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Angaben zur Veröffentlichung / Publication details:

Krebs, Heike. 2020. "Effectful advertising? Film trailers and their relevance for prospective audiences." In *Telecinematic Stylistics*, edited by Christian R. Hoffmann and Monika Kirner-Ludwig, 205–22. London: Bloomsbury.

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Effectful advertising?

Film trailers and their relevance for prospective audiences

Heike Krebs

1 Introduction

In April 2000, *The Guardian* reported the record number of 1.7 million downloads of the new trailer for the upcoming *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (*The Guardian* 2000). This number alone, combined with the actual box-office receipts (Mikos et al. 2007: 245), might support the notion that film trailers are among the most effective ways of advertising (Hediger 1999: 112). What all of them have in common is their multimodal composition, which includes audiovisual as well as textual elements. However, while the number of multimodal analyses of films is steadily growing, closer examinations of trailer-related filmic discourse are still rare and often constrain themselves to a film historical perspective or one of movie marketing (see, for example, Kernan 2004; Hediger 2001).

Using Richard Janney's claim that 'film making and film viewing can be understood as interrelated aspects of a complex form of public audiovisual discourse' (2012: 87), this chapter focuses on trailers as multimodal texts situated within this type of discourse. Since trailers are made to persuade, the question arises how their creators manage to convince viewers to go out and watch the related feature film. In many ways, pragmatic stylistics seems to provide the suitable theoretical groundwork necessary to tackle this question. So, we may ask how trailers develop their advertising function and to what extent the multimodal fabric of trailers tends to maximize it?

To this end, this chapter introduces a new framework based on relevance theory (RT) (Sperber and Wilson 1986, 1995), specifically designed to capture and analyse film trailers as multimodal advertising texts. Various examples used by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson show that their approach does not exclusively focus on verbal language. For instance, they show that body movement or gaze can be used for specific communicative purposes, such as indicating an approaching person or possibly bad weather conditions (1995: 48f, 51); they even discuss the context dependent relevance of the smell of gas or auditory phenomena (1995: 151). Given that in film trailers verbal language is consciously combined with non-verbal modes like moving images or sound.

this makes an important prerequisite for the application of their theory. Another main advantage of their model is its capability to account realistically for the speed of human comprehension (Forceville 2014: 55; Padilla Cruz 2016: 10) and provide empirical proof for central claims (Wilson 2016: 6). The former seems especially relevant regarding the complexity of multimodal texts like film trailers. Furthermore, a number of studies have already applied RT to various multimodal examples, especially within advertising (e.g. Díaz Pérez 2000; Taillard 2000).¹

Film trailers as multimodal advertising, however, have not been discussed from a relevance theoretic perspective so far. Therefore, this chapter aims at a combination of both perspectives. In this respect, Charles Forceville's question 'What does each modality contribute to the optimization of relevance?' (2014: 67) will be taken as a starting point in order to explore the notion of relevance in the specific genre of film trailers. To this end, a multimodal analysis of a film trailer of *The Lord of the Rings*² (henceforth *LotR*) will show how its multimodal construction can cause specific relevance for different target audiences based on the use of different semiotic modes.

In a first step, the specific characteristics of film trailers as telecinematic advertising will be explained. On the theoretical basis of Sperber and Wilson's seminal publication of 1995, the general prerequisites of optimally relevant trailers will be used to develop a relevance theoretic framework for a trailer recipient design and to examine how a trailer's typical combination of descriptive and interpretative uses of modes contributes to its persuasive potential. Finally, an exploratory case study of a *LotR* trailer will focus on the semiotic modes of written and spoken language, (moving) image and music, as well as the combination of them, in order to expose the merits of this relevance theoretic framework for multimodal analysis.

2 Film trailers as telecinematic advertising

In order to provide a thorough analysis of film trailers in Chapter 4, some considerations as to their structural and functional classification are necessary. Both are prominent in Carmen Maier's central definition about the multimodal structure and persuasive function typical of trailers: 'Film trailers are multimodal texts in which several semiotic modes are combined, and parts of texts created for other purposes are transferred, rearranged and supplemented in order to attain a promotional purpose' (2009: 160). Apart from Maier's papers (see also Maier 2011), there are only three monographs focusing on film trailers, all of which take a film historical stance, albeit from different perspectives.³ Recently, trailers have also been subject to multimodal argumentation studies.⁴ This chapter, based on a closer look at the multimodal structure of trailers and the main semiotic resources relevant to the following analysis will categorize film trailers as telecinematic advertising. This includes some basic considerations about their multimodal structure, their production background and classification as (tele)cinematic discourse, as well as their 'promotional purpose' (Maier 2009: 160) of advertising a film.

Starting with a closer description of film trailers, a first aspect for their classification as cinematic discourse can be found in Janney's definition, that understands the 'technical cinematic apparatus [as] multimodal and multicoded' (2012: 91). However,

taking a linguistic point of view, instead of talking of semiotic resources or (semiotic) modes like Maier (2009: 160), Janney prefers using the terms 'smaller expressive subsystems, each with its own heuristic practices, forms, and discursive functions' (Maier 2009) to describe the contents of this apparatus. As such subsystems, he lists language, staging, gesture, cinematography, editing and post-production. For my examination of film trailers, I will be dividing language into a spoken and written mode (*speech* and *writing*) and subsume staging, gesture and cinematography under the semiotic mode of (*moving*) *images*. Finally, considerations about *sound* and *music* will conclude my selection of the five most important semiotic modes in a film trailer, all of which can be classified according to their sensory channel as visual or auditory. The case of *editing* as a filmic mode shows the difficulty of this sensory subdivision, because its classification as exclusively visual might not go far enough, as by linking subsequent shots, editing is rather time-based. Therefore, it will serve as a sixth, filmic mode, which as such has a direct effect on other modes, for example when editing creates a rhythmic change of shots, which might be supported by music.

Taking Gunther Kress's definition of modes as 'socially shaped and culturally given resource[s] for making meaning' (2014: 60) as a basis provides the opportunity to emphasize the social aspect of meaning-making, which also brings along a rather dynamic understanding of meaning, that goes along with Sperber and Wilson's view of communication as inferential (see chapter 3.1). Kress goes on to list '[i]mage, writing, layout, music, gesture, speech, moving image, soundtrack [as] examples of modes used in representation and communication' (2014, emphasis in the original), pointing out their functional purpose. Depending on the different affordances or meaning-making potentials of the different modes, they can be used – individually or in a combined way – for certain aims, like the promotion of a film.

As trailers will be considered cinematic discourse based on their use of 'audiovisual discourse of film narration' (Janney 2012: 86), they are, secondly, also subject to different types of layering. In a very simplified way, the production of trailers can be seen as a two-step process, starting with the material of the film to be advertised, which is then 'transferred, rearranged and supplemented' (Maier 2009: 160) during the trailer production. For the description of this production level of films – which can also be applied to trailers, as I claim, Marta Dynel (2011) introduces the term *collective sender* to include several instances, which are collectively responsible for the production of filmic discourse³, 'embracing among others: the scriptwriter, the director, camera operators, actors, picture and sound editors' (42). The collective sender of a film trailer additionally integrates the respective editors, voice-over artists and so on from a distinct trailer production company, which is usually commissioned for this task (Hediger 2001: 21). With regard to specific discourse within films – or trailers – another layering can be made out, which different authors have examined (Dynel 2011: 48). Most prominently, Herbert Clark's approach of layered discourse (1996) springs to mind, which has also been used for criticizing Sperber and Wilson's RT for lacking concrete applicability for such multilayered, fictional discourse (1987). Central to this approach is the idea that discourse is to be differentiated into an '*inter-character/characters*' (*communicative*) level and the *recipient's* (*communicative*) level, on which meanings are communicated to the viewer' (Dynel 2011: 49, emphasis in

the original). Similarly, Francisco Yus Ramos 'draw[s] a symbolic line between author/spectator communication and character/character communication' (1998: 5), which seems especially useful for advertising discourse, too (1998: 7). In order to analyse how trailers develop relevance for specific audiences, this chapter will focus on the recipients' communicative level (Dyner 2011: 49), which the collective sender uses to pursue their aim of advertising.

Finally, according to their 'promotional purpose' (Maier 2009: 160), trailers will be categorized as telecinematic advertising, expanding their cinematic classification to the realm of television and other media,⁷ where trailers can be found increasingly. In this respect, Forceville lists four special characteristics of advertising that 'differ [...] from the kind of communication that dominates *Relevance*' (Forceville 1996: 99, emphasis in the original): 'non-co-presence in time', 'number of communicators involved', the 'multi-media [sic!] character of advertisements'⁸ and 'ambiguity of the textual part of advertisements' (1996: 99–104).⁹ Additionally, Forceville classifies advertisements as '*mass-communication*' (1996: 99). Similarly to the production level of films, advertising also involves several contributors who communicate their mutual advertisement to a mass audience that can be more or less easily defined in terms of the prospective target group of a certain product, brand or film (Forceville 1996: 100). Due to 'non-co-presence in time', advertising in general does not provide any opportunity of direct feedback in case of misunderstanding (Forceville 2014: 62, 1996: 100), contrary to typical face-to-face communication, which is the basis of Sperber and Wilson's (1995) majority of examples.¹⁰ That means that advertisers have to be extremely conscious about the form of their messages, which is why advertising often uses ambiguous or weak forms of communication, such as images, metaphors or music (Cook 2006: 50f), as well as multimodal combinations (Forceville 1996: 102), in which the responsibility of drawing a suitable conclusion lies with the addressee (Forceville 1996: 102–4). In order to show how the specific combination of weak and strong forms of communication enables the address of specific audiences, RT can provide a helpful framework.

3 Relevance in trailer communication

After sketching out the basic features of the discourse of film trailers, the following chapter will expound the main notions of RT for the application to film trailers. Other than Paul Grice's approach (1989), RT does not rely on the premise of cooperation, which may be especially useful for the application to advertising discourse (Taillard 2000: 153). A main reason might be the condensation of Grice's cooperative maxims to just two principles of relevance (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 162). Of these, the first, cognitive principle of relevance is the general basis of their theory and states that '[h]uman cognition tends to be geared to the maximisation of relevance' (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 260). More important than this is the second, communicative principle of communication, which will serve as a basis for the subsequent analysis: 'Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance' (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 260).

On the basis of the premises for an application of RT to film trailers (3.1), the following chapter will explain the core idea of their second communicative principle, that is a balance between optimal effect and effort from the perspectives of the audience (3.2). From the perspective of the collective sender, who is the communicator of the trailer, further considerations about the different uses of language or other modes of a trailer will be made (3.3).

3.1 Premises for optimally relevant trailers

At the heart of Sperber and Wilson's theory lies the classification of communication as 'ostensive' and 'inferential'. While the latter describes the process of understanding by inferencing, in contrast to encoding and decoding processes, the former contains information about the communicative situation itself. In order to apply RT to a specific domain like film trailers, it must be clear that communication in this field can be considered ostensive in the first place. For Sperber and Wilson, '*ostensive* behaviour or simply *ostension*' is 'behaviour which makes manifest an intention to make something manifest' (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 49), 'manifest' meaning 'perceptible or inferable' (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 39). Note that the authors do not only talk about ostensive *utterances* but instead deliberately use the more general term ostensive *behaviour*.¹¹ Employing a rather broad concept of behaviour, in their theory, they enhance its scope of application to multimodal forms of discourse. In the case of film trailers, I claim that the collective sender's distribution of an attractive trailer can be seen as ostensive behaviour, as will be shown.

The definition of 'ostension' centrally includes the notion of intention and 'provides two layers of information to be picked up: first, there is the information which has been, so to speak, pointed out; second, there is the information that the first layer of information has been intentionally pointed out' (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 50). The former, informative intention is directed at the information within a certain utterance, which can on the one hand consist of concrete narrative information about the advertised film, additional information about the cast, or an idea about its genre classification. On the other hand, considering trailers as parts of film marketing and thus of 'commercial advertising', their 'informative intention always boils down to some kind of positive claim about the product or service advertised' (Forceville 1996: 99). Applying Forceville's claim of 'modern Western man's familiarity with the genre of advertising' (1996: 106) to the more specific genre of film advertising – that is, trailers – it can hence be assumed that the audience generally notices the positive claim within the trailer, so that the informative intention of the trailer is at least recognized, if not even fulfilled, which is the case when the audience actually believes it (Forceville 1996: 99).

The second, communicative intention is recognized when the audience knows about the communicator's intention to convey certain information. In film trailers, this can be the case by recognizing the form of the trailer itself, which is typically used for intentional advertising of the respective film. This recognition – that is, the audience's assumption that the trailer is a piece of advertising for a certain film – may also be influenced by the individuals' cognitive environments, consisting in their physical

environment (e.g. in the cinema) and cognitive abilities (e.g. former experience with or knowledge of trailers) (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 39).

Furthermore, Sperber and Wilson (1995: 153) include the notion of 'stimulus' as a 'phenomenon designed to achieve cognitive effects' (1995), which will be explored further in the next chapter. They elaborate that stimuli can be ostensive, too. As visual, auditory or tactile perceptions, they first serve to get the audience's attention, at the same time ensuring that the audience becomes aware of the communicator's intentions (1995), thus serving as an important element within trailers, as will be shown.

3.2 Audience – Effect and effort

The core idea of Sperber and Wilson's theory is that all communication is based on a principle of optimal relevance, which relies on a cost-benefit balance between the effort of processing, which must be optimally small, and the effect of the input, which must be optimally large for the input to be relevant (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 164, 267). This effect is defined as a 'cognitive effect that contributes positively to the fulfilment of cognitive functions or goals' (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 265). Concretely, a positive cognitive effect can be an 'epistemic improvement, i.e. an increase in knowledge' (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 266), for example, but also 'the reorganization of existing knowledge, or the elaboration of rational desires' (Sperber and Wilson 1995). Wilson (2016: 5) further specifies the need of new information to be linked to existing knowledge to be relevant for the addressee:

what makes an input relevant to an individual is that it interacts with contextual information he has available to yield worthwhile cognitive effects (e.g. warranted conclusions, warranted strengthenings or revisions of available information). (Wilson 2016: 5)

Hence, relevance in Sperber and Wilson's sense includes three different effects within ostensive communication, which are necessary for the input to be relevant:

1. New information that can link to existing cognitive environment, that is existing knowledge,
2. Strengthenings of existing assumptions and
3. Weakenings of existing assumptions.

Forceville adds a fourth effect, consisting in 'sharing an emotion or evaluation with an addressee' (Forceville 2014: 54). Considering these effects, a trailer will be relevant if it presents new information, which can be linked to existing knowledge. In the case of the *LotR* trailer analysed in this chapter, the existing knowledge is – at least partly – based on the films' character as literary adaptation, which, similar to a trailer for a remake of a film, makes the activation of knowledge possible. In order to be relevant to viewers who might not know the original books, however, other ways of connecting existing knowledge or assumptions are necessary, which will be explored in the detailed analysis in Section 4.

The processing effort needed is more difficult to show. It includes the quantity of information to be processed and the number of mental operations, such as deductions (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 125–7). For linguistic utterances, it can be assumed, for instance, that a rather long utterance containing the same proposition as a shorter utterance will need a greater effort to process or that an utterance containing additional information without further contextual effects is thus less relevant (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 127). For film trailers, the case is more complex as they simultaneously use different modes for conveying an impression about the promoted film. However, the abundant use of film scenes can be seen as a way of keeping the effort as low as possible, given that the recognition of filmic action, as long as certain editing rules are obeyed, might be less taxing than, for example the decoding of the same information if it were presented only in written form.¹²

Considering the popularity of trailers as film advertising might lead to the conclusion that their assumed relevance – that is, the balance between maximal effect and minimal effort – is indeed recognized by their respective audience. As a closer inspection of the audience's effort is not possible in the scope of this chapter, the following case study (chapter 4) will focus on the question of effect and asks how the combination and interaction of modes contributes to a trailer's relevance.

3.3 Collective sender – Saying and showing

Assuming that trailers are a type of ostensive communication, as was done in 3.1, does not automatically mean that trailers do exclusively use overt communication. On the contrary, ostension, too, is a scalar notion. On these grounds, the following reflections directed at the communicator in the form of a collective sender will discuss different kinds of uses of language or other semiotic modes in a trailer.

In this respect, Sperber and Wilson claim that there is 'a continuum of cases of ostension ranging from "showing", where strong direct evidence for the basic layer of information is provided, to "saying that", where all the evidence is indirect' (1995: 53). They give the example of Peter 'leaning back ostensively to let Mary see William approaching' (1995). Despite this strong direct evidence of the approaching figure, the ostensive movement can still be understood as an instance of weak communication, as Mary may derive several assumptions about its meaning. That is why non-verbal communication can generally be considered 'relatively weak' (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 60). On the other hand, in saying that William is approaching, Peter must rely on his credibility if he does not only want to have his informative, but also communicative intention fulfilled. In film trailers, this opposition is resolved by a combination of 'saying' and 'showing', which involves a combination of descriptive and interpretive uses of modes.

On the most basic level, every utterance is a more or less faithful interpretation of a thought the speaker wants to communicate. An utterance is descriptively used when the thought interpreted is itself entertained as a true description of a state of affairs; it is interpretively used when the thought interpreted is entertained as an interpretation of some further thought: say, an attributed or a relevant thought. (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 259)

For an application of this distinction between descriptive and interpretative use of utterances to film trailers, the special construction of film trailers must be considered. Roughly, the trailer can be seen as a multilevel and multimodal utterance of a 'positive claim' (Forceville 1996: 99) about the film it advertises. The film scenes included in the trailer are used as a form of interpretation of the original film scenes, for example often presented in a cut version, similar to direct quotations or summaries, which resemble the original but differ from it (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 227f).

In terms of the descriptive use of filmic material, semiotic modes 'show' the audience what they can expect from the film, for example images of characters played by certain actors. Thus, the descriptive use is mostly found on the microlevel of concrete semiotic modes, especially in the form of moving images or spoken language of the film, which iconically resemble and indexically represent the original film scenes. Such a 'description of a state of affairs in the actual world' (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 231) or in a given fictional world (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 289) is for instance also the release date of the films (1:04–1:22) or the names of the cast (1:24), given in written language. The interpretative use, on the other hand, is usually constructed by combining different semiotic modes, aiming at mirroring the film's narrative, for example, which is itself a function of multimodal construction work. Within this interpretative use, a trailer can itself develop its own narrative, for example, which need not be exactly the same as the one in the film it advertises – even though it is constructed largely from the same filmic material.

Hence, the advertising function of trailers works on at least two levels: On the one hand, the different semiotic modes and their combinations can cause different cognitive effects, enabling the address of different target audiences. On the other, based on the same multimodal construction, a specific combination of descriptive and interpretative uses of modes can give rise to an especially powerful advertising effect. The following chapters will merge these aspects with the respective potential of weak and strong forms of communication and show how this relevance theoretic framework functions by use of a case study.

4 The multimodal structure of the *LotR* trailer and its relevance for different audiences

4.1 Corpus and method

The following relevance theoretic analysis will focus on one trailer of the *LotR* trilogy. It is the first trailer for the whole trilogy, which was screened about a year before the release of the first film (Mikos et al. 2007: 70). It serves as advertising for the whole trilogy. As the first trailer of the trilogy promoted the film about one year in advance, it had to raise a general awareness for the trilogy before other trailers followed which focused on the first film of the trilogy.¹³ *LotR* is a special case in that it is a literary adaptation and could thus address former readers of the literary original (Mikos et al. 2007: 56, 65). As such, it was part of an extensive marketing campaign (Mikos et al. 2007) and provides the advantage that a comprehensive reception study

(Mikos et al. 2007; see also Jöckel 2005) can underpin assumptions about potential audiences with quantitative evidence.¹⁴ Therefore, among the different target audiences identified in the study by Mikos et al. (2007: 209),¹⁵ this analysis will focus on one distinction, that is spectators who have or have not read the original books.

Considering Sperber and Wilson's communicative principle of relevance, the main focus will lie on the positive cognitive effects the trailer offers for readers and non-readers of the literary original as revealed by a multimodal analysis (4.2). After the identification of the five modes of speech, writing, images, sound and music, as well as their combinations, they will be classified regarding their potential of raising (different) cognitive effects for readers or non-readers of the books. A new framework will finally combine Sperber and Wilson's classification of strong and weak communication with the respective multimodal background and assign it to respective descriptive or interpretative uses of modes or multimodal combinations (4.3).

4.2 Multimodal recipient design

For the films of the *LotR* trilogy, Jöckel has shown that their success can be explained by their attractiveness for diverse social groups (2005: 209). Therefore, I assume that the trailers as part of a larger marketing strategy are also aimed at different audience groups and that this can be explained within their multimodal structure. So, while Sperber and Wilson's RT can provide insights as to how audiences develop positive cognitive effects (see chapter 3.2), a second theoretical concept, that can only be touched upon within the scope of this chapter, frames the analysis in terms of a multimodal recipient design: Building upon Alan Bell's audience design (1984, 1991), Dynel uses the notion of recipient design, originally brought up by Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson (1974), in a telecinematic context:

Recipient design is here understood as a set of discursive (as well as cinematographic) techniques enabling the target viewer's interpretative processes and arrival at meanings, in accordance with the collective sender's plan. The latter's choice of strategies, and effects consequent upon them, are dependent on the presupposed target audience. (Dynel 2011: 52)

Both audience design, which was developed for explaining intra-speaker variation in the context of news discourse, and recipient design can account for stylistic choices, which Sperber and Wilson see as important means for the communicator to imply her relevance (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 219; see also Padilla Cruz 2016: 11). Considering that discursive as well as cinematographic techniques on the recipients' level – that is, aimed at the film or trailer audience outside the screen – are based on multimodal structures, the use and combination of different modes will be understood as stylistic choices within a trailer. On this basis, a multimodal analysis will show in which ways the recipients of trailers profit from positive cognitive effects like the generation of new knowledge, strengthening or weakening of assumptions or being conveyed an emotion or evaluation (Forceville 2014: 54). Following reception studies about the *LotR* trilogies (Mikos et al. 2007; Jöckel 2005), the following analysis will focus on two

main target groups, explaining how readers of the *LotR* novels might gain maximal cognitive effects in comparison to audience members who are not aware of the literary original.

Given the readers' existing knowledge about the novels by John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (1954), its characters, plot and maybe also about the cultural discourse around the work, such as the common assumption that it was deemed too complex for filmic adaptation, the cognitive environment they could build upon is different from so-called non-readers, who watch the trailer without background knowledge of the books. In the trailer, these different backgrounds are activated by a combination of forms of weak and strong communicational means. In general, non-verbal modes, that is, images, music and sound are seen as 'relatively weak' by Sperber and Wilson (1995: 60), which means that their interpretation can vary to a rather large degree depending on the addressee (Forceville 1996: 106–7). In the case of this trailer, the advantages of weak communication, which is commonly used in advertising (Forceville 1996: 107), become clear, as it further supports the specific address of the different audiences.

So, while images give rise to the recognition of various aspects of the known literary works for readers thereof, the same images can be considered relevant for spectators without knowledge of the books for other reasons. A rather long scene towards the end of the trailer (1:02–1:22) is a good case in point. The images alone show altogether nine male persons in a mountainous landscape walking towards the camera in different outfits. Readers might recognize them because their outfits or props suggest their character, for example the wizard Gandalf with a pointed hat and a staff, Legolas carrying a bow and the bearded Gimli an axe, others might notice that some of them have appeared earlier in the trailer (e.g. Gandalf in 0:35 and 0:45, Frodo in 0:38, 0:42, 0:54 or Aragorn in 0:32 and 0:46), which might suggest their importance, and viewers without knowledge of the books might simply know an actor – either case leads to recognition that improves the relevance for the viewers. The new knowledge about book characters' appearance can additionally lead to strengthening or weakening readers' assumptions held about the looks of certain characters – an effect that non-readers will miss, however. Instead, the assumptions they might gather from visual stimuli generally refer to the film's assumed genre or atmosphere. The central part of the trailer, for instance, consists of a sequence of sixteen different shots presented in 18 seconds (0:28–0:46). Not only do these give a very broad overview of different protagonists and rather impressive landscapes, which different kinds of audiences can integrate differently in their existing knowledge. Also, the editing of these scenes in quick succession strengthens different assumptions. On the one hand, readers, having recognized parts of the trailer as a possible filmic adaptation of the *LotR* novels, might (start to) assume that their idea of Tolkien's story being unfilmable because it stretches over decades in the original, which were hard to imagine within the length of a mainstream film, has to be revised – that is, their assumption weakened. On the other hand, non-readers can use the visual information for the formation of new assumptions about the advertised film's genre, which seems to be somewhere between action, adventure and fantasy. The fact that single scenes show fights, for example by two figures with long robes and a staff (0:42) or battle related scenes, such as a man with a sword leading an army (0:46) or a marching army of orcs (0:28) can support this impression.

Additionally, other typical examples of weak communication are provided by sounds and music. The two parts of the trailer that are accompanied by music (0:28–0:48, 1:00–1:42) each gain specific energy and momentum, for example by rhythm as sub-mode of both music and editing. Especially the assumption about the adventurous character of the film conveyed by the editing mentioned earlier (0:28–0:46) is further strengthened. A potential meaning of sounds, however openly communicated, is harder to pin down, whereas their relevance potential in the form of ostensive stimuli has been claimed explicitly by Sperber and Wilson. These ‘must satisfy two conditions: first, they must attract the audience’s attention; and second, they must focus it on the communicator’s intentions’ (1995: 153). Given that prominent phenomena like ‘sudden loud noises such as shouts or doorbell chimes, striking visual stimuli such as hand waves, flashing lights or bright posters, or vigorous tactile stimulation such as prodding or grasping’ (1995) are especially prone to human attention (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 40), the first condition is fulfilled. Their combination with other modes in trailers, then, can offer the function of directing the audience’s attention according to the communicator’s intentions (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 153).

Therefore, instances of weak communication, especially those directing the audience’s attention, will often be combined with strong forms of communication like language in both written and spoken forms. In the example of the approaching figures mentioned earlier (1:02–1:22), this works by the combination with language, written in this case, which Sperber and Wilson generally describe as ‘a kind of explicit communication’ (1995: 55) with the ‘advantage [...] that it gives rise to the strongest possible form of communication’ (1995: 60). This use of writing towards the end of the trailer provides a frame for the otherwise mostly visual impressions the viewers obtain and presents the titles of the single films of the trilogy, each followed by their general release date (1:04–1:22), for example ‘Christmas 2001’ (1:01). While some quiet, ethereal music accompanies the scene in the background, the appearance of each film title and release date is introduced by a muffled beat of a kettledrum, leading the viewer’s attention to the written information. The interaction of writing and images might also lead to new assumptions about how the presented persons fit to single films of the trilogy: ‘The Fellowship of the Ring’ (1:04) might in fact consist of the shown persons and a story about their experiences. The title ‘The Return of the King’ (1:17) presented simultaneously with two men approaching might bring up the question of reference: Is one of the two men rightfully referred to as king? The fact that the last person appearing was already presented twice before in this trailer can be seen as a higher relevance, as he will be recognized on the grounds of pre-existing knowledge more probably than the person walking in front of him.

Therefore, from a perspective of RT, the film titles and dates alone would not be very relevant, despite being a strong form of communication. By their combination with other modes and their position at the end of the trailer, however, they can refer to the new knowledge about the film they advertise – for readers and non-readers alike. Depending on how interested the viewers have become, the dates present a very relevant input, if the interaction of recent impressions of the film with the new knowledge about the release dates, has the cognitive effect of the decision to see the film.

Finally, speech is rather rare in the analysed trailer and only occurs three times. A large part at the beginning of the trailer is taken up by an off-screen narrator quoting the ring verse 'One Ring to rule them all / One Ring to find them / One Ring to bring them all / and in the darkness bind them' (Tolkien 1954: 1, 0:08–0:24). This verse creates the first explicit differentiation of the trailer audience: Those who are acquainted with Tolkien's books can recognize it as the ring verse in *LotR*, thus connecting it to their existing knowledge of the literary original, which results in a high relevance for them. Probably, hearing the ring verse in spoken form within a trailer – fans will even recognize it in the language of Mordor, uttered before the English version begins – will raise the strong assumption of a film adaptation being advertised. The interpretation of others will be more open after decoding the utterance.¹⁶ A similar differentiation can be assumed for the other two instances of speech, which on the one hand (re-)activate knowledge about the original plot ('Even the smallest person can change the course of the future,' 0:49–0:51) and on the other strengthen assumptions about the advertised film's atmosphere and genre ('This Christmas, the most extraordinary tale ever told will come to life,' 0:35–0:44). Equally interesting is the classification of speech in terms of its descriptive or interpretative use, which can be applied to the latter sample of speech and which contributes to a new theoretical framework for the multimodal analysis of trailers.

4.3 Double usage structure of trailers

As has been shown from a relevance theoretic perspective, weak forms of communication can in fact be considered 'even preferable to the stronger forms' (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 60) and the combination of both can be used efficiently for the advertising effect of a film trailer. In the following, the general effectiveness of a trailer will be discussed on the basis of its double usage structure of saying and showing, that is descriptive and interpretative uses of certain modes or multimodal combinations.

The basis for this special communicative feature of trailers lies in the character of trailers itself, which typically use the material of the film that they advertise, as mentioned in chapter 3.3, but not only 'transfer' this material to an advertising context but also 'rearrange[...]' and 'supplement[...]' (Maier 2009: 160) it. The latter features can be seen as foundation for the suitability of Sperber and Wilson's interpretative use of modes in trailers. At first sight, this interpretation makes sense especially with regard to the mentioned combination of modes, for instance not only by enriching a scene with the addition of background sounds or music or making it seem especially vivid by editing a sequence of short shots, but also because this specific multimodal combination can imply a certain interpretation, 'saying that' the advertised film is especially suspenseful, for example (see Table 9.1). However, the mode of speech in the analysed *LotR* trailer partly¹⁷ works in a similar way, as it makes suggestions that do not only describe the advertised film but give an interpretation of it. In this respect, 'This Christmas, the most extraordinary tale ever told will come to life', articulated by a male voice-over, (0:35–0:44) does not only refer to the release date of the first film of the trilogy in terms of 'an actual state of affairs' (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 232), which is tantamount to a descriptive use. It also, interpretatively, uses the superlative 'most

extraordinary tale ever told' and thus provides the audience with further points of departure for individual inferences. For instance, viewers can relate the use of 'tale' to own experiences of adventurous (fairy) tales, thus concluding that the prospective film might belong to a fantasy genre. However, despite the explicit character of language, this – interpretative – utterance needs further proof to be relevant, let alone credible, for the audience.

Therefore, the trailer makes use of literally 'showing' reasons why the advertised film is relevant for certain audiences and therefore worth watching. For instance, the mode of writing 'describes' an actual state of affairs (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 232) by announcing that the films will screen 'Christmas 2001' (1:01). Also, the use of scenes from the film, that is, the mode of images taken individually or audiovisual combinations that can be interpreted as scenes from the film, work this way, providing direct evidence for the attractiveness of the advertised film (e.g. the shot-reverse-shot sequence of Galadriel and Frodo (0:49–0:51) or the diverse scenes used in the short-shot sequence in the middle of the film (0:28–0:46)). Interestingly, it is also the visual mode that is used because of its indirectness in terms of recipient design: being a weak form of communication, it can be interpreted rather openly, which contributes to the potential of addressing a diverse audience.

Hence, this double usage structure also makes use of the specific affordances of different modes, however, differently from the ways used in the formation of a multimodal recipient design. Here, weak forms of communication like images are used for providing direct evidence of the film in question, that is, support the positive claim about the film directly, while rather strong forms of communication like spoken language can only substantiate the claim they make in an indirect way.

This is especially obvious for the case of a voice-over narrator, who is not part of the fictional layer but can rather be attributed to the collective sender, that is, communicator, herself. However, I claim that in general, also other instances of speech and writing are used, at least partly, in an interpretative way with regard to the advertising aim of the communicator of the trailer.¹⁸

The special context of advertising, that usually entails a certain lack of trust towards the advertiser (Tanaka 1996: 39–40), therefore makes appropriate adjustments necessary so that the communicator can achieve her aim of offering a relevant message to her audience, that is, potential viewers of the advertised film. Especially in non-reciprocal

Table 9.1 Double Usage Structure of Trailers

Use	(Multimodal) preference	Form of communication
Interpretative use 'Saying that'	Single mode: <i>speech</i> (off-screen narrator), <i>writing</i> (intertitle)	Strong communication
~ indirect evidence for positive claim about film	Multimodal: <i>editing, music</i> (used additionally to audiovisual scenes)	Weak communication
Descriptive use 'Showing that'	Single mode: <i>images</i> (e.g. landscapes, characters/actors), <i>writing</i> (e.g. release dates, names of cast)	Weak communication, strong communication
~ direct evidence for positive claim about film	Multimodal: audiovisual scenes	Combination of weak – strong communication

communication like advertising, the communicator, that is, collective sender of the trailer, 'has to [...] adapt her informative intentions to her credibility' (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 63) in order to create the mutual cognitive environment necessary for the communication of further details. For example, this mutual cognitive environment can entail knowledge about constituents of the collective sender – for example the director or production company of the advertised film – as well as, in terms of the 'cognitive ability' of the addressee, the possibility to recognize the trailer as film advertising due to its comparability to other trailers or its presentation in a cinema, which makes up the physical environment, which is also part of the (mutual) cognitive environment (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 39). For trailers, this means that in order to fulfil their informative intention of conveying a positive image of the advertised film, the communicator must resort to appropriate ways of presentation. This can be done by presenting certain content. The corporate logo of the production studio of the advertised film shown in the beginning of the trailer ('New Line Cinema – A Time Warner Company' (0:01)), for example, can be interpreted as a guarantee for certain quality as it evokes positive memories about previous popular films produced by the same film studio (Grainge 2008: 85). Keiko Tanaka (1996: 39–40) furthermore gives the example of a salesperson to illustrate the situation of a possibly untrustworthy communicator, who, lacking obvious trust, 'has to aim to achieve [her] intended effects by means of an artfully crafted stimulus' (Tanaka 1996: 40). In the case of trailers, the collective sender similarly aims at raising interest in the promoted film by creating a trailer that is attractive for its target audience, containing an 'artful' combination of diverse multimodal stimuli, so that it can even receive acclaim in the form of the Golden Trailer Award.¹⁹ However, the special case of film advertising lies in the direct connection of this artful presentation to the source of the employed material, which is the advertised film. To this end, the communicator makes use of the specific kind of double usage structure of saying and showing in order to make her sales message both credible and worthwhile the viewers' attention.

5 Conclusion

Using a *LotR* film trailer as a case study, this chapter has developed a relevance theoretic framework for the multimodal foundation of a trailer recipient design and has shown how RT helps to explain the address of two exemplary target audiences. Secondly, the use of certain modes has been merged with a more abstract structure that might provide an explanation for the effectiveness of trailer advertising. This 'double usage structure' of trailers illustrated for the sample analysis that the verbal modes *speech* and *writing* can be used differently: While in the case study writing is mostly used descriptively, giving rather concrete release dates or names of the cast, for example, speech is also used in an interpretative way in that it presents the positive claim about the advertised film – to be shown and substantiated directly by the help of otherwise weak forms of communication, such as images.

For this exploratory case study, the use of a trailer for a pre-sold property – that is, an advertised product whose advantage is that it is already known among a group of potential customers (Mikos et al. 2007: 56) – was very helpful in terms of the

identification and selection of a well-defined audience group. Further studies, however, need to show how a trailer recipient design can resort to other and possibly multiple target audiences, also exploring the use of modes in more detail. Moreover, further empirical studies from an interdisciplinary perspective, especially including reception studies or the rather new branch of neurocinematics, might offer closer insights into the applicability and scope of this relevance theoretic framework for film trailers.

Notes

- 1 For a relevance theoretic model for media discourse, see Yus Ramos (1998); Pinar Sanz (2013) has applied RT for political advertising and Piazza and Haarman (2015) have most recently developed a framework for verbal–visual relations in television news programmes.
- 2 *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring – Trailer* [online]. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_WZxJpHzEE>
- 3 *Coming Attractions. Reading American Movie Trailers* by Lisa Kernan (2004) aims at a rhetorical analysis of trailers from three different eras (1920–1999) and wants to explore how trailers address their (implied) audience. Keith M. Johnston's *Coming Soon. Film Trailers and the Selling of Hollywood Technology* (2009) uses the method of 'unified analysis', which combines textual analysis of trailers with a historical analysis of the trailers' contexts, for example concerning their production, distribution or reception (11f), specifically focusing on the connection to technology. Vinzenz Hediger's analysis in *Verführung zum Film. Der amerikanische Kinotrailer seit 1912* (2001) offers a historical classification of different types of trailers, which he frames with respective background information about film advertising.
- 4 See, for example, Wildfeuer and Pollaroli (2017), Pollaroli (2014).
- 5 Film discourse according to Dynel (2011: 42) defines linguistic discourse within a film, that is, usually among the filmic characters, and has to be distinguished from 'cinematic discourse, which conflates an array of cinematographic techniques, which are studied primarily outside linguistics' (ibid., see also Janney 2012: 86). Given the scarcity of film discourse in the examined trailer, this study will consider it as only one of several parts of the broader notion of (tele)cinematic discourse, that also Christian Hoffmann and Monika Kirner-Ludwig refer to in their introduction to this volume.
- 6 That RT can indeed be used will hopefully be shown in the course of this chapter.
- 7 See especially the introduction in the edited volume by Piazza, Bednarek and Rossi (2011) for a comparison of cinematic and television discourse.
- 8 In his description of this feature of advertising, Forceville (1996: 102) actually describes the multimodal character of advertisements, although they are to be found in different media, too.
- 9 The fourth aspect, 'ambiguity of the textual part of advertisements' (Forceville 1996: 102–4) entails the conscious use of ambiguous stimuli, which is not constrained to verbal modes but rather common for advertising in general (see, for example, Tanaka 1996; Cook 2006).
- 10 Latest models of mass communication show that this lack of feedback typical for a transmission model is not to be seen as absolute, but that media, including advertising, exist in a continuous feedback loop as they can be considered as embedded in contemporary culture (McQuail 2011: 70). What is probably rather

problematic is the possibility of short-term misunderstandings that arise if the potential customers are addressed in a way they do not approve of. This can be avoided by better knowledge of the prospective audience or target group.

- 11 This generic use is reminiscent of Grice's concept of 'utterance' (see Padilla Cruz 2016: 5; Yus 1998: 293) which referred 'not just to linguistic utterances but to any form of communicative behaviour' (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 21, see also Sperber and Wilson 1995: 29).
- 12 In this vein, using shot-detection tasks, Smith and Henderson (2008) have shown that match-action cuts are more likely to be missed than cuts between scenes. Also, the metastudy by Smith, Levin and Cutting (2012) presents the results of various empirical studies of film reception that suggest how films work 'by piggybacking on natural visual cognition' (108). More concretely, Schwan and Ildirar (2010) suggest that even film viewers without experience easily understand discontinuous film clips as long as they can perceive some line of action (975). These might be helpful results for estimating the rather low effort of understanding film trailers.
- 13 Note that the original designation of the trailer found on YouTube is misleading in this respect, being referred to as 'Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring - Trailer', https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_WZxJpHzEE.
- 14 See also Shefrin (2004), Wasko and Shanadi (2006) and Thompson (2007) for further background on the marketing of *LotR*.
- 15 In their choice of target groups, Mikos at al. (2007) refer to the study by Jöckel (2005) and focus on gender, reading experience with *LotR* and fandom, adding affinity to media and technicity (211) as a fourth aspect.
- 16 For non-readers, the repeated mentioning of 'One Ring' can lead to a strengthening of the assumption that a ring plays a powerful role in the advertised film on the basis of diagrammatic iconicity. Also, if the power of the ring is taken literally, a fantasy genre might suggest itself.
- 17 The other two instances of speech differ in that they simultaneously belong to the narrative universe and can thus be also considered to be 'shown' as glimpses of the prospective film: Firstly, the same male off-screen narrator recites the Ring verse known from the beginning of the novels (0:08–0:24). Secondly, within the character-character level, Galadriel tells Frodo in a shot-reverse-shot: 'Even the smallest person can change the course of the future' (0:49–0:51).
- 18 Another case in point is the intertitle at the end of the trailer 'You will find adventure, or adventure will find you' (1:29–1:36).
- 19 www.goldentrailers.com

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