

UDC 81.111: 801.81

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PHONOSTYLISTIC MEANS OF CAR BRAND IMAGE CREATION

Abstract

The current paper presents an overview of phonostylistic devices (alliteration, assonance, rhyme, onomatopoeia) most commonly used in slogans and taglines of the modern car industry. The advertising slogan, being limited by space and time, is viewed as an important part of any marketing campaign. In a similar manner to previous studies, this paper confirms that a slogan is an effective type of storytelling for brands. However, it differs from the tagline, which is supposed to be long lasting. In an endeavour to convey some characteristics or information about the product and make it memorable for the consumer, brand designers resort to various linguistic devices that make the advertising language effective. The analysis of commercial advertising slogans and taglines demonstrated that such phonological devices as assonance and rhyme are infrequent, while alliteration is the most productive sound technique. As for onomatopoeia, it appeared to be the rarest device in the analysed bulk of slogans and taglines. The obtained results show the capacity of these sound techniques to enhance brand image. Numerous examples provided in the paper are tailored to support this statement. Moreover, the paper addresses the issue of sound symbolism, since the interest in its manifestation in marketing is on the rise. Thus, from a phonosemantic vantage point, the most productive phonemes are sibilants, plosives and sonorants. Their recurrent character contributes to the creation of a brand image. The overall results may have significant implications for marketing teams that seek to create ear-catching and memorable slogans and taglines as well as shed light on the consumer's psychology.

Keywords: brand, slogan, tagline, alliteration, assonance, rhyme, onomatopoeia, sound symbolism.

Анотація

У статті представлено результати практичної розвідки дослідження фоностилістичних засобів (алітерації, асонансу, рими, звуконаслідування) у складі рекламних слоганів та гасел, що репрезентують автомобільну індустрію. Обґрунтовано ідею про те, що рекламний слоган, обмежений простором і часом, розглядається як важлива частина будь-якої маркетингової кампанії. Подібно до попередніх досліджень, у науковій розвідці підтверджено, що слоган є ефективним типом розповіді про бренд, зокрема, встановлено відмінність між слоганом та гаслом. Із метою передачі певної інформації про продукт розробники брендів використовують низку мовних засобів, які роблять мову реклами ефективною. Метою статті є виокремлення та опис найуживаніших у сучасних слоганах автомобільної індустрії фонетичних засобів стилістики. Аналіз комерційних рекламних слоганів і гасел показав, що такі фоностилістичні засоби, як асонанс і рима, трапляються досить часто, тоді як алітерація є найпродуктивнішим звуковим прийомом. Результати цього дослідження демонструють потенціал таких звукових прийомів задля покращення іміджу та цінності бренду. Крім того, у статті розглянуто проблему звукової символіки, оскільки зацікавлення до її вияву у сфері маркетингу помітно зростає. Таким чином, із фоносемантичного погляду, найпродуктивнішими фонемами є шиплячі, вибухові та сонорні. Їх повторюваний характер сприяє створенню іміджу бренду. Численні приклади, наведені в статті, слугують підтвердженням отриманих висновків.

Ключові слова: бренд, слоган, гасло, алітерація, асонанс, рима, ономатопея, звуковий символізм.

1. Introduction

In an overcrowded marketplace, numerous producers seek for the creation of such advertisements that are targeted at the emotions of the audience. As the advertising message is usually limited by space and time, it is of vital importance for brand designers to use effective language to attract the consumer and get a positive response from them.

Theoretically, much scientific research has been done on branding in general. One of the first scholars who made headway on this issue was Leech (1972) addressing a linguistic inquiry into advertising in Great Britain. Since then, a plethora of cross-cultural linguistic research has been focused on creating, changing and improving slogans and taglines to support branding images (Allagui & Breslow, 2016; Borys & Materynska, 2020; Do, 2018; Hamlin, 2014; Kladou et. al., 2016).

The study of stylistic aspects of English commercial advertising is on the rise: as branding slogans are open for interpretation, they become a subject for linguistic discussion. Both practitioners and scholars go deep into understanding and explaining how to create and use successful advertising slogans. Therefore, brand linguists are highly interested in those phonostylistic devices that are used to create a special effect on the consumer. Moreover, they bring sound symbolism to attention, dwelling on whether brand names can convey product-related information and whether consumers use the sounds to infer product attributes and benefits (Lerman et. al., 2017).

The parts of the article follow a logical sequential flow. The second section opens up by describing the nomenclature of branding slogans and the functions they perform, followed by the overview of phonostylistic devices commonly used in advertising. Then the aim and the objectives of the present article are given. The next section covers the data collection methods and techniques used to analyse and interpret the material, followed by research results and discussion. The section closes up with overall conclusions as well as information on potential spheres of investigation.

2. Literature review

2.1 Branding slogan: Nomenclature and functions

Advertising has always been an essential type of communication especially since the arrival of mass media (Mas-Manchyn, 2020). The pivotal role of advertising in today's highly competitive market place and informational society is crucial since to reach target audiences companies have to make their advertising message stand out from others highlighting the best qualities of the brand. Scorupa and Dubovičienė state that the purpose of any advertising campaign is to "make the target audience remember the transmitted message, which will eventually change the consumer's buying habits due to the impact the advertisement has on their thinking, feelings and behavior" (2015, p. 109). Consequently, apart from the high-quality product, brand designers have to create advertising that uses a wide range of attention-catching linguistic and extralinguistic devices.

Before delving deeper into an inventory of linguistic devices, it is worth defining such key advertising terminology or core concepts as "brand", "brand image", "slogan" and "tagline".

As suggested by Lerman et. al. (2017), a **brand** is a product or service that is distinguished by and marketed on the basis of a distinctive and enduring personality. **Brand image** is defined as a "mental picture of a brand in a consumer's mind, made up of numerous brand associations and memories" that come from different sources (Do, 2018, p. 11). Any brand has a slogan. The analysis of the existing definitions of **slogans** from a linguistic perspective suggests that there is no uniform definition of a slogan. For instance, in Leech's view (1972), the slogan is a short phrase used by the company in its advertisements to reinforce the identity of the brand. Rein states that the advertising slogan is a "unique catchy phrase identified with a company or brand" (1982, p. 49). Hamlin (2014) affirms that the advertising slogans are catchy, declarative phrases that use devices such as metaphors, alliteration or rhyme with simple, vibrant language.

Interestingly enough, the overview of topic-related publications reveals the interchangeable use of the terms "slogan" and "tagline".

According to Do, a **tagline** is "a slogan, clarifier, mantra, company statement, or guiding principle that describes, synopsisizes, or helps create an interest" (2018, p. 11). Generally, it includes a few words, repeatedly arranged in promotional media (Allagui & Breslow, 2016) aimed at reinforcing unique qualities of the advertised brand in the minds of the public (Slade-Brooking, 2016). On the face of

it, these terms seem to be quite similar. However, as put by Do (2018), the only difference between a slogan and a tagline is that a tagline is part of a company signature that constantly represents it and undergoes some changes only with a total redefining of the company. Conversely, slogans are made up for a peculiar product or campaign, therefore designed to be less permanent than taglines.

Studying linguistic aspects of advertising slogans and taglines, more than half a century ago, Leech (1972) claimed that effective advertising must meet a number of criteria, e.g., attention value, listening ability/readability, memorability and marketing power. Since then numerous works on the creation of effective slogans and taglines (Allagui & Breslow, 2016; Kohli et al., 2007) allow singling out some additional criteria: 1) conciseness accompanied with intensive emotion; 2) focus on the core commercial offer; 3) simple language that is easily memorized (Zembytska & Mazur, 2018, p. 40).

Conciseness is determined by the common formula of memorization 7 ± 2 , i.e. the length of the slogan should be from five to nine words and this volume is the most successful in terms of conciseness and memorization because it meets the capabilities of human random access memory, i.e. the ability to hold the appropriate amount of information.

From the functional vantage point, slogans and taglines briefly assert the essence of the branding politics (Wheeler & Millman, 2017), its positioning on the market (Slade-Brooking, 2016), distinguishing the company from its competitors (Wheeler & Millman, 2017). They become focal points of exclusive elements of a product or promises the brand wishes to make to the consumer (Slade-Brooking, 2016). Additionally, both a slogan and a tagline can add values (Kladou et al., 2016), take the product to some high ground (Sullivan, 2016) and build an emotional link with consumers (Ranasinghe et al., 2017; Stashko, 2020).

Since advertising as the means of communication and slogans or taglines, in particular, are usually very restricted by both space (in print advertising), and time (on TV and radio) it seems reasonable to assume that the use of various phonostylistic devices in slogans and taglines can be helpful in creating the brand image.

2.2 Phonostylistic means

As suggested in Merriam Webster's Dictionary, **alliteration** (also called head rhyme, initial rhyme) is the repetition of usually initial consonant sounds in two or more neighbouring words or syllables (such as *wild and woolly*, *threatening throngs*). The repeated sounds are usually the first, or initial, sounds – as in "seven sisters" – but repetition of sounds in non-initial stressed, or accented, syllables is also common: "appear and report".

Alliteration occurs not in the abstract but in culture: in specific text-types in specific languages and at specific times (Roper, 2011, p. 2). Investigating alliteration as its central focus across a variety of languages and domains, Roper distinguishes different types or forms of it: perfect and imperfect alliteration, morphological alliteration and eye alliteration (as in *cat* and *ciao*, *sea* and *shell*, where we observe purely visual, non-audible recurrence), i.e. which uses letters not sounds. As for the imperfect alliteration, the single phoneme must alliterate with the cluster, which contains this phoneme, e.g. *simple street*. As Stashko claims, "alliterated lines contribute to a gratifying effect to the ear, building up a subliminal bridge to faster connotation decoding" (2017, p. 312) and tends to be essential in creating backgrounds (Stashko, 2018, p. 139).

Assonance, also called "a vocalic rhyme" (Scorupa & Dubovičienė, 2015, p.112), is a relatively close juxtaposition of similar sounds especially of vowels (as in "*rise high in the bright sky*") (Merriam Webster's Dictionary). Since it is less apparent to the eye than alliteration, it is much harder to identify it.

Onomatopoeia is the naming of a thing or action by a vocal imitation of the sound associated with it (such as *buzz*, *hiss*, etc.). In advertising, this sound technique makes the idea of the brand tagline more interesting, expressive and effects the consumer's senses (Scorupa & Dubovičienė, 2015, p. 113).

Consonance is the recurrence or repetition of consonants especially at the end of stressed syllables without the similar correspondence of vowels (as in the final sounds of "stroke" and "luck") (Merriam Webster's Dictionary).

In traditional linguistic theory, **rhyme** is defined as correspondence in terminal sounds of units of composition or utterance (such as two or more words or lines of verse) (Merriam Webster's Dictionary; Zabuzhanska, 2017). As put by Leech (1972), it makes the slogans and headlines appear striking and easier to memorize. Later, it was proved by Scorupa & Dubovičienė (2015) that rhyme is particularly vital in those slogans that reflect the brand name, i.e. the brand name should be part of the rhyme.

The aforementioned sound techniques serve a mnemonic purpose and provide slogans with a strong beating rhythm.

3. Aim and objectives

The focus of the study is directed to various sound techniques used in English slogans and taglines representing the worldwide car marketplace. Therefore, the ultimate **aim** of the present paper is to study the most commonly used phonostylistic devices and the way they contribute to the creation of a brand image.

The specific research objectives are:

- 1) to discuss the significance of advertising as a means of communication;
- 2) to study the terminology related to brand slogans and identify their functions;
- 3) to exemplify the most common phonostylistic devices used in English car slogans and taglines;
- 4) to account for the motivation for the choice of the recurrent phonemes and their contribution to the creation of a brand image.

4. Research methodology

Due to the scope of this study, the following methods were used:

1. The analysis of current publications on this issue was used to provide some theoretical background to the problem.
2. The descriptive method was used to define, explain and clarify the communicative functions of advertising and the meaning of the advertising slogan.
3. The phonological and phonosemantic analyses (including quantitative and qualitative content analyses) were used to identify the linguistic characteristics of slogans and taglines.

The material of the current research is the body of 355 slogans and taglines used in the car marketing industry. The slogans and taglines under investigation were randomly sampled from the Internet resources.

5. Research results and discussion

As for the slogans and taglines in the corpus, the data shows that the aforementioned sound techniques are found in 143 instances, which makes 40%.

This fact is not at all surprising since not all companies and brand designers take into account sound techniques. Alternatively, they may use other linguistic means to draw the customers' attention at morphological, syntactic and lexical levels. Although the analysis of such means was not among the research objectives, we found some vivid examples to name just a few, e.g. initial and full capitalization: "*Power, Beauty and Soul*" (Aston Martin); common use of the second person addressee "you", which approximates the product to the consumer (Zembytska & Mazur, 2018, p. 40): "*Are You Amg Ready*" (Mercedes-Benz Amg) or the possessive pronoun "your": "*Go Where Love Takes You*" (Subaru); the use of such pronouns and adverbs as "every", "everyone", "always" that emphasize the spirit of inclusiveness: "*Everyday*" (Toyota), "*Always there for you*" (Hyundai). One cannot but mention various stylistic devices used at the semasiological level as well. However, such considerations are for another day.

At the phonological level, 93 slogans and taglines (65%) contain perfect and imperfect alliteration.

The most vivid examples are: "Today. Tomorrow. Toyota" (Toyota), "When better automobiles are built, Buick will build them" (Buick), "Everyone dreams of an Audi" (Audi), "Chrysler. Inspiration comes standard" (Chrysler), "Technology you can enjoy" (Honda), "Relieves Gas Pains" (Volkswagen), "The new Jag generation" (Jaguar), "Superstar as standard" (Fiat-500), "Fuel for livin' loud" (Kicker), "Blue blooded Yamaha" (Yamaha-Enticer), "American by birth. Rebel by choice" (Harley-Davidson), "Life, liberty and the pursuit" (Cadillac), "Vehicles equipped for family fun" (Chrysler), "Better built. Better backed" (Mitsubishi), "Smart Slogan" (Renault), "Live life in your own lane" (Mercury), "Grace... Space... Pace..." (Jaguar), "Find your own road" (Saab), etc.

The analysis shows that there is a striking imbalance between the occurrence of alliteration and assonance. The latter is found in 29 slogans and taglines (20%). The examples are: "Mean but green" (Toyota-Prius), "Excellence for Everyone" (Chevrolet), "Anyone. Anytime. Anywhere" (Nissan), "Electric trucks. Ready to deliver" (Volvo), "Born to perform" (Jaguar), "Driving is believing" (Hyundai), "It's time to ride" (Harley-Davidson), etc.

There is a small, however significant number of slogans, which contain both alliteration and assonance: "Life is a Journey. Enjoy the ride" (Nissan), "It is a whole new Hundai" (Hyundai), "Don't Dream it. Drive it" (Jaguar), etc. The interplay of such sound techniques may seem to be particularly successful and effective. However, they make up only 8% of the investigated material.

Instances of rhyme are in a smaller number as well. The analysed bulk of slogans contains 9 examples, among them: "You can with a Nissan" (Nissan), "Eye it. Try it. Buy it" (Chevrolet), "People can tell... When you Autobell" (Autobell), "The Best Never Rest" (Ford Trucks), "See the USA in your Chevrolet" (Chevrolet), "Building a better way. To see the USA" (Chevrolet), etc.

Although rare, the only slogan with onomatopoeia is represented in the tagline for Mazda – "Zoom, Zoom, Zoom". The pronunciation of this slogan reminds the listener of the sound produced by the car engine when the accelerator is pressed. One potential reason for this is that it may be difficult to think of any other proper sounds connected with driving a car that reflect the sense. Thus, the commonly used sound techniques are presented below (Fig. 1).

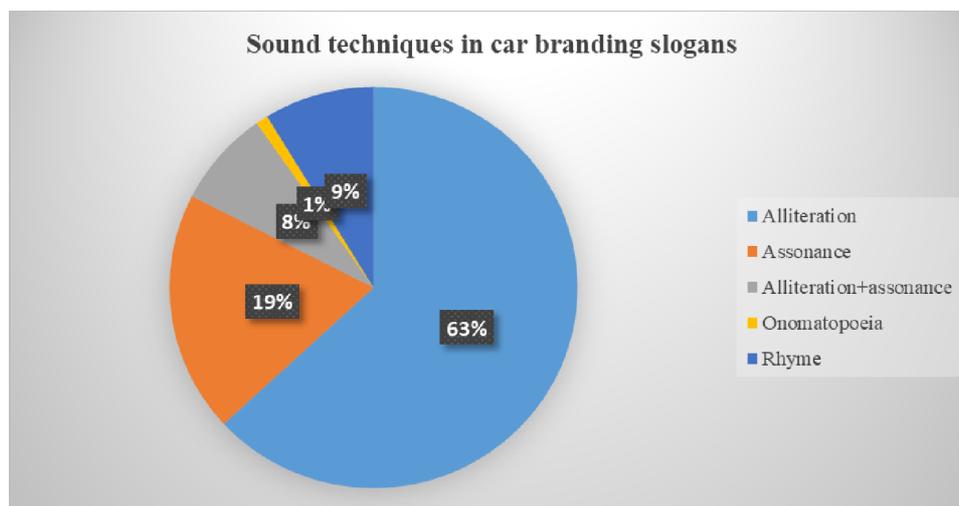


Fig. 1. Sound techniques in car branding slogans

These findings allow room for speculation. Analysing linguistic characteristics of commercial and social advertising slogans, in particular phonological ones, Scorupa and Dubovičienė (2015) came to the conclusion that rhyme is one of the best sound techniques in English advertising.

Therefore, the results obtained in this study contradict the aforementioned statement. Moreover, what comes as a surprise is a small number of slogans, which contain both alliteration and assonance. Given their persuasive power, the combination of these two phonostylistic figures seem to be more effective in creating the branding tagline.

Following Roper (2011, p. 15), we agree that the use of the aforementioned sound techniques can have a semantic cost, i.e. there is a motivation for the choice of the recurrent phonemes. Consequently, it is worth mentioning sound symbolism that refers to the non-arbitrary mappings existing between phonetic properties of speech sounds and their meaning (Knoeferle et. al., 2017).

According to the sound symbolism theory, vowels and consonants are directly involved in conveying meaning. Different classes of phonemes (plosives, sonorants, sibilants, etc.) are associated with different perceptual properties (Preziosi & Coane, 2017). These associations arise from some acoustic and/or articulatory features of the phonemes (Sidhu & Pexman, 2018, p. 1619). Recent research on sound symbolism shows considerable dependence on sounds and the meanings they can convey. An example of this may be derived from phonesthemes, i.e. phoneme clusters that tend to occur in words with similar meanings. As suggested by Liberman, "Sound symbolism is often the result of a secondary association. The words glow", "gleam", "glimmer", "glare", "glisten", "glitter", "glacier" and "glide" suggest that in English the combination *gl-* conveys the idea of sheen and smoothness. Against this background, "glory", "glee" and "glib" emanate brightness by their very form, glance and glimpse reinforce our conclusion (because eyesight is inseparable from light), and "glib" has no other choice than to denote specious luster, and, indeed, in the sixteenth century, when it became known in English, it meant 'smooth and slippery' " (2005, p. 34).

One of the most researched sound symbolic effects is that of size or magnitude symbolism (Preziosi & Coane, 2017), which became known as the *mil/mal* and *maluma/takete* (later *bauba/kiki*) effect (Sidhu & Pexman, 2018, p. 1620). Such sound symbolic associations illuminate the multimodal nature of human cognition.

The quantitative analysis of the sounds, which are recurrent in the studied slogans and taglines containing alliteration, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

The recurrence of consonants in slogans and taglines containing alliteration

Consonant	Example	Amount of cases
/s/	" <i>Grace... Space... Pace...</i> " (Jaguar)	26
/b/	" <i>Better <u>h</u>uilt. <u>B</u>etter <u>h</u>acked" (Mitsubishi)</i>	13
/l/	" <i>Live <u>l</u>ife in your own <u>l</u>ane" (Mercury)</i>	10
/f/	" <i>Vehicles equipped for <u>f</u>amily <u>f</u>un" (Chrysler)</i>	7
/d/	" <i><u>D</u>on't <u>D</u>ream it. <u>D</u>rive it" (Jaguar)</i>	6
/t/	" <i><u>T</u>oday. <u>T</u>omorrow. <u>T</u>oyota" (Toyota)</i>	5
/p/	" <i>The <u>p</u>erfect <u>p</u>ursuit of <u>p</u>erfection" (Kia)</i>	5
/dʒ/	" <i>Technology you can <u>e</u>njoy" (Honda)</i>	5
/ʒ/	" <i>Peugeot. Live the <u>p</u>leasure" (Peugeot)</i>	3
/z/	" <i>Closer to <u>R</u>oads" (Lamborghini)</i>	3
/m/	" <i>Move your <u>m</u>ind" (SAAB)</i>	3
/k/	" <i>The <u>c</u>ar that <u>c</u>ares" (Kia)</i>	2
/r/	" <i>Find your <u>o</u>wn <u>r</u>oad" (Saab)</i>	2

Considering the /p/-/b/ alliterating pair it is interesting to observe how these sounds contribute to the creation of the tagline as they are interpreted as "hard" and "abrupt" (Crystal, 2009) and according to some findings, plosives are associated with power (Knoeferle et. al., 2017): "*American by birth. Rebel by choice" (Harley-Davidson), "*Better huilt. Better hacked" (Mitsubishi), etc. Even**

a glance at the inventory of the vehicles that are produced by Harley-Davidson company is enough to prove its massiveness, power, masculinity, ruthlessness, etc. In a similar vein, the design of Mitsubishi cars evokes feelings of strength, force, mercilessness, etc.

Particular attention should be paid to sonorants /m/, /n/, /l/, which are considered "soft", "nice" (Crystal, 2009), and "gliding" (Sedley, 2013). Therefore, such slogans as "*Life, Liberty and the Pursuit*" (*Cadillac*) reinforced by the name of the brand Cadillac, "*Travel Well*" (*Lincoln*), "*Fuel for the Soul*" (*Pontiac*), "*If only everything in life was as reliable as a Volkswagen*" (*Volkswagen*) contain an /l/-alliterant and may bring the association of a smooth road, free from projections or unevenness of the surface.

Furthermore, some studies show that sibilants /s/, /z/ may express power, feelings and liveliness (Sedley, 2013). The use of /s-z/ alliterants is typical of such brands as Renault ("*Smart Slogan*", "*Size Matters*"), Hertz ("*Hertz puts you in the driver's seat*"), Hennessey ("*Hennessey makes cars go faster*"), Chrysler ("*Chrysler. Inspiration Comes Standard*"), etc. Interestingly enough, these sibilants may remind of a sound produced by the car engine when the accelerator is pressed. This fact may account for the highest amount of identified cases with alliteration.

In terms of assonance, the most commonly used phonemes are /e/, /i:/ and /ɪ/. Such phonemes as /o/ and /ɒ/ are less frequently used as constituents of assonance. Size contrast is well demonstrated with the help of these bright examples containing /i:/ and /ɪ/, which are observed in the slogans of small family cars (as rated by U.S. News & World Report, 2021). Consider the following examples: MINI ("*It's a MINI*"), Nissan ("*Shift*"), Volkswagen ("*Think Small*"), Hyundai ("*Driving is believing*"), Subaru ("*Driven by what's inside*"), Toyota ("*Mean but green*"), etc.

6. Conclusions and further research

The research of advertising language in modern linguistics encompasses anthropocentric and discourse paradigms. Linguostylistic approach is considered dominant when analysing the structure, semantics and pragmatics of advertising slogans and taglines.

Creating the brand name and its slogan, companies endeavour to convey some characteristics or information about the product and make it memorable for the consumer. The automobile industry has a plethora of slogans due to a great number of vehicles produced annually. The analysis of car branding slogans and taglines came up with a series of findings. Marketing research has always displayed interest in the use of sound symbolism as its study reveals hidden dimensions of richness and meaning in language. Firstly, at the phonological level, alliteration is shown to be a favourite phonostylistic device. The most often used sound techniques in car advertising slogans are assonance and rhyme, while onomatopoeia is the rarest sound technique ever found in car industry advertisements. As for manifestations of repetition on the phonological level, alliteration, assonance and rhyme serve a mnemonic purpose, lending dynamism to the discourse and heightening the overall tone. Such phonostylistic devices are not mere ornamental stylistic figures. Additionally, brand slogans and taglines can be considered an implied example of sound symbolic properties of phonemes. Thus, from a phonosemantic vantage point, the most productive are sibilants, plosives and sonorants. Their recurrent character contributes to the creation of a brand image.

These results may have significant implications for marketing teams that seek to create ear-catching and memorable slogans and taglines. Specifically, for customers, the knowledge of such sound techniques and the way they influence the perception of the brand may be helpful for a more relevant and informed purchase decision. The future areas for investigation are plentiful. In terms of potential applications, the present findings also have implications for the field of consumer psychology. Moreover, research can be taken onto a higher scale, encompassing a complex study of syntactic, lexical and semantic characteristics of car slogans.

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Дата надходження до редакції 11.12.2021
Ухвалено до друку 21.12.2021

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