

EXPLORING SEVEN TYPES OF MEANING IN GLOBAL BRAND ADVERTISING SLOGANS

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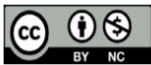
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Abstract

Advertising slogans play a crucial role in shaping global brand identity and consumer perception through concise yet impactful language. Although semantic studies have explored certain types of meaning in slogans, few have applied Geoffrey Leech's complete framework across diverse global brands. This study aims to examine how Leech's seven types of meaning are embedded in 20 advertising slogans from multinational brands and to interpret how these meanings contribute to persuasive communication across cultures. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, the study used documentation and coding analysis to categorize slogans into conceptual, connotative, affective, social, reflected, collocative, and thematic meanings. Results indicate that conceptual meaning is dominant across all slogans, followed by frequent use of collocative, social, and thematic meanings. Affective and connotative meanings appear moderately, while reflected meaning is rare. These findings suggest a strategic emphasis on clarity, familiarity, and identity over ambiguity or deep symbolism in global advertising. The study reveals that successful slogans rely on layered semantic strategies, balancing universality and emotional resonance. This research reinforces the relevance of Leech's framework in modern advertising and contributes fresh insight into the linguistics of brand messaging.



Keyword: *advertising slogans; semantic analysis; global brands; Leech's seven meanings; brand identity*

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INTRODUCTION

In the current era of global commerce and digital media, advertising has evolved from a product-centered function into a strategic tool for shaping brand identity, building emotional connections, and constructing cultural narratives (Yustisia et al., 2023). Among the diverse elements of advertising, slogans stand out as one of the most influential and enduring components. They serve as concise verbal signatures that encapsulate a brand's vision, values, and promises in a few memorable words (Steenkamp, 2020). With just a short phrase, slogans are expected to attract attention, deliver meaning, and resonate

with audiences across different cultural and linguistic boundaries (Miller & Toman, 2016).

Global brands such as Nike, Coca-Cola, and Apple demonstrate the power of slogans to transcend language barriers and create instant associations with product quality, lifestyle ideals, or emotional experiences (Sichkar et al., 2023). The effectiveness of these slogans lies not only in their creativity but also in their strategic linguistic construction (Ezzeddine, 2023). As Pezzuti et al. (2021) argue, the certainty and emotional appeal embedded in language significantly influence consumer engagement, particularly in global digital advertising environments. This makes advertising slogans a rich object of study within linguistic research, especially from a semantic perspective (Pezzuti, Leonhardt, & Warren, 2021).

Despite the centrality of slogans in global brand strategy, linguistic research often limits its exploration to either partial semantic categories or to local advertising contexts. For instance, Azizah (2021) emphasized affective meaning as the dominant feature in English advertisement slogans, while Kurman and Zuraida (2022) focused on affective and connotative elements in cosmetic slogans (Azizah, 2021; Kurman & Zuraida, 2022). These studies offer valuable insights but tend to be narrow in scope-either in terms of the semantic dimensions examined or the geographical-cultural setting of the data. Meanwhile, Sagheer et al. (2023) adopted Geoffrey Leech's (1974) full framework in the context of Pakistani advertisements and found conceptual and connotative meanings to be most frequent (Sagheer, Malik, & Rasool, 2023). However, this research still remained localized and did not explore slogans from truly global brands with international reach.

What remains underexplored is a comprehensive semantic analysis of advertising slogans from internationally recognized brands using all seven types of meaning as proposed by Leech-conceptual, connotative, social, affective, reflected, collocative, and thematic (Niswa et al., 2023). In particular, the way these different types of meaning work together to ensure clarity, appeal, and memorability across cultural boundaries has not been sufficiently addressed. The absence of such holistic studies creates a gap in understanding how global branding succeeds in harmonizing semantic complexity with cross-cultural communication strategies.

The need for a more comprehensive linguistic analysis of advertising slogans becomes increasingly urgent in today's globalized communication landscape (Aljarelah, 2024). Multinational companies invest heavily in crafting slogans that not only appeal to consumers emotionally but also convey universal clarity across diverse linguistic and cultural markets. However, without a deep understanding of how meaning is strategically layered within these slogans, much of the persuasive mechanism behind global branding remains superficially examined.

Geoffrey Leech's (1974) framework of seven types of meaning offers a robust semantic tool to decode the complexity of advertising language. Yet, as noted in prior studies, only a few scholars have adopted the full typology in a systematic way. Most research either isolates certain types-such as affective or connotative meaning (Azizah, 2021; Kurman & Zuraida, 2022)-or restricts the scope to national or regional slogans (Sagheer et al., 2023). As such, there remains a theoretical and practical gap in understanding how slogans from global brands operationalize multiple layers of meaning simultaneously (Allan, 2022). This study addresses that gap by applying Leech's complete semantic model to a carefully curated corpus of slogans from internationally prominent brands, thereby enriching both theoretical discourse and applied linguistic research.

A number of scholars have contributed to the semantic analysis of advertising slogans, each offering insights into how specific types of meaning influence consumer interpretation. Azizah (2021), for example, found that affective meaning was most dominant in her analysis of English advertisement slogans, underscoring the emotional dimension of brand language (Azizah, 2021). Similarly, Kurman and Zuraida (2022) analyzed cosmetic slogans and concluded that affective and connotative meanings were deliberately used to evoke identity, aspiration, and lifestyle alignment (Kurman & Zuraida, 2022). Their work highlights the power of emotional and symbolic associations in advertising discourse.

However, such studies often operate within limited frameworks, neglecting the fuller picture of how multiple meanings interact. Sagheer et al. (2023) took a more holistic approach by applying all seven of Leech's semantic types to Pakistani commercial slogans (Sagheer et al., 2023). Their findings revealed a dominance of conceptual and connotative meanings, which they interpreted as a strategy for clarity and memorability (Sagheer et al., 2023). While this study is notable for its methodological breadth, it remains confined to a specific national advertising context.

The current research distinguishes itself by applying Leech's full semantic typology to advertising slogans from global brands across various industries—including fashion, food and beverage, technology, automotive, and entertainment. This broader and more internationally relevant dataset allows for a richer understanding of how semantic strategies are used to build brand identity, cross-cultural appeal, and emotional resonance. By extending the scope of analysis, this study not only validates Leech's framework in a global context but also contributes new insights into the linguistic mechanics of effective international branding.

The objective of this study is to analyze the application and distribution of Leech's seven types of meaning in global advertising slogans and to interpret how these meanings contribute to brand identity and consumer engagement across cultures. By examining the presence and interplay of conceptual, connotative, affective, social, reflected, collocative, and thematic meanings, this study seeks to uncover the linguistic strategies that global brands employ to achieve clarity, resonance, and persuasive impact in diverse international markets. This objective also aims to validate the relevance of Leech's semantic framework in the context of real-world advertising and extend its applicability across various industries and cultural settings.

This research offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it enhances the body of semantic scholarship by systematically applying Leech's full framework to a global dataset of brand slogans, thus filling a critical gap left by previous studies that were either partial in scope or limited to local contexts. It also demonstrates how each type of meaning functions not in isolation but as part of a layered linguistic strategy that shapes consumer perception.

Practically, the study provides valuable insight for brand strategists, marketers, and copywriters by illustrating how semantic choices influence message effectiveness and audience connection on a global scale. Understanding the distribution and function of semantic meaning in slogans can assist professionals in crafting more impactful, culturally resonant, and linguistically efficient brand messages. Moreover, for educators and students in linguistics, media studies, or marketing communication, this research serves as a model for integrating theoretical linguistics with applied branding discourse in real-world contexts.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the meanings embedded in global advertising slogans using Geoffrey Leech's (1974) semantic theory (Leech, 1974). The qualitative design was selected because the study emphasizes interpretation, classification, and meaning construction within natural language data, rather than relying on quantifiable variables (Lim, 2025). The descriptive orientation allows for a systematic exploration of how different types of meaning—both literal and implied—are conveyed through slogan language across various industries.

The primary instrument of this study was a semantic coding sheet derived from Leech's (1974) taxonomy of seven types of meaning: conceptual, connotative, social, affective, reflected, collocative, and thematic (Leech, 1974). This coding sheet served as a structured guide to identify the presence and function of each semantic category within the data. Additionally, a documentation checklist was used to ensure the slogans were sourced and recorded systematically from official and credible brand materials.

The dataset consisted of 20 advertising slogans collected through purposive sampling from globally recognized brands across five major industries: (1) fashion and personal care (e.g., Nike, L'Oréal, Adidas), (2) food and beverage (e.g., McDonald's, Coca-Cola, Red Bull), (3) technology and electronics (e.g., Apple, Samsung), (4) automotive (e.g., Toyota, BMW), and (5) entertainment and services (e.g., Disney, Lego, MasterCard). A slogan was included if it met at least one of the following criteria: (a) it was actively used in global advertising campaigns between 2023 and 2024, or (b) it had been widely recognized as an iconic slogan between 2010 and 2023, and (c) it was verifiably used by the brand in official communication such as websites, televised ads, or press materials.

Each slogan was documented and then subjected to close, repeated readings. The semantic coding process followed a two-phase procedure: First, the researcher independently analyzed each slogan to determine which types of meaning were present. Second, a peer coder with a background in linguistics reviewed the data independently. Any disagreements in classification were discussed and resolved through consensus to enhance interpretative validity.

After the slogans were coded, the frequency of each semantic type was calculated and tabulated. The findings were then analyzed narratively and interpretively to examine how each type of meaning contributed to the persuasive and communicative function of the slogan. The emphasis was placed not only on identifying the presence of meaning types but also on understanding their interaction, rhetorical effect, and potential cross-cultural relevance. The results were also compared with findings from previous studies (Azizah, 2021; Kurman & Zuraida, 2022; Sagheer et al., 2023) to highlight both similarities and new insights. No human participants were involved in this study, and all data were sourced from publicly available and ethically accessible materials (Cheong, Lyons, Houghton, & Majumdar, 2023). Therefore, this research adhered to standard ethical norms for secondary qualitative data analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study based on the analysis of 20 advertising slogans from globally recognized brands, interpreted through Geoffrey Leech's (1974) seven types of meaning. The results reveal that all seven semantic types—conceptual, collocative, social, thematic, affective, connotative, and reflected—were present across the dataset, albeit with varying degrees of frequency and function.

Among these, conceptual meaning emerged as the most dominant, identified in 100% of the slogans. This confirms the foundational role of conceptual clarity in advertising language, especially in global contexts where linguistic precision and cross-cultural intelligibility are essential. Collocative meaning followed closely, appearing in 65% of slogans, suggesting a strategic use of natural and familiar word combinations to enhance fluency, memorability, and aesthetic appeal.

Interestingly, social and thematic meanings were observed in 50% of the data, reflecting how slogans are crafted not only for message clarity but also for projecting values, identity, and brand voice. In contrast, affective and connotative meanings were moderately represented-35% and 25%, respectively-indicating a more selective approach to emotional and symbolic appeals. The least frequent was reflected meaning, appearing in only 10% of slogans, likely due to the high risk of misinterpretation or cultural ambiguity in international markets.

These findings suggest that global brand slogans are not randomly constructed but are instead the product of careful semantic layering-balancing clarity and emotional resonance with linguistic universality. In the following sections, each type of meaning will be examined in depth, supported by examples and comparative insights from previous studies. The total frequency of each semantic category identified across the dataset is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. *Frequency of Leech’s Seven Types of Meaning in Global Advertising Slogans*

| Type of Meaning | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------|-----------|------------|
| Conceptual | 20 | 100% |
| Collocative | 13 | 65% |
| Social | 10 | 50% |
| Thematic | 10 | 50% |
| Affective | 7 | 35% |
| Connotative | 5 | 25% |
| Reflected | 2 | 10% |

As shown in Table 1, conceptual meaning appeared in every slogan, confirming its foundational role in advertising semantics. The following subsections examine each type of meaning in more detail.

1. Conceptual Meaning

Conceptual meaning appeared in all 20 slogans (100%), establishing its status as the semantic foundation of global advertising discourse. As the literal, denotative core of meaning, conceptual meaning ensures that a message is understood in its most basic and direct form-making it indispensable in cross-cultural communication. According to Leech (1974), conceptual meaning organizes language around referential clarity, logicity, and cognitive accessibility, all of which are essential in high-stakes branding.

For example, Apple’s slogan “Think Different” directly signals the brand’s ethos of innovation and individualism without ambiguity. Similarly, BMW’s “The Ultimate Driving Machine” presents a concrete, unambiguous claim of performance and quality. These slogans exemplify how conceptual clarity allows brands to convey product identity and positioning in a manner that transcends linguistic barriers.

This finding aligns with Sagheer et al. (2023), who also identified conceptual meaning as the most frequent in Pakistani commercial slogans, emphasizing its role in ensuring message stability and recall. However, unlike Sagheer et al.’s

localized dataset, this study reveals that conceptual meaning remains dominant even in globally distributed slogans, suggesting that clarity is not merely a regional preference but a universal linguistic necessity in international advertising.

2. Collocative Meaning

Collocative meaning was identified in 13 out of 20 slogans (65%), marking it as the second most frequent semantic type in the dataset. This high frequency highlights how brands deliberately employ familiar word pairings to create slogans that are not only grammatically fluent but also psychologically resonant. Leech (1974) defines collocative meaning as the meaning a word acquires due to its habitual co-occurrence with certain lexical items, making slogans more “natural” and easier to remember.

For instance, the slogan “I’m Lovin’ It” (McDonald’s) combines the informal, emotionally charged phrase “lovin’ it” with the subject pronoun “I’m,” producing a colloquial expression that mimics everyday speech. Similarly, DeBeers’ slogan “A Diamond is Forever” leverages a strong collocative pairing between “diamond” and “forever,” reinforcing the cultural association between jewelry and eternal love. These combinations create semantic familiarity, which enhances both recall and emotional anchoring.

Unlike Azizah (2021) or Kurman & Zuraida (2022)-who focused more on affective and connotative aspects-this study emphasizes collocative meaning as an understudied yet powerful mechanism in slogan construction. The findings suggest that linguistic familiarity is a strategic asset, especially in global advertising, where slogans must be instantly digestible across cultures. Thus, the prominence of collocative meaning supports the idea that effective slogans are crafted not only for creativity but also for fluency and cognitive ease.

3. Social and Thematic Meaning

Social meaning and thematic meaning were both found in 10 out of 20 slogans (50%), indicating a significant yet balanced presence. Social meaning refers to the language choices that convey information about the speaker’s or brand’s social status, cultural alignment, or values (Leech, 1974). In advertising, this type of meaning is vital in constructing brand identity and signaling inclusion or aspiration to the target audience.

Slogans like “Because You’re Worth It” (L’Oréal) reflect empowerment and self-value, aligning with modern ideals of gender equality and consumer self-assertion. Similarly, “Live Más” (Taco Bell) incorporates Spanish not only to sound culturally flavorful, but also to associate the brand with a youthful, multicultural lifestyle. These slogans operate on more than just a literal level-they align the brand with specific social identities and value systems (McGowan et al., 2017).

Thematic meaning, on the other hand, deals with how the structure or emphasis within a slogan shapes interpretation. Leech (1974) notes that this type of meaning often comes from word order, prominence, or sentence form (Leech, 1974). Samsung’s “Do What You Can’t” is a clear example-grammatically subversive, it places emphasis on personal agency and rebellion against limitations. The placement of the negative “can’t” at the end makes the slogan rhetorically powerful and ideologically bold.

Together, social and thematic meanings enable brands to go beyond functional messaging, creating alignment with cultural narratives, consumer aspirations, and lifestyle philosophies. Their equal distribution in the dataset demonstrates that global brands do not merely sell products-they sell identity

and worldview through linguistically embedded social signals and structural emphasis.

4. Affective and Connotative Meaning

Affective meaning appeared in 7 out of 20 slogans (35%), while connotative meaning was found in 5 slogans (25%), indicating that emotional and symbolic appeals were present but used selectively. Affective meaning relates to the emotional tone conveyed by the slogan-whether it evokes joy, pride, nostalgia, or excitement. Red Bull's "Gives You Wings" is a prime example: it suggests elevation, energy, and freedom, not just in the physical sense, but metaphorically. Similarly, Coca-Cola's "Open Happiness" turns the act of drinking soda into an emotionally rich experience.

Despite the widely held belief that emotional appeals dominate modern advertising, this study finds affective meaning to be moderately present. This contrasts with Azizah (2021) and Kurman & Zuraida (2022), who reported that affective and connotative meanings were most frequent in their localized datasets (Azizah, 2021; Kurman & Zuraida, 2022). The lower frequency in our findings suggests that global brands may prioritize emotional universality over intensity, choosing to embed subtle emotional cues rather than overt sentimentalism to avoid cultural misfire.

Connotative meaning, which involves cultural, ideological, or symbolic associations, also appeared infrequently. While slogans like "Think Different" (Apple) carry strong connotative weight-associating the brand with rebellion, innovation, and individualism-most slogans in the dataset favored clarity and familiarity. This may reflect a strategic choice to minimize ambiguity in diverse markets, where symbolic language can be interpreted differently across cultures.

In essence, global brand slogans tend to temper emotional and symbolic expression in favor of accessibility and universality. The affective and connotative elements are present, but often act as supporting layers rather than dominant strategies-demonstrating a measured approach to emotional branding in international contexts.

5. Reflected Meaning

Reflected meaning, as defined by Leech (1974), arises when a linguistic expression evokes multiple senses or associations, often due to its interaction with emotionally charged or culturally sensitive domains-such as religion, sexuality, or social taboos. It operates not through what is said explicitly, but through what is unintentionally suggested by a word's association with another sense of the same linguistic form. In advertising, this type of meaning can be powerful, humorous, or ironic-but also risky.

In this study, reflected meaning was found in only 2 out of 20 slogans (10%), making it the least utilized semantic category. This rarity is notable but unsurprising. Global brands typically operate across multiple cultural, religious, and linguistic contexts, where ambiguity, double meanings, or unintended associations may lead to misunderstanding, offense, or reputational damage. As a result, most global slogans are crafted to minimize interpretive ambiguity and maintain tight message control.

For instance, while slogans such as "Make.Believe" (Sony) or "Do What You Can't" (Samsung) could be read playfully or subversively, they stop short of fully engaging reflected meaning. Instead, they remain grounded in conceptual or thematic structures. A true example of reflected meaning might involve a word that, while neutral in one culture, evokes unintended religious or sexual connotations in another-an outcome that global brands strive to avoid.

The deliberate omission of reflected meaning reflects a broader branding strategy: to prioritize semantic safety and universality over rhetorical complexity. In culturally homogenous or local campaigns, advertisers may dare to use double meanings, puns, or innuendo; however, in global advertising, clarity and consistency are paramount. Reflected meaning, by nature, complicates these goals.

From a linguistic standpoint, this finding reinforces the idea that not all types of meaning are equally functional in global contexts. While reflected meaning can enrich literary or creative texts, it is often seen as a liability in international marketing, where message control, cultural neutrality, and immediate comprehension are prioritized. The marginal role of this meaning type thus signals a strategic alignment between semantic economy and cross-cultural pragmatics in global branding.

When positioned alongside prior research, the findings of this study both validate and extend current scholarly understanding of semantic strategies in advertising. Similar to Sagheer et al. (2023), this research confirms that conceptual meaning is the most dominant type used in advertising slogans (Sagheer et al., 2023). However, while Sagheer et al.'s analysis was confined to Pakistani slogans in a local context, the present study broadens the scope to include diverse global brands, thereby demonstrating that the primacy of conceptual meaning is not a regional phenomenon, but rather a universal linguistic strategy for ensuring message clarity across cultures.

In contrast, Emodi (2011) emphasized the prevalence of affective and connotative meanings in advertising slogans-particularly within the domains of cosmetics and local Indonesian markets (Emodi, 2011). This aligns with the nature of emotionally-driven consumer products, which often depend on symbolic and sentimental language (Ahmed, Sharif, Ting, & Sharif, 2024). However, the current study, using a global dataset, found these two types to be moderately present at best (Kelly, Kaye, & Oviedo-Trespalacios, 2023). This suggests a strategic shift in international branding toward controlled emotional engagement-one that favors clarity and familiarity over symbolic depth or localized sentiment.

Most notably, this study brings to the forefront the importance of collocative meaning, a dimension rarely emphasized in previous literature. The high frequency of collocative meaning found here underscores the role of natural-sounding, idiomatic language in enhancing slogan fluency and memorability. This marks a critical departure from prior research and introduces new insight into the linguistic mechanics of effective global branding.

Taken collectively, the results of this study point to a deliberate semantic architecture underlying successful global slogans. Rather than relying solely on emotion or style, global brands tend to strategically layer multiple types of meaning to achieve three core objectives: clarity, resonance, and retention. Conceptual meaning secures message intelligibility; collocative meaning enhances fluency and familiarity; social and thematic meanings introduce identity and ideology; while affective and connotative meanings, though used sparingly, add emotional dimension when appropriate. Reflected meaning, meanwhile, is largely excluded to preserve message control across heterogeneous audiences.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study affirms the comprehensive utility of Leech's (1974) semantic framework in analyzing persuasive language beyond its original scope. It demonstrates that all seven types of meaning are functionally relevant in advertising discourse-yet not equally so. Their application is contingent on communicative intent, audience diversity, and brand positioning. Thus, the research not only validates Leech's taxonomy but also adapts it to the practical realities of global marketing communication.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the application of Geoffrey Leech's seven types of meaning in 20 global advertising slogans and revealed a distinctive semantic architecture underlying international brand communication. The findings show that conceptual meaning is universally dominant, ensuring clarity and accessibility across cultural contexts. Collocative meaning emerged as the second most frequent type, emphasizing the strategic use of familiar lexical pairings to enhance memorability and naturalness. Social and thematic meanings appeared in half of the data, reflecting the role of slogans in shaping identity, values, and brand voice. Meanwhile, affective and connotative meanings were applied selectively, suggesting a measured approach to emotional and symbolic appeals. Reflected meaning was the least employed, highlighting the necessity of semantic control to avoid ambiguity in cross-cultural markets.

The uniqueness of this research lies in its comprehensive application of Leech's full semantic framework to a global dataset, rather than to localized advertising contexts as in most prior studies. By doing so, it not only validates the relevance of Leech's typology in modern advertising but also introduces collocative meaning as a critical yet underexplored dimension of slogan effectiveness.

Practically, the study provides valuable insights for professionals in advertising, branding, and linguistics. It shows that crafting effective slogans requires more than creativity—it demands semantic precision, cultural sensitivity, and linguistic intuition. For linguists and discourse analysts, the study offers a replicable model for semantic inquiry within applied domains. For marketers and copywriters, it highlights which meaning types are safest, strongest, or most persuasive in global outreach.

In essence, this research reveals that language is not just a medium in advertising—it is the strategy itself. The success of global slogans lies in their ability to carry layered, audience-adapted meaning while maintaining semantic integrity across borders. Understanding and leveraging this layered semantic composition is vital for building brand narratives that not only inform but inspire, not only attract but endure.

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