

## Advertising campaigns as voices in discourse

### Introduction

While discourse linguistics in the tradition of Foucault with a focus on constitution of reality and knowledge through “transtextual language patterns” (Spitzmüller/Warnke 2011) has been established in discourse since the 2000s, (contrastive) discourse linguistic studies on advertising “that put individual advertising texts into a larger transtextual [...] thematic context” (Janich 2019b, p. 74) are few and far between. Overall, this area of discourse linguistics, despite advertising's omnipresence and potential to steer cultural developments (see Janich 2019b, p. 74), has only been marginally outlined. In this respect, advertising certainly shows political partisanship and has the potential to trigger societal discourse beyond the individual advertising campaign. This article explores the question of how advertising communication in traditional and digital media discursively follows macro-socially relevant discourse by means of intertextual references and further, how it enriches, influences and moulds these discourses. Using the example of Aldi Süd's out-of-home and digital campaign *ALDInativlos*, which ran in parallel to the 2017 parliamentary elections, this article focuses on the intertextual interlocking of the knowledge domains politics and economics in order to highlight the relevance of the campaign as a voice in discourse.

### Advertising texts as units of discourse linguistic analyses

Discourse linguistic investigations operate on the premise that societal, group-specific as well as individual knowledge and realities in discourse is constituted with the help of linguistic devices (lexemes, multi-word-units, metaphors, sentences, topoi, text types or even multimodal in text-image combinations) as a function of actors and institutions, i. e. that it is “constructed, legitimised and distributed” (Roth/Wengler/Ziem 2017, p. IX; Felder 2018). Analyses of advertising discourse in this context can, broadly speaking, be categorised as more descriptive (Gredel 2014; Datinská 2017; Schröter 2017) or more discourse-critical (Bendel Larcher 2012; Janich 2013b, 2019b). Descriptive works show how advertising “as a societal sub-discourse is thematically [affiliated] with current – macro-socially relevant – topics” (Gredel 2014, p. 227) by, e. g., verbally, visually or multimodally using discursively established metaphors, developing them and instrumentalising their metaphorical potential for advertising purposes (ibid.). In research on advertising discourse, authors advocate not only assuming a descriptive perspective on advertising but instead perceiving the research as a part of critical science and reflecting on advertising content accordingly. Reissigl (2019), for example, highlights that advertising in the automotive sector creates an image of driving that can no longer be reconciled with the realities of mobility and the environmental situation. He thus associates automotive advertising with the overall discourse on climate change and climate crisis, and takes an according stand. Janich (2013b, pp. 49–69) also investigates advertising from the perspective of critical discourse linguistics, namely as a player in macrosocial discourse (climate change and sustainability) with a high degree of responsibility: on the one hand in regard to the “sustainable development of their products” and, on the other hand, in terms of their “cultural steering effect” (ibid., p. 49).

## Intertextuality – Discursivity

Intertextual references are understood as “*the* most obvious characteristic of the discursive state of language” (Spitzmüller/Warnke 2011, p. 189). If, in research practice, we consider discourse as temporally and medially limited, as well as thematically bound, series of texts, then the special feature of this text series or corpus can be found precisely in the intertextual references that exist between these texts or text series (see Teubert 1998, p. 148). While intertextuality at the single-text level in advertising is used for product-related alienation as well as to draw attention by establishing a connection to the familiar (see Janich 2019a, p. 191), it additionally assumes a constitutive role in discourse in transtextual, discourse-linguistic analyses. The inclusion of reference signals and explicit labels in pheno-texts, in particular, indicates “which reference texts need to be included in the transtextual analysis in order to make them (re)interpretable or comprehensible” (Klug 2018, p. 115). Moreover, hash tags and hyperlinks are of particular importance in digital discourse as they must be regarded as “technically generated traces of intertextual reference”. Here, “the analysis of these traces [...] can help to reconstruct of the genesis of a discourse” (Poljanar/Scharloth/Škerlavaj in press). Goman/Gür-Şeker (2020, p. 143) mention a further important aspect in regard to intertextuality and posts in comment forums: reception of intertextuality can be extrapolated through posts.

Intertextual references can be divided into two global types according to their mode: typological and referential intertextuality. So far, discourse-linguistic analyses have mainly focused on typological intertextuality by relating individual texts to the superordinate pattern, i. e. a text type to a discourse type or line of argumentation etc. (Klug 2018, p. 111); referential intertextuality, by contrast, has mainly been ignored. On the one hand, text-text relations in discourse linguistics are relevant for the reconstruction of a discourse's genesis and, on the other hand, play a role when searching for the key text or key image of a discourse or discourse fragment (ibid., p. 115), which, due to its influence on other texts, assumes a central position as a reference text in the discourse (fragment). However, discourse should not only be regarded as a succession of texts but also as a “polyphonic parallel existence” (Spieß 2011, p. 113) of texts, which Burger (2001) refers to as “synchronous intertextuality”. Discourse mixing may occur here as one text can simultaneously be a part of various discourses.

### Case study: advertising campaign *ALDInativlos*

In August 2017 (23/8/2017–2/9/2017), the retail company Aldi Süd launched the campaign *ALDInativlos* in parallel to the 2017 parliamentary elections in which it promoted its range of “fresh” and “local” fruit and vegetables. In terms of research practice, the present analysis is based on a temporally and medially limited corpus containing various formats: seven advertising posters/ads featuring the fruit politicians, a leaflet introducing the five figures and their “election programme” in more detail, as well as a dedicated social wall on the campaign website *aldinativlos.de*. In addition, three YouTube videos were created for only fictitious male candidates, which will only be discussed selectively here. Finally, Aldi Süd also initiated a discussion within the facebook and Twitter community using the hashtag *#aldinativlos* and asked users to record interesting placements of posters, upload them and comment on them. There were around 30 entries on facebook and another 87 tweets on Twitter that used the hashtag *#aldinativlos*. For reasons of brevity, the meta-dis-

cursive, journalistic reporting will only be selectively mentioned and not analysed in greater detail.

The analysis of intertextual references in the description of advertising campaigns is based on the intratextual level, which plays an important role for the follow-up communication on Twitter, facebook as well as in journalistic coverage. In doing so, the intertextual references to linguistic patterns, messages and text types of other knowledge domains (here: politics) are focalised beyond both the single text and the text type interlinking in the context of the advertising campaign. In a next step, the meso-communication, as Domke (2014) calls the public text world, and the transtextual level, which exceeds the single text and the text type interlinking in the context of the campaign, is taken into consideration in order to illustrate the relevance of the campaign as a voice in discourse.

The interlocking of the *ALDInativlos* advertising campaign with the knowledge domain politics primarily took place by means of text-text pattern references (genre reference) as the series of advertising posters were staged as political ads by using relatively consistent core features of prototypical campaign posters. Following Janich, this can be referred to as a “pattern metamorphosis” (2013a, p. 235). This metamorphosis was combined with the terminology of an election campaign as well as creative puns to create a funny yet ironical effect. The tension between the domains politics and economics can be further identified in the contrasting use of key words such as *Einkaufs-LISTE*, *Frische-Programm* or *ALDInativlos*. The humorous contamination *ALDInativlos* also ties in with the virulent use of *alternativlos*, a political buzzword since 2009. This debate on the “Basta!” attitude among leading politicians can be considered the “replication background” (Warnke 2002) for the *ALDInativlos* advertising campaign, which also became a subject of discussion in social media: “Good campaign – especially for Aldi! Using satire to combat Merkel's politics! And even the @fdp – truly #aldinativlos.” (Nico @nico\_amiri. 17. Sep. 2017). Thus, the analysis of the campaign is also linked to the diachronic framework conditions. Furthermore, a reference to the AfD is also established. Users considered the campaign primarily critical of the AfD but also judged it to be inspired by the AfD. This highlights the risk for a company in so clearly affiliating with another knowledge domain (in particular when that domain is politics). While Aldi Süd consciously distanced itself from a potential appropriation by political parties, the campaign only worked as well as it did as, at the time of circulation, election posters were also visible in the public sphere and thus became more prominent in the public sphere. As a result, (unwanted or unanticipated) intertextual references were coined. In the respective media coverage, the advertising agency then confirmed that the posters were intentionally positioned as close as possible to the election posters and that even green spaces were utilised, an uncommon occurrence in advertising campaigns. An advertising poster is generally considered a stationary message with which “the public sphere is constituted as politically characterised” (Domke/Meier 2017, p. 241). This positioning of the public sphere can also be interpreted from a discourse-linguistic perspective as topics discussed in election campaign become newsworthy (Pappert 2017). To put it bluntly, Aldi Süd avails itself of the election campaign advertisements and benefits from the posters that constitute the current public sphere. The assignment of the #*ALDInativlos* contributed to the creation of an additional sphere, namely that of the social media platforms, in which users could publish positive or negative posts about the advertising campaign. The advertising effect is greatest if photos of the posters (image citations)

are also uploaded. Companies can exponentiate their advertising reach through facebook posts without having to place their own advertisements on the platforms. As a result, people who are not on-site can also see the posters and even discuss them online. A synergy effect; especially as the advertisements are judged to be positive here. Because, on the one hand, users not only make others aware of “funny advertising”, they also consider it to be a fitting campaign due to similarities with the party election posters for the upcoming general elections. Thus, all knowledge frameworks of political discourse are activated. Some users recognised a direct reaction to the current political events in the posters and understood them as a joke targeted at the AfD while emphasising their dislike of the party. The connection to expression of political opinion, where the selected hashtags *#noafd*, *#againstextremism* are normally used, also becomes apparent here. In commenting on the *ALDInativlos* campaign, users apply the hashtag *#wählengehen* and therefore connect a political message to their post. This was also an important aspect of the advertising campaign as Aldi Süd took advantage of the fact that the political mood was, on the one hand, quite volatile during the 2017 parliamentary elections and, on the other, many people were disenchanted with politics and there was a real fear of a low voter turnout.

## Conclusion

The example of the *#ALDInativlos* campaign highlights the value of analysing advertising as a multidimensional discourse. The election poster can be classified as a transtext, which constructs public discourse in political campaigns (Domke/Meier 2017) and is “borrowed” for advertising purposes here. The flyers, advertising videos and the use of social media as part of the advertising campaign, which were also modelled on political discourse, illustrate intertextual links to well-known linguistic text type patterns as used in election campaigns. What stands out, however, is that the advertisements worked as well as they did because they were circulated during a turbulent parliamentary election campaign (AfD versus the established parties). While the company explicitly wanted to be seen as non-political, the discursive connections led recipients to interpret the advertisements from a political perspective and use them for their own political statements. Here, the predominantly descriptive analytical approach could be expanded by a critical stand point. Finally, due to their attractiveness, advertising posters become not only conditional possibilities for renewed text production in social media, but are also repeatedly used as anchors in journalistic reporting where they are discursively negotiated.

By highlighting discursive connections on the basis of intertextual relationships, the relationship of individual advertising messages on thematically bound discourse on the one hand and the discursively or serially established text types of election advertising on the other hand can be demonstrated: On the one hand, the *ALDInativlos* campaign, including the follow-up communication, is connected to the 2017 parliamentary elections and the debate about Angela Merkel's political style and can be understood as a joking, mocking, ironic contribution to an otherwise serious topic that is relevant to society as a whole. On the other hand, the Aldi Süd campaign attracted so much attention due to its creative, playful design and placement in the public sphere that this led to the initiation of an independent discourse in digital and classic media (Twitter, facebook, company blog as well as in newspaper articles), in which the design, placement as well as the overall effect of the campaign were discussed and evaluated. Using the posts on social media platforms, however, the viewers of the advertising posters often also profess their political stance (*#noafd*

or #wählengehen), which illustrates the mixing of the advertising and political domains in a particularly impressive way.

It can be summarised that multimodal advertising campaigns have the potential to contribute to discourse diversification. Here, the momentum of the voice in discourse is recognised by the fact that users transfer the advertisements to current political events. They thus take the advertising campaign as an occasion to express themselves politically, from which a network of intertextual and intermodal references can be reconstructed.

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