

A Semiotic Analysis of Printed Advertisement — The Case of Awarded Works in the International Advertising Festival Alcohol Division

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1. Introduction

An advertisement consists of signifier (signifiant) and signified (signifié). As shown in Figure 1.1, Roland Barthes(1964) further clarified that signifié consists of three messages, i.e. a linguistic message, a coded iconic message and an uncoded iconic message.

Linguistic messages and coded iconic messages correspond to ‘denotation’ conceptualized by Lewis Hjelmslev(1961). On the other hand, uncoded messages that are symbolically represented correspond to ‘connotation’. Furthermore, Barthes considered it important that the principle of rhetoric works there when copies and graphics represent connotation. Roman Jakobson(1956) has outlined two main methods of this rhetoric, i.e. metaphor and metonymy.

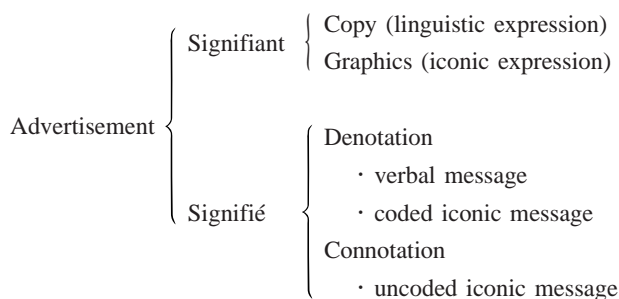


Figure1.1 *Constituents of Advertisement Sign*

In many advertisements, these expression methods are not used independently, but applied in complex combination. In addition, as an expression method, not only rhetoric but also ‘estrangement’ is applied as a technique. Estrangement (‘Verfremdung’ or ‘ostrannenie’) means to make an expression unfamiliar or new by putting a word or style that has become customary or familiar in a new context, or coining a new word or appropriating a forgotten word or style. In actual advertisements, the estrangement technique is used in combination with the rhetoric method. In other words, quite complex methods are used for many advertisement expressions.

Studies on advertisement expression have been carried out in accordance with the way of thinking of the semiotics mentioned above. The study of Barthes (1964) which analyzes an advertisement of Panzani is a representative study where semiotic analysis is applied to the expression of printed advertisement. In Japan, Aoki (1984) also made an semiotic analysis of newspaper advertisement of Seibu Department Store, which had then a good reputation among creators and general consumers.

These two reviewed precedent studies analyzed printed advertisements consisting of a small number of cases¹. We increased the number of subjects for analysis and systematized them. In other words, we decided to select printed advertisements of alcoholic beverages on the basis of certain standards as mentioned in Section 2, and analyzed them.

2. Subjects for analysis

We used as the subjects of analysis the winning works of alcoholic beverage division in the Canne International Advertising Festival, which is the most authoritative among the advertisement festivals in the world. The official name of the Canne International Advertising Festival is the International Advertising Festival, and also called Canne Lion. Its head office is located in London. It started in 1954, and the 49th Festival was held from 16th to 22nd June 2002. The Advertising Festival consists of 5 divisions, i.e. Films, Outdoor & Press, Cyber, Media, and Direct Marketing, which was added in 2002. Judges who have been selected from various nations (all are creative directors) judge the works during the period of the Festival. This is considered the most prestigious advertising awards selected by creators.

The categories of awards are Grand Prix, Gold, Silver and Bronze. In this study, the subjects are all the advertisements having won these prizes. Furthermore, there are cases where awards are given not to single advertisements but campaigns. In such cases the subject of analysis is the work representing a series of works of a campaign (we referred the rest of a series of works for a campaign for reference if necessary).

The period for analysis is the 8 years from 1995 to 2002. The reason why the subject division is only the alcohol division is that while it is difficult to find common characteristics in all the products due to a wide range of product groups, we expect that it will be easy to find a certain tendency in a specified genre. Table 1 shows a list of advertisements that fall under the above standards.

As a result, the winning works selected in this way were grouped into four categories of product groups, i.e. beers, vodkas, wines and tequilas. In the analysis below, we grouped them by genre, i.e. product group, and decided to see how symbolic significance would appear. In other words, we will carry out analysis of beer advertisements firstly, and secondly, vodka, wine and tequila in this order, and lastly we would like to consider the difference in the tendency by group as well as characteristics common in all these groups.

3. Results

3.1. Result of analysis of beer advertisements

Firstly, we would like to comment on the beer advertisement in the order of the materials numbers shown in table 1. We list below Work numbers, Titles and Products in brackets below. Each work is shown in from Figure 2.1 to Figure 2.20 respectively.

Table 1. Awarded works in the International Advertising Festival Alcohol Division (1995-2002)

No.	Title	Product	Award	Year	Country:	Advertiser	Agency
1	FRANK	BIG BUD - BEER	Bronze Lion for the Campaign	1999	BRAZIL	BUDWEISER	DM9DD0B PUBLICIDADE
2	CREAM TEA	BODDINGTONS BEER	Gold Lion for the Campaign	1996	UNITED KINGDOM	WHITBREAD BEER COMPANY	BARTLE BOGLE HEGARTY
3	HER DAD	BODDINGTONS EXPORT	Bronze Lion for the Campaign	1996	UNITED KINGDOM	WHITBREAD BEER COMPANY	BARTLE BOGLE HEGARTY
4	URINAL	COORS ARCTIC ICE	Bronze Lion	1995	USA	COORS BREWERY COMPANY	THE INTEGER GROUP
5	GUINNESS - CLEAVAGE	GUINNESS STOUT	Silver Lion for the Campaign	2001	SINGAPORE	GAELIC INNS	OGILVY & MATHER ADVERTISING SINGAPORE
6	RUGBY STOCKING	GUINNESS STOUT	Silver Lion	2002	MALAYSIA	GUINNESS ANCHOR MALAYSIA	OGILVY & MATHER MALAYSIA
7	BUILDERS BUM	HEINEKEN	Bronze Lion	2000	UNITED KINGDOM	WHITBREAD BEER COMPANY	LOWE LINTAS
8	MOTORCYCLISTS	SAN MIGUEL 0.0 BEER	Bronze Lion for the Campaign	2000	UNITED KINGDOM	SAN MIGUEL	PUBLICIS/CASADEVALL PEDRENO & PRG
9	CAR	STELLA ARTOIS	Grand Prix for the Campaign	2000	UNITED KINGDOM	WHITBREAD BEER COMPANY	LOWE LINTAS
10	COMPENSATED	TOOHEY'S BEER	Silver Lion for the Campaign	1996	UNITED KINGDOM	WHITBREAD BEER COMPANY	BARTLE BOGLE HEGARTY
11	ABSOLUT POTEKIN	ABSOLUT VODKA	Bronze Lion	1997	FRANCE	ABSOLUT	TBWA
12	ABSOLUT FETISH	ABSOLUT VODKA	Silver Lion	1999	UNITED KINGDOM	ABSOLUT	LOWE HOWARD-SPINK
13	SURGEONS	SMIRNOFF RED	Silver Lion	1997	UNITED KINGDOM	IDV	LOWE HOWARD-SPINK
14	PLANE	SMIRNOV VODKA	Bronze Lion for the Campaign	1998	RUSSIA	SMIRNOFF	EURO RSCG MAXIMA
15	RED SQUARE	STOLICHNAYA VODKA	Bronze Lion for the Campaign	2000	AUSTRALIA	UNITED DISTILLERS AND VITNERS	LEO BURNETT
16	SEAFOOD GRAPES	CABOMAR WHITE WINE	Gold Lion	2002	SPAIN	GONZALEZ BYASS	BASSAT OGILVY
17	PIG	GRAN CORONAS CABERNET SAUVIGNON	Gold Lion for the Campaign	2001	SPAIN	MIGUEL TORRES	TANDEM CAMPANY GUASCH DOB
18	FISH	WINES	Gold Lion for the Campaign	1999	SPAIN	RENE BARBIER	BASSAT OGILVY & MATHER
19	FAMILY TREE	TEQUILA	Gold Lion	1997	USA	SAUZA CONMEMARATIVO	CLIFF FREEMAN AND PARTNERS
20	FORTUNE COOKIE	TEQUILA	Silver Lion	1997	USA	SAUZA CONMEMARATIVO	CLIFF FREEMAN AND PARTNERS



Fig.2.1 FRANK



Fig.2.2 CREAM TEA

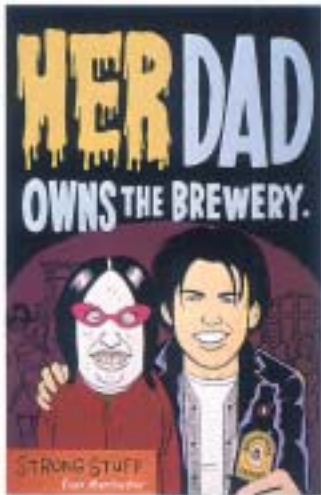


Fig.2.3 HER DAD



Fig.2.4 URINAL



Fig.2.5 GUINNESS-CLEAVAGE



Fig.2.6 RUGBY STOCKING



Fig.2.7 BUILDERS BUM



Fig.2.8 MOTORCYCLISTS



Fig.2.9 CAR

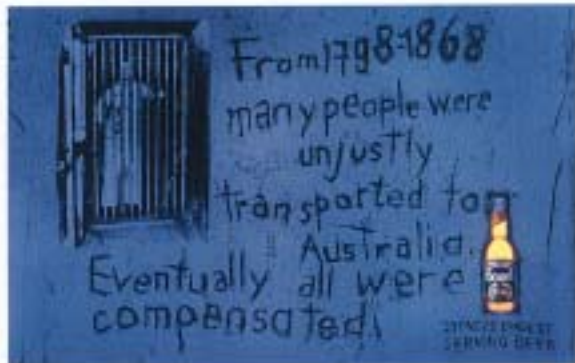


Fig.2.10 COMPENSATED



Fig.2.11 ABSOLUT POTEMKIN



Fig.2.12 ABSOLUT FETISH



Fig.2.13 SURGEONS



Fig.2.14 PLANE



Fig.2.15 RED SQUARE



Fig.2.16 SEAFOOD GRAPES



Fig.2.17 PIG



Fig.2.18 FISH



Fig.2.19 FAMILY TREE



Fig.2.20 FORTUNE COOKIE

《1. “FRANK” — BIG BUD - BEER》

This is an advertisement showing a man who is carrying out weight training. It has the effect of making people think of the good taste of beer after exercise by showing vigorous exercise. In addition, the mass of muscle shown in the picture is overlapped with the image of BIG BUD, which functions as a metaphor. Another technique in its expression is that it uses a proper name, “Frank”, as shown in the title, and shows a man with personality, and not an ambiguous anonymous person. As regards the colors used, the base is black and white, and a bright color is used only for the beer. It has therefore the effect that the beer attracts attention visually.

《2. “CREAM TEA” — BODDINGTONS BEER》

This advertisement shows a large teapot and therefore tricks people into thinking that it might be an advertisement of tea at first glance. But it is an advertisement for beer. It is a little unexpected that no beer bottle etc. usually expected as a form of this product is seen, but a tea container. This is an estrangement effect. In fact, the yellow liquid is not tea but beer, and what is seen as cream is the froth of beer. Furthermore, cream tea is a metaphor for beer. In addition, the yellow tin that is a characteristic of this beer reminds one of association as it is similar to the color of a glass pot. Cream is metonymy of creamy taste. There is also the effect that the graphic emphasizes the catch phrase, “The cream of Manchester”.

《3. “HER DAD” — BODDINGTONS EXPORT》

An attractive man approaches an unattractive woman (teeth in braces, acne, a double chin, and unfashionable clothes and hairstyle are shown as its symbols. In addition, she is depicted in contrast with beautiful women behind). The reason is that her father owns a brewery. This advertisement shows the power of alcohol comically. A major difference from other advertisements is that it uses a cartoon and not a photograph. It appears that the advertisement is aiming to have a good reception from the youth by putting it in a context of the youth culture, i.e. a cartoon. Furthermore, it is conspicuous that the modality is unrealistic, because a cartoon is used. (It is almost impossible to see such an advertisement in alcohol advertisements in Japan.)

《4. “URINAL” — COORS ARCTIC ICE》

It appears that the fact that the urine of the man leaving from the urinal of the public toilet is frozen is a symbol showing unrealistically abnormal coldness, and has an estrangement effect. In addition, the color tone with the base of white and black brings a cold image common in winter decay. The beer bottle is conspicuous in it, as only the bottle is a bright color. This has an effect of attracting attention to the product. In view of the man’s toilet and the relaxed clothes of the man, it appears to target mainly young male people.

《5. “GUINNESS - CLEAVAGE” — GUINNESS STOUT》

It looks like a figure of a fair-complexioned woman wearing black underwear, but in fact it is a metaphor of black beer being poured in a glass. Fair skin resembles white froths. The catch copy, “What’s on your mind?”, seeks solution of a puzzle. While it uses a sexual image, it advertises GUINNESS STOUT,

which is an unexpected resemblance in this image, going onto the offensive by using a sexual image. The product itself is not seen at all, and the point that indirect communication is used has an unexpected nature.

《6. “RUGBY STOCKING” — GUINNESS STOUT》

The product for this advertisement is not seen at all, which is the same as “GUINNESS-CLEAVAGE” in the above advertisement. However, the leg in the stocking for rugby can be seen as a metaphor of black beer poured into a glass from the color and shape. The hand holding the leg can be seen as if it held a glass. The effect of unexpectedness is high in the sense that what appears totally unrelated is connected to a Guinness beer. It is also considered that this advertisement has the effect of giving connotation that the product is sporty and masculine by using the vigorous sport, rugby, as its subject material.

《7. “BUILDERS BUM” — HEINEKEN》

A filler is applied to the buttocks of a fat man sweating and repairing a wall as it is to the wall. It is interesting that it can also be seen as if the man is applying a filler to his own buttocks. A message like “the wall is refreshing, and the man is also refreshing” can be read from the visual message and the catch phrase (“How refreshing. How Heineken.”). In addition, the structure of significance of the sweat (a symbol of labor) and the good taste of beer afterwards (“How refreshing.”) has a common nature with other beer advertisements.

Heineken used to be a brand that had an up-market image in relative terms, but it is possible to expand the customer groups by way of such an interesting photograph.

《8. “MOTORCYCLISTS” — SAN MIGUEL 0.0 BEER》

The image does not tell any significance at a glance, but it can be understood that it is a visual metaphor of “0,0”. It advertises that it is a true non-alcoholic beer, and that the alcohol composition is only “0,0%”, as indicated in red. In addition, “0,0” can be seen as a couple of a man and a woman riding in tandem. It is considered that it gives connotation that it is sporty and indicates being young and sexual intimacy. Furthermore, it has an estrangement effect that it is seen from above the head of the riders.

《9. “CAR” — STELLA ARTOIS》

The shiny and expensive-looking car has a scratch. There is a bottle cap of this beer nearby. This explains that the scratch on the car was made when the beer bottle was opened without a bottle opener to hand. Other advertisements in this series also show a similar photograph in which furniture, a bike, and a musical instrument are scratched by mistake. The message that it is worth scratching can be read from the catch phrase, “Reassuringly Expensive”. Here is compositional arrangement of “failure and comfort” that is often seen in other advertisements. All the things that were damaged in other examples in this advertising campaign are all high-quality articles. So doing gives a feeling of high quality to this product itself.

Furthermore, a communication strategy of metonymy exists where only the bottle cap suggests this product without showing the beer itself.

《10. “COMPENSATED” — TOOHEYS BEER》

This is an advertisement in the form of graffiti on the wall of a prison. It says, “From 1798 –1868 many people were unjustly transported to Australia.” It is modeled on the history that Australia became a penal colony and many people were transported from Ireland under very bad conditions. It shows a positive value that the tradition of making beer in Ireland was transported to this place and a high quality beer was made. The structure of “hardship and its reward” is the same kind often seen in other beer advertisements.

3.2 *Results of analysis of vodkas*

《11. “ABSOLUT POTESKIN” — ABSOLUT VODKA》

It is a parody of a famous film, “Battleship Potemkin” by Eisenstein. It appears that this has the effect of giving association of “a nature of Russia” which is the home of vodkas. In addition, the shape made by a crowd of people running away is that of a bottle, which is a metaphor of a vodka. The whole screen is a monotone like a black and white film. Holding the color like this is often seen in other alcohol advertisements.

《12. “ABSOLUT FETISH” — ABSOLUT VODKA》

Part of the bottle of ABSOLUT has come to the surface in light and shade. This part of what has come to the surface has become metonymy of the whole bottle. It takes a moderate expression method by pushing forward only the characteristics of the bottle of this product and holding other points.

《13. “SURGEONS” — SMIRNOFF RED》

While a surgeon and others are in the middle of an operation, only a person behind the glass has a knife and a fork. Apparently it tells you that a different world (a comfortable world) can be seen through the alcohol bottle. The surgical operation, which is a hard work, and a meal, which is a pleasure, are both shown. The two appears in contrast, but it has a similarity that metal tools such as a knife are used and white cloths are used. It has an estrangement effect by a combination of things different in kind. The modality is visionary.

《14. “PLANE” — SMIRNOV VODKA》

A vodka bottle and a glass form a shape of an airplane, which has become a metaphor. The track of the airplane drawn gives an impression. It may suggest an intoxication of a feeling of floating in the air. The vodka in the bottle has become a metaphor of gasoline. The color used is transparent pale yellowish green and gives association of the color of a cocktail.

Here the material for the advertisement is an airplane. Other advertisements in the same campaign as this advertisement have also taken the materials from engineering, mathematics, physics and astronomy. It has a connotation of science and technology. It appears that it suggests cool intelligence and the intelligent elite.

《15. “RED SQUARE” — STOLICHNAYA VODKA》

The stage is a “Russian” place, the Red Square (a Russian building is photographed in the middle), which suggests the product being Russian and the home of vodka. The down jacket and dim light like the midnight sun both lead to an image of “extreme north”.

The color used is close of a monotone, and it appears that exposure contributes to the above connotation. In addition, a man having a bottle of vodka is in the middle of an open space. The slogan, “THE TRUTH”, is written in white on the red base at the left end (the color used resembles the color of the bottle of Stolichnaya). It appears that a message that it is for orthodox people can be read from the “Truth” written in the space.

3.3. *Results of analysis of wine advertisements*

《16. “SEAFOOD GRAPES” — CABOMAR WHITE WINE》

It looks like a bunch of grapes, but in fact it is a trompe l’oeil of shells in clusters. It can be said to be a good example of estrangement expression giving an effect of unexpectedness. Shells are a metonymy of seafood. In addition, because grapes are materials of wine, they are also a metonymy of wine. The both being united as one thing shows that the level of affinity is high. This indicates that drinking it when having seafood is appropriate. The color of the shells is close to that of the white wine. They are harmonious.

As regards the product, only a bottle is placed at bottom right unconcernedly, and there is a large blank space. It is very clear that what is advertised is restricted. It can also be said that it is an elegant technique in the sense that foods are shown in an indirect means without showing directly.

《17. “PIG” — GRAN CORONAS CABERNET SAUVIGNON》

The vines of grapes form the shape of a pig, and a trompe l’oeil is also used for this advertisement. The vines of the grapes are a metonymy of wine. The shape of the pig is a metonymy of pork. It shows a message that it is a wine matching pork dishes. There are works where it can be seen as a cow or a fish in similar examples in the same campaign. This resembles the above “SEAFOOD GRAPES” in the sense that wine is shown in a small size at bottom right.

《18. “FISH” — WINES》

A cork stopper of a wine is stuck in the mouth of a fish. In other words, it is a picture where a fish is placed instead of a wine bottle. This also shows that this wine is going well with fish like the examples of “SEAFOOD GRAPES” and “PIG”. The product itself can be differentiated only by the trademark of the cork stopper and the letters which show the product name at bottom right. This is an another example of highly restricted expression.

3.4. *Results of analysis of tequila advertisements*

《19. “FAMILY TREE” — TEQUILA》

A family tree is shown like a tree (this is a clear metaphor). The mother’s side has good looks, but

the father's side has odd looks. The person (You) is a figure having inherited bad genes from the father's side. A catch copy, "LIFE IS HARSH.", is shown like a comment on this misfortune, and it says, "Your tequila shouldn't be." below that in italics². A bottle of tequila is placed at bottom right, which visually suggests the relationship of "Harshness in life → alcohol for comfort or healing". This relationship is often commonly seen in alcohol advertisements.

《20. "FORTUNE COOKIE" — TEQUILA》

This is a funny photo showing that a person who had Chinese dishes saw "That wasn't chicken.", when the person opened a fortune cookie. This is a black humor on the assumption that materials for Chinese dishes are strange. Presentation of the catch phrase, "LIFE IS HARSH." and tequila is the same as the work in the above. This advertisement also shows the relationship of "Harshness in life → alcohol for comfort or healing". In view that bizarre food is suggested coolly, it appears that affinity of dishes and alcohol is not considered in particular in the case of this advertisement. It is considered that this suggests a way of thinking that alcoholic beverages can rather be comfort independently from dishes.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, firstly we would like to consider characteristics commonly seen in each advertisement expression.

a) Estrangement

As regards characteristics commonly seen in the winning works, many advertisements had expression which takes people by surprise, unlike ordinary and familiar advertisements. There are many cases where things of different natures which usually cannot be connected are made related to each other. Such combination of things of different natures is a typical means of estrangement.

As a result, many of the advertisement expressions are enigmatic, and their interpretation requires drawing an inference. It is different from an advertisement that gives sensuous vague impression in the sense that this requires intellectual understanding. In some cases there is nothing like an advertisement at first glance, but interpreters will think an advertisement is made on the assumption that a product is being advertised. Because of that, looking at an advertisement is to solve a puzzle. It will give intellectual satisfaction, when it can be interpreted. In addition, it requires interpretation of quite a deep significance as a result. It is therefore remembered better than an advertisement that is only presented sensuously.

Unrealistic modality is also used as an estrangement expression. Expression in SF and comics that cannot be seen in Japanese advertisements is also used in some cases.

b) Differentiation

The next characteristic is that many use expression focused on the differential from other products³. The focus and the points advertised are restricted. The very slight difference in characteristics that can be called a differential from similar products is emphasized, and efforts have been made not to put too many elements casually.

Visually, only characters that can be differentiated from those of other products are shown, and what

is common in the product genre in general is omitted. For example, a specific product is advertised by the “FISH” advertisement rather than wines in general. There are some works that took a form in the use of the colors in that only the product has a bright color on the black and white base. For example, they are “FRANK”, “ABSOLUT FETISH” and “URINAL”. So doing makes the products attract attention visually.

c) Metaphor and metonymy

Use of metaphor and metonymy is one of the common characteristics. For example, many use such metonymy technique as suggesting a product by showing raw materials. In addition, a close relationship such as “matching dishes” is used, but this is a kind of metonymy. It makes it more interesting to use a metaphor technique by making it look like an unexpected thing with the use of a similarity such as “PLANE” advertisement.

Furthermore, they have the effect of escaping from the impression, “It is really an advertisement.” without showing the whole product directly by using an indirect communication strategy, a metaphor. It must be effective for consumers to get away from antipathy towards advertisements, or boredom (saturation of significance) towards advertisements that have been presented repetitively. For example, in “GUINNESS-CLEAVAGE” or “RUGBY STOCKING” advertisement, no image of a beer is seen at all, and a product is shown only indirectly.

However, such an indirect communication strategy is effective because the product has already been famous due to repeated expression of the product. For example, in the case of GUINNESS, the widely known distinguishing color of the product is used for the purpose.

Attracting attention by using a sexual image is a well-worn device in advertising, and consumers have had enough. But representing it by slightly changing the significance with the use of an indirect means appears to have the effect of preventing antipathy.

d) Humor

Estrangement or metaphors in the above tend to be inevitably connected with a laugh. Humor is also one of the common characteristics. However, if you look at the kinds of humors, jokes that cannot be seen in Japanese advertisements are used. Examples include “BUILDERS BUM” and “HER DAD”. In some cases, black humor is used.

e) Binary opposition of significance

“Hardship, labor, failure and misfortune” are opposites of “pleasure and comfort” in the meaning in respect of the structure of significance often seen in alcohol advertisements. With these two values opposing, one of which is a positive and the other of which is a negative, a modulating message easy to understand is composed. A method of showing a negative state such as hardship is often used to make conspicuous a positive value of a product.

Next, we would like to consider the difference in categories of alcoholic beverages.

It is said that there are two kinds of alcohol. One of them is alcohol that warms us and the other is alcohol that cools us. If you compare advertisements, opposition in significance can be seen between alcohol that warms us behind the coldness and alcohol that cools us behind the heat wave. Vodka advertisements are the former and beer advertisements are the latter.

The advertisements for wines tend to stress good matching with dishes. Compatibility is a virtue of

contiguity if a terminology of the semiotics is used, and has a high affinity with metonymy. In addition, the advertisement of wine tend to use metonymy and metaphor to show the feeling of materials of dishes. As regards tequila, only two winning works were used for this analysis. Compared to other works, a black humor is used, and it is characteristic that they rather pursue a value as a beverage than affinity with dishes. Its value as a beverage seems to be “comfort”.

Lastly, I would like to mention about our problems that have to be solved in future. It is necessary to consider how we should do to win awards, as Japanese works have been submitted but have not received awards. Our problem that has to be solved in future is to clarify characteristics of Japanese advertisements by comparing the works analyzed for this paper and Japanese advertisements, and trying to find conditions existing in the world.

Furthermore, by experimentally measuring affective responses of each advertisement as in Sasaki and Asakawa (2000), it may also be an interesting subject to find the relationship between the measured responses and main semiotic characteristics found in this paper.

Notes

¹ In response to such a stream of study, Okano and Asakawa (2002) selected works of TV advertisements on alcoholic beverages in Japan from among the winning works of representative advertisement awards in Japan, and attempted semiotics analysis of them.

² The types of characters compose a contrast in line with the message content.

³ This can be said to be “differentiation strategy” if a marketing terminology is used.

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