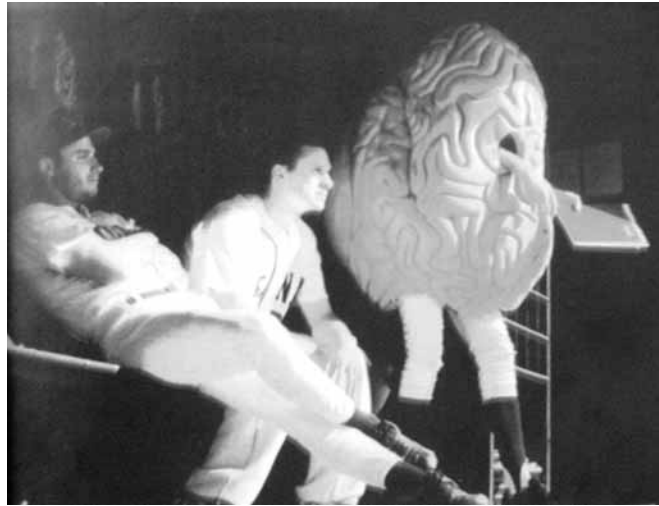
The picture in the ad for the Samsung 21" Monitor  
(Reprinted with permission)



#### **APPENDIX TWO**

The picture in the ad for the Fantasy Brain online tool

(Reprinted with permission)



**APPENDIX THREE**

The picture in the ad for the DuPont Mini-Sip milk pouch

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#### **APPENDIX FOUR**

The picture in the ad for Viagra tablets

*Master Tropes in English Magazine Ads*

(Reprinted with permission)

RAFAEL PALMEIRO  
Yankees All-Star  
2001 Home Run Leader

SINGLE DOUBLE TRIPLE VIAGRA

For Rafael Palmeiro  
and so many other guys,  
VIAGRA is a home run.\*

That's why Palmeiro stays with it. Because it works. In fact, about 16 million men worldwide have improved their love lives. All with the help of VIAGRA. So do what Rafael did. Ask your doctor about VIAGRA. And we'll deliver your order.

VIAGRA  
(sildenafil citrate) tablets

OFFICIAL SPONSOR

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英文雜誌廣告中的主要譬喻：符旨符徵取徑

謝健雄  
大葉大學歐洲語文學系

本文討論英文雜誌廣告中的主要譬喻（明喻、隱喻、轉喻），運用符旨符徵取徑辨識、分析這三種譬喻。本文希望解答下列兩個問題：第一、符旨符徵取徑是否能說明英文雜誌廣告中的主要譬喻；第二、英文雜誌廣告中的主要譬喻是否以同樣的概念結構出現在完整的子句與獨立片語之中。結論是符旨符徵取徑大致可運用於英文雜誌廣告中的主要譬喻，且各類、各次類出現於完整子句的譬喻均可以獨立片語的語言形式呈現。