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Puns, relevance and appreciation in advertisements

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Abstract

Puns are popular rhetorical figures in advertisements. A distinction can be made between puns in which both interpretations are relevant to the advertiser's message (e.g., "The gift that leaves you beaming" in an advertisement for a small flashlight) and puns in which only one interpretation is relevant (e.g., "Roses grow on you" for Cadbury's Roses chocolates). In recent publications, different predictions have been made as to whether slogans containing puns in general are appreciated more than slogans without a pun, and also whether puns containing two relevant interpretations are appreciated more than puns containing only one relevant interpretation. This paper reports on an experiment to test these hypotheses. Sixty-eight participants rated their appreciation of 24 slogans. The results showed that the presence or absence of puns had a significant impact on the respondents' appreciation of the slogans. Furthermore, whether the pun contained two relevant interpretations or only one did not influence the extent to which they were considered funny, but the former were considered a better choice than the latter.

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1. Introduction

Puns frequently occur in advertisements. Leigh (1994), for instance, shows that in a large sample, 10 to 40% of all ads contain wordplay (the range depending on the definition of what constitutes a “pun”). It seems that puns and wordplay serve an important function.

Advertisements are designed to persuade consumers to buy a certain product. Advertisers apparently believe that puns are helpful in attaining this goal. Meyers-Levy and Malaviya (1999) reviewed the empirical research on what makes an advertisement persuasive. They concluded that one way in which advertisements are persuasive is by giving their audience a pleasurable experience. The consumer may associate the pleasure they experienced in processing the ad with the product that is being advertised, which in turn may lead to a more positive attitude towards the product. Puns can provide this pleasurable experience in several related ways (cf. Tanaka, 1994; McQuarrie and Mick, 1999, 2003; Tom and Eves, 1999).

First, a pun is a humorous device. A humorous message can give the audience a pleasant experience. Second, a pun can be considered as a riddle. Solving a riddle is a pleasant experience, because it flatters the audience’s intellectual capabilities by showing them that they have the relevant knowledge to solve the problem. For instance, Phillips (2000) showed that participants appreciated the riddle of a visual metaphor more when they succeeded in generating a relevant interpretation themselves, compared to participants who received the visual metaphor along with a headline in which the intended interpretation was spelled out. Solving a riddle can establish rapport between the communicator and the audience (Norrick, 2003). A correct solution demonstrates that the communicator and her¹ audience are on the same wavelength. This feeling may increase the positive attitude toward the product the communicator is endorsing. These may be some of the reasons why puns are used in advertisements.

Theories on the effectiveness of puns are literally centuries old. Quintilian (2001: 6.3) distinguishes between puns in which both meanings are relevant and those for which only one meaning is relevant. He argues that it is better to use the first type than the second. In advertising, both types can be found, for instance, in the following two slogans originally devised for an English-speaking audience. In an advertisement for Cadbury’s Roses chocolates “Roses grow on you”, only one interpretation of growing is relevant (‘become irresistible’ and not ‘develop’), whereas both readings of “cross with us” are relevant in Stena Sealink’s slogan “Prices that will even make our competitors cross with us” (namely, ‘be angry with us’, and ‘cross the seas in our liners’). According to Quintilian, the audience would appreciate Stena’s slogan more than Cadbury’s. In the next section, we will review more recent research on the effectiveness of different types of puns. We will then report on an experiment that tests the different predictions.

2. Theoretical framework

In general, puns refer to “the usually humorous use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more of its meanings or the meaning of another word similar in sound”

¹ Following Sperber and Wilson (1995) [1986], we refer to the sender as a “she”.

(Encyclopaedia Britannica). Therefore, puns are a form of figurative speech, a trope in which the message has at least two different meanings. McQuarrie and Mick (1996) qualify puns as one of the more complex forms of rhetoric: puns generally require more processing effort than messages where simple forms of rhetoric, for example, rhyme or alliteration, are used (McQuarrie and Mick, 1996, 1999). In our approach, we apply the following, restrictive, definition of puns: puns create ambiguous slogans, which allow for a less salient interpretation, together with a more salient interpretation (cf. Lagerwerf, 2002: 248, Yus, 2003: 1320).²

The notion of salience plays a crucial role in our definition of puns. Giora (1999) argues that it is better to do without the traditional notions of “literal” and “figurative” meaning. Instead, the salience of a meaning is a function of its conventionality (Giora, 1999). The meaning that is more popular, or more prototypical, more frequently used, more familiar, or recently activated by previous context, is the more salient one. In line with Relevance Theory, she proposes the “graded salience principle” by which she shows that the salient meaning is always accessed first, and that a less salient meaning is activated only if there is no gradual increase in informative content in the most salient meaning and if the most salient meaning does not fit the context (Giora, 1997, 1999, 2002).

Recently, efforts have been made to integrate the graded salience principle with the General Theory of Verbal Humor (Attardo, 2003). The General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) is an incongruity theory which defines verbal humor as a text compatible with two scripts (frames) opposed to each other in specific ways (Raskin and Attardo, 1994). Raskin and Attardo (1994) show that (verbal) humor must be considered as a type of non-bona fide communication because of the incessant violations of the Gricean cooperative principle. In their view, a pun is always compatible with two distinct scripts (interpretations) and these scripts cannot both be true at the same time. Therefore, by changing to the non-bona fide mode of humor, the reader understands that a pun is intended. However, GTVH fails to account for the type of pun so much favored by Quintilian. In cases where both scripts can be true at the same time, there would be no reason to change into a non-bona fide mode, since there is no apparent incongruity.

Although the GTVH elegantly explains how a receiver understands that humor is intended, Relevance Theory provides a better account of the type of pun in which there can be two relevant meanings. This is why we refer to the interpretation of puns in terms of Relevance Theory. This framework allows for a description of how the principle of relevance shapes all kinds of communication (Sperber and Wilson, 1995 [1986]). Relevance Theory presupposes ostensive-inferential communication. In other words, communication is overt, is mutually manifest to both receiver and sender, and can be implicit. Communicators are capable of inferring the intended meaning of a message and they will always strive for an optimally relevant contribution: the receiver assumes that the utterance provides a good balance of cognitive effects in exchange for the effort demanded by the processing. The receiver is inclined to expend as little effort as possible to understand the message and at the same time will try to gain as much effect as possible from the message by processing it. The sender will thus try to make her communication

² All puns in our sample are therefore ambiguous—the possibility of a sound similarity, as in homophonous words, is deliberately left out.

easy to process, at the same time making sure that the change in the cognitive environment of the receiver is maximal. In other words, there is a tension between minimum effort and maximum effect.

This line of reasoning would suggest that the use of puns in advertising is not too well-advised since, in general, in order to understand a pun, the receiver has to expend extra mental effort (cf. Noveck et al., 2001; Gibbs, 1994; Toncar and Munch, 2001; Mothersbaugh et al., 2002). While interpreting the pun, the receiver has to process more than one meaning in the message, and this generally involves additional processing effort.³ In other words, processing wordplays – or figurative speech in general – is less economical than the processing of plain, explicit messages. The supplementary interpretation does not necessarily supply extra information. The use of puns would therefore seem to contradict a formal application of the principle of Relevance.

Tanaka (1992, 1994) and Yus (2003) have argued, however, that it is possible to explain the working of puns within the framework of Relevance Theory. They show convincingly that certain effort-demanding interpretive paths are favored in exchange for an increase in humorous effects. Similarly, Sperber acknowledges: “When more effects are derived, there is the added cost of just deriving these effects” (Sperber, 2001); but the extra processing effort is then rewarded in the form of extra effect: the pleasure of ‘getting’ the pun. In Yus’ words (2003: 1300): “A more relevant interpretation worth being processed may be activated, despite the supplementary mental effort required. Humorous effects such as the enjoyment in the resolution of incongruity are worth this extra cognitive effort.”

The receiver experiences pleasure by processing an at first sight complex message. And, hoping to find more humorous entertainment, the receiver is willing to devote some extra cognitive resources. Yus (2003) further stresses the fact that it is a condition on the receiver’s willingness to expend extra mental effort that he is aware of the joke frame of the utterance.

Yus (2003) distinguishes four types of puns by focusing on the differences in computing the effects of the utterance and on differences in context accessibility; two of these types play a role in advertising and will be discussed here.⁴ The first type is illustrated using an advertising slogan borrowed from Tanaka (1994):

- (1) [A car parked on a lengthy drive leading to a mansion]
The perfect car for a long drive—Mazda car (Tanaka, 1994)

In this slogan, both readings of “long drive,” viz. a ‘long ride’ and ‘a long driveway’, are relevant in order to interpret the slogan completely. The two processed meanings are appropriate and applicable to the present utterance and neither has to be discarded. In his

³ The amount of effort may of course differ from context to context, and from individual to individual.

⁴ The third and fourth type in Yus’ taxonomy are rarely found in advertising. The third type of puns produces absurd and nonsensical interpretations, but in advertising, hearers will always search for a relevant meaning with regard to the positive claim automatically inferred within this genre. Therefore, absurd readings will not often be found in puns in advertising. The fourth type, where the punster invalidates a first accessible interpretation in favor of a more unlikely interpretation, can only be found in conversation or interaction. In other words, two of the types of puns described by Yus (2003) coincide with the two types proposed by Tanaka (1994) and can be found in advertising.

definition, Yus stresses the fact that “the hearer, unable to choose one candidate as consistent with the principle of relevance, moves back and forth entertaining both humorously” (Yus, 2003: 1321).

Two other examples, originally devised for an English-speaking audience, are shown in (2) and (3).

- (2) Nothing comes between me and my Calvin Klein jeans (‘Calvin Klein jeans and I are inseparable’ and ‘I don’t wear any underwear’)
- (3) Adidas and Mitre use the skins of slaughtered kangaroos. Who’d want to be in their shoes?—Greenpeace (‘Who’d want to take their responsibility?’ and ‘Who’d want to buy their shoes?’)

The second type of puns described by Tanaka (1994) and Yus (2003) is one in which one of the two interpretations has to be discarded. Consumers know that an advertisement is designed to make a favorable claim about a product. If the first accessible interpretation does not yield such a favorable claim, they will search for an additional interpretation. In hindsight, inferring the first interpretation is a “useless waste of cognitive resources” (Yus, 2003: 1321, note 21). Example (4) illustrates this by playing on the two meanings of the expression “to grow,” ‘to develop’ and ‘to become irresistible’. It is clear that the first meaning has to be discarded, although it immediately comes to mind in the context of ‘roses’.

- (4) Roses grow on you—Cadbury’s chocolates

Other examples are:

- (5) How to stop yourself dying for sex—Don’t Aid Aids (‘How to stop yourself wanting sex very badly’ is discarded in favor of ‘How to stop yourself being killed by a sexually transmitted disease’).
- (6) When it rains, it pours—Morton Salt (‘When it rains, it rains heavily’, to be discarded in favor of ‘this salt runs freely even when the atmosphere is damp’).

Following Tanaka (1992, 1994) and Yus (2003), it can be predicted that receivers will appreciate puns in which all invested effort is rewarded with extra relevance (type 1), more than they will appreciate puns in which the salient interpretation is not relevant (type 2).⁵ This leads to the following hypothesis:

Slogans containing puns with two relevant meanings are appreciated more than slogans containing puns with only one relevant meaning.

Even if a pun has only one relevant meaning, the use of a pun may still have a humorous effect or produce a positive feeling because the reader “got it”. Whether this (positive) humorous effect will outweigh the (negative) effect of having to spend cognitive effort to infer an irrelevant interpretation is unclear. This leads to the following research question:

⁵ Note that this prediction is in line with Quintilian’s advice to orators.

Are slogans containing puns with only one relevant meaning appreciated more or less than are slogans without a pun?

3. Method

A total of 24 slogans were selected, all of which had been developed for a broad audience by professional copywriters and were published in various Dutch magazines in 2001. In a pre-testing phase, a larger sample of slogans was presented to groups of postgraduate students at Radboud University, Nijmegen. On the basis of these tests, the slogans were then divided into three groups: those that did not contain a pun, those that contained a pun with one relevant meaning, and finally those that contained a pun with two relevant meanings. Only slogans that could be indisputably attributed to one of the three groups remained in our corpus; the three groups ended up comprising eight slogans each (The 24 slogans and their translations are presented in Appendix). Care was taken that all slogans were interpretable without the original accompanying picture or typeface. However, in order to assess the possible additional effect of layout, the slogans were presented in two different ways: once in the original advertisement context, with original typeface, graphics, and visuals, and once in the typeface of the rest of the questionnaire, with only the brand name as additional information. Each of the participants rated each slogan only once. Figs. 1–3 present examples of the advertisements used in the questionnaire.

In all, 68 participants (48 female, 20 male) took part in the experiment. The participants were undergraduate students (mean age: 21 years; range = 19–28 years) of the Faculty of Arts at Radboud University.

A within-participants design was used. A questionnaire was developed to elicit data from participants. To check the effect of context, half of the participants first answered questions on 12 slogans in their original setting, and then on 12 (different) slogans with brand name alone. The other half of the participants first answered questions on the slogans without context, and then on slogans within their original setting. To control for order effects, two further versions were developed in which the order of slogans was reversed.



Fig. 1. *No pun*: Groots genieten—olive oil ('enjoy spectacularly').

In the third part of the questionnaire, participants were asked whether they had had one or more interpretations in mind while evaluating the slogans.

The data were analyzed using a two-way analysis of variance followed by planned contrasts. Analyses by participants (F1) and by slogans (F2) were carried out. Significant effects in the F1-analysis suggest that the same effects would occur with different participants; significant effects in the F2-analysis suggest that the same effects would occur if different slogans were used.

4. Results

First, it was assessed whether the participants recognized the puns in the slogans with puns (and correctly identified the slogans without a pun). A strong main effect of slogan type was obtained ($F(2, 66) = 125.36, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.79$). Comparisons revealed that the slogans containing puns (one relevant interpretation: $M = 6.32$; two relevant interpretations: $M = 6.21$) were much more frequently identified as allowing for more than one interpretation, as compared to the slogans without a pun ($M = 2.24$). However, these results also indicate that in approximately 25% of the cases, participants incorrectly identified the slogan as containing a pun (and vice versa).

Next, it was tested whether presenting the slogan in its original advertisement context influenced the appreciation scores of the slogan types. This proved not to be the case. There was no effect of context on the judgment of the well-chosenness of the slogan ($F_1(1, 67) = 2.93, p = 0.09$; $F_2(1, 21) = 1.31, p = 0.27$) or of its pleasingness ($F_1 < 1$; $F_2(1,21) = 1.09, p = 0.31$). Neither was there any influence from the context on the scores of puns by type or on the participants' judgments of well-chosenness ($F_1 < 1, F_2 < 1$) or pleasingness ($F_1 < 1, F_2 < 1$). Therefore, the data are collapsed over this factor. Table 1 presents the mean judgments and standard deviations of the participants for the different types of slogans.

The results show main effects of the type of pun on the judgment “well-chosen” ($F_1(2,66) = 33.79, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.51$; $F_2(2,21) = 4.55, p < 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.30$) and on the judgment “pleasing” ($F_1(2,66) = 88.82, p < 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.73$; $F_2(2,21) = 9.47, p = 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.47$). Planned comparisons revealed that slogans containing a pun were appreciated more than those without a pun. Whether or not the two interpretations of the pun were relevant had no effect on the appreciation of the ad – with one exception, viz., the participants' judgment on well – chosenness; here, participants rated slogans containing a pun with two relevant interpretations as better than those containing a pun with only one

Table 1

Mean judgment (and standard deviations) on well-chosenness and pleasingness of the different types of slogans (1 = very negative, 7 = very positive) as a function of the type of pun and the presence of context

	Well-chosen	Pleasing
No pun	4.17 (0.71)	3.44 (0.76)
One relevant interpretation	4.58 (0.62)	4.37 (0.67)
Two relevant interpretations	4.86 (0.71)	4.45 (0.81)

Table 2

Mean judgment (and standard deviations) on well-chosenness and pleasingness of the different types of slogans (1 = very negative, 7 = very positive) as a function of the type of pun and the interpretation of the slogan

	Well-chosen	Pleasing
Incorrectly identified		
No pun	4.59 (0.92)	4.10 (0.93)
One relevant interpretation	3.70 (0.88)	3.51 (1.07)
Two relevant interpretations	4.29 (1.20)	3.60 (1.24)
Correctly identified		
No pun	4.06 (0.85)	3.19 (0.83)
One relevant interpretation	4.83 (0.66)	4.83 (0.72)
Two relevant interpretations	5.05 (0.71)	4.69 (0.80)

relevant interpretation. This difference was not significant in the analysis by slogans ($p = 0.23$).

As noted above, in approximately one quarter of the cases participants incorrectly identified a slogan as containing a pun (whereas in fact it did not), or as not containing a pun (whereas in fact there was a pun). To assess the effect of these misinterpretations, a second analysis was conducted, in which the interpretation of the participants with regard to whether or not the slogan in question contained a pun was entered as an independent variable. The means are presented in Table 2.

The analysis revealed main effects of Correct identification and Slogan-type for both dependent variables. However, these main effects were qualified by a highly significant interaction between Identification and Slogan-type (Well-chosen: $F_1(2,34) = 29.82$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.64$; $F_2(2, 19) = 54.11$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.85$; Pleasing: $F_1(2, 34) = 35.05$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.67$; $F_2(2, 19) = 60.31$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.86$). These interactions are the result of the fact that slogans that are (correctly or incorrectly) identified as containing a pun are appreciated more than those that are identified (correctly or incorrectly) as not containing a pun. As a result, the “no pun” slogans that were identified as containing a pun were considered more pleasing than the “pun” slogans that were identified as not containing a pun. However, when the “pun” slogans were correctly identified, they were considered as more pleasing than the correctly identified “no pun” slogans.

With respect to the ‘well-chosen’ ratings, the pattern of results is somewhat more complicated. When incorrectly identified, the ‘one relevant interpretation’ slogans were considered less well-chosen than the ‘no pun’ slogans and the two relevant interpretations’ slogans (the two latter types were no different in this regard). When correctly identified, the ‘two relevant interpretations’ slogans were considered better chosen than the ‘one relevant interpretation’ slogans, which in turn were considered better chosen than the ‘no pun’ slogans.

5. Conclusion

The experiment was conducted to test the hypothesis that a slogan containing a pun with two relevant interpretations would be appreciated more than a pun with only one relevant interpretation. This proved to be the case only when the criterion was well-chosenness;

when pleasantness was the criterion by which the slogans were judged, no difference between the two slogan types was found.

The question was also addressed as to whether slogans containing a pun with only one relevant meaning were appreciated more than were slogans not containing a pun. The results clearly show that even if participants had to infer a second meaning that on second thoughts proved to be irrelevant, they still evaluated the slogan more favorably compared to a slogan without a pun.

6. Discussion

The assumptions of Tanaka (1992, 1994) and Yus (2003) are confirmed in our experiment: it is true that slogans with puns are considered more amusing and are appreciated more than slogans without puns. In addition, slogans that contain a pun with two relevant meanings are not considered more amusing, but they are considered more felicitous than slogans for which one meaning has to be rejected. These effects associated with puns are (statistically speaking) very large. That is, much of the variation in the ratings of the slogans can be attributed to the presence of a pun.

Further evidence for the importance of the pun for the appreciation of a slogan is provided by the fact that exactly the same slogan was appreciated much more when participants noticed the pun than when they missed it. Furthermore, slogans that did not contain a pun were evaluated much more positively when participants thought that they did contain a pun.

The fact that participants recognized puns in slogans where there actually were none, according to our definition of ‘pun’, might be the result of that somewhat restricted definition. For instance, the slogan “Een Tweede Huid—Hema panty’s” (‘A Second Skin—Hema pantyhose’) does not strictly speaking contain wordplay, but the metaphor can be considered as a new meaning for the product ‘pantyhose’, and therefore it is quite conceivable that some of our participants recognized more than one meaning. The same is true for “De BNG wordt weer bedankt—BNG bank” (‘Thanks again, BNG, [for making this possible]’ and ‘Thanks, BNG, but no thanks’ [ironic sense]), for which the two meanings of ‘to thank’ were hardly noticed by our participants, probably because the ironic sense of this expression was not really made clear in the slogan or in the rest of the advertisement. Gibbs also reports that it is the context that decides on how easily readers process irony (Gibbs, 1994: 385). In addition, it is possible that the appreciation of a slogan was influenced by the appreciation of the product or brand. Popular beers for instance are known to be very much appreciated by students, regardless of the way the advertisement is laid out. Testing is needed to see if the appreciation of a brand or product influences the appreciation of the slogan.

The participants mainly consisted of students, a majority of whom acknowledged being fond of word games. It is very well possible that this predilection for cognitive ‘challenges’ – and we have to consider our puns in slogans as such – is a prerogative of the intellectual elite and that a population which better reflects the average magazine reader will have another preference. On the other hand, on the basis of this argument, one would expect our participants, since they are likely to appreciate the elegance of the double fit, to find a

slogan with two relevant meanings more pleasing than one with only one relevant meaning; but, as reported above, this is not the case in our data.

We made sure that all our slogans were understandable without the accompanying picture. However, this type of slogan is relatively rare in magazine advertisements: usually, one of the meanings to which the ad alludes is only apparent in the accompanying visual. The picture often manipulates the salience of a meaning. Since we specifically excluded this type of slogan from our corpus, we do not know whether participants would have preferred a type of slogan where the pun resides in the interaction of word and image (cf. Forceville, 1996). It is conceivable that this kind of slogan is more appreciated than the purely cognitive kind, where the efforts are rewarded, on a solely cognitive and textual basis.

In view of the considerable size effects of our findings, it seems that the type of pun plays a considerable role in the appreciation of slogans. It should therefore be investigated how the appreciation of puns relates to other figures of speech in advertising. In addition, it would be useful to investigate whether the predilection for puns in advertising is a typically Dutch preference, or whether it exists in other cultures as well. All in all, figurative speech in advertising promises to become a fruitful field for future research.

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Appendix A

The 24 slogans used in the experiment. Product category in brackets.

No pun

1. Groots genieten—Bertolli olijfolie [olive oil]
'Enjoy spectacularly'
2. Je haarkleur herleeft met Schwarzkopf Color Refresher—Schwarzkopf
haarkleuringsproduct [hair product]
'The color of your hair comes to life again with Schwarzkopf Toner'
3. Nu kunnen je handen er altijd net zo jong uitzien als je je voelt—Nivea
handcrème [hand cream]
'Now your hands can feel as young as you do'
4. Tweede huid—Hema ondergoed [underwear]
'Second skin—Hema underwear'
5. Een wereld op zich—Duvel bier [beer]
'A world on its own—Duvel beer'
6. Jij slaat je er wel doorheen. [Ook in stressvolle tijden]—Valdispert
Rust medicijn [paracetamol]
'You'll manage. [Also in times of stress]—Valdispert
tranquilizing prescription'

7. Wie zijn ziel volgt, wacht grote ontmoetingen—Grimbergen bier [beer]
‘Great encounters await him who follows his soul’
8. De fruitigste sportsiroop—KC Sport siroop [syrup]
The fruitiest sports syrup’

One relevant interpretation

First translation = irrelevant interpretation;

Second translation = intended interpretation

1. Lak aan alles—Douglas Nagellak [nail polish]
‘To hell with it all’
‘Nail polish everywhere’
[‘lak’: ‘nail polish’; ‘lak aan’: ‘don’t give a damn’]
2. In Oost-Europa ziet iedereen ze vliegen—Austrian Airlines
luchtvaartmaatschappij [airline company]
‘In Eastern Europe, everybody is nuts’
‘In Eastern Europe, everybody looks at [Austrian Airlines’] flying machines’
[‘ze zien ze vliegen’ = ‘they see them fly’ and ‘they are crazy’]
3. Hij wil geen energie aan u verspillen. Daarom komt de Energie Adviseur
graag bij u langs—Essent energiemaatschappij [energy distributor]
‘He does not want to waste his time on your behalf. That’s why the Energy
Advisor likes to drop by.’
‘He does not want to waste energy on your behalf. That’s why the Energy
Advisor likes to drop by.’
[‘energie verspillen’ = ‘waste time’ and ‘waste energy’]
4. De BNG wordt weer bedankt—BNG bank [bank]
‘Thanks again, BNG’
‘Thanks, BNG, but no thanks’
[‘Weer bedankt’ = ‘thank you for making this possible’ and ‘no thanks’]
5. Als je een vechtpartij ziet deel dan gelijk drie tikken uit: bel 1-1-2 alarmlijn
[emergency number]
‘If you see a fight, throw three punches right away: call 1-1-2’
‘If you see a fight, call 1-1-2 right away’
[‘tikken uitdelen’ = ‘to deliver blows’ and ‘to hit the keypad’]
6. Bekijk het!—Manzine internetsite [internet site]
‘Suit yourself!!’
‘Have a look!’
[‘Bekijk het’ = ‘suit yourself’ and ‘look at it’]
7. Verse uitjes!—NS-Er-op-uit ideeënboek [Dutch Railways’ ‘Up and away’
Idea Book]
‘Fresh onions’
‘New excursions’
[uitje: diminutive of ‘ui’ = ‘onion’; ‘uitje’: short form of
‘uitstapje’ = ‘excursion’]

8. Dankzij Niria krijg ik mijn verdiende loon—Niria ingenieursvereniging
[union of engineers]
‘Thanks to Niria I get my deserts’
‘Thanks to Niria, I receive my fair wages’
[‘verdiende loon’ = ‘what you deserve’ and ‘salary earned’]

Two relevant interpretations

1. Dus jij denkt dat je vandalen weer op het goede spoor kunt zetten—NS
spoorwegpolitie [Dutch Railways railway police]
‘So you think you can put hooligans back on the right track’
‘So you think you can put hooligans back on the right platform’
[‘goede spoor’ = ‘right track’ and ‘right platform’]
2. De foodbreak die je klaar stoomt—Iglo foodbreak [soup]
‘The lunch break that gets you running [to cope with the rest of the day]’
‘The lunch break you prepare in a whiffy’
[‘klaar stomen’ = ‘to prepare rapidly (e.g., someone for an exam)’
and ‘to pressure cook’]
3. Zie je die jaloerse blikken?—Heineken Cooltas [cooler bag]
‘See these envious looks?’
‘See these envious cans?’
[‘blikken’ = ‘looks’ and ‘cans’]
4. Uw gedachten vloeiend op papier!—Lamy schrijfgerei [writing equipment]
‘Your thoughts on paper fluently’
‘Your thoughts on paper flowingly’
[‘vloeiend’ = ‘fluently’ and ‘flowingly’]
5. Koffie royaal [niet verkeerd]—Hertog ijs [ice cream]
‘Royal coffee. [Not bad.]’
‘Royal coffee. [Not café au lait]’
[‘koffie verkeerd’ = a kind of café au lait, as it is prepared, e.g., in
Holland or Israel: a little coffee and the rest milk; ‘niet verkeerd’ = ‘not bad’
and ‘not café au lait’]
6. Een mooi jaar om te schenken—2001 Premium bier [beer]
‘A nice year to give away’
‘A nice year to pour’
[‘schenken’ = ‘to give away’ and ‘to pour’]
7. Nieuwe Guhl Mango verzorgt je haar tot in de puntjes—Guhl shampoo
[shampoo]
‘New Guhl Mango takes care of your hair down to the details’
‘New Guhl Mango takes care of your hair down to its (split) ends’
[‘tot in de puntjes’ = ‘down to the details’ and ‘down to the ends
(of your hair)’]
8. Deze actie laat u niet lopen—Treintaxi [railway cab, i.e., one ordered
through the railway to meet you at your station of destination]

‘This promotion does not leave you walking’
 ‘You don’t want to miss out on this promotion’
 [‘laten lopen’ = ‘to leave walking’ and ‘to miss out on’]

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