Packing in Meaning: Applying Jakobson's Model of Communication to Packaging Design

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Abstract: From the level of the sign to culture, the practice of semiotic analysis concerns the construction and description of models. Within commercial semiotics, a few of these models (notably Greimas's semiotic square and Raymond Williams's concept of residual, dominant, and emergent), have proven particularly useful due to their ability to summarise cultural phenomena in a form readily digested and applied by marketing professionals to their brands. Packaging design is a frequent subject of commercial semiotic enquiry and draws on a wide array of semiotic phenomena ranging from visuals, to textures, and the lived experience of interacting with the package. How can we approach a comprehensive understanding of the potential of packaging design to communicate meaning? In what ways can we say that a package can 'mean', and how as semioticians can we help analyze and create novel packaging solutions that further brand meaning? Roman Jakobson's general model of linguistic communication proposes a diverse array of cross cultural communicative functions for language, but is not currently a key model in the commercial semiotician's toolkit. This paper proposes that this linguistic model has the potential to be translated into the multisensory realm of general semiotics and applied to packaging design. It will particularly consider how Jakobson's six communicative functions (emotive, referential, poetic, conative, metalingual, and phatic) are relevant to the numerous non-linguistic sign systems (colour, texture, shape, typography, imagery, material etc.) employed in packaging. In so doing, this paper proposes a system for understanding the meaning potential of packaging design as not only an aesthetic vehicle but also a strategic tool for the cross-cultural development and communication of brand identity.

Keywords: packaging design, modeling systems theory, Roman Jakobson, Jakob von Uexküll, biosemiotics, communication

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Introduction

To be semiotically active is to construct models. In his *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans*, Jakob von Uexküll observed that "each and every living thing is a subject that lives in its own world, of which it is the centre" (Uexküll 1934: 45). As an example, Uexküll describes the world of a tick:

> From the enormous world surrounding the tick, three stimuli glow like signal lights in the darkness and serve as directional signs that lead the tick surely to its target [. . .] the whole rich world surrounding the tick is constricted and transformed into an impoverished structure that, most importantly of all, consists of only three features and three effect marks—the tick's environment [. . .] the poverty of this environment is needful for the certainty of action, and certainty is more important than riches. (Uexküll 1934: 51)

The vast complexity of the surrounding world is filtered, through the tick's perceptual organs, and reconfigured as a simple internal model based around a few meaningful signifiers. This semiotic model is known as an "umwelt" and constitutes the actual lived world of the tick. The modelling process Uexküll describes is not unique to the tick; it is true of all living things. As Thomas Sebeok was was frequently known to comment, "to be alive is to be semiotically active" (Kull, Emmeche, and Hoffmeyer 2011: 2). The difference between the umwelt of a tick and of a human is only a matter of relative complexity. As Uexküll observes, "the simple animal has a simple environment; the multiform animal has an environment just as richly articulated as it is" (1934: 50).

Whatever the complexity, in order to generate these internal perceptual models, an organism must engage in the process of semiosis, "the biological capacity to produce and comprehend forms" (Sebeok and Danesi 2000: 6). Semiosis is defined as "the fundamental process that carries meaning and in which meaning is created" (Kull et al. 2011: 2). John Coletta explains that, through semiosis, humans can construct models at four different "registers". He states, more specifically, that

> Semiotic modelling [. . .], is virtually synonymous with semiosis. [. . .] What we generally call 'semiotic modelling' may be understood to obtain, to manifest itself, in four developmentally arranged registers, only one of which is itself formally called "modelling". These are "perception", "semiosis", "modelling", and "representation". (Coletta 2015: 952)

Through these processes we "make sense" of our whole lives. From the raw, lived experience of perception, through growing levels of understanding and engagement, to, finally, the communication of our understanding to others, human life can be considered a series of interactions with models at increasing levels of abstraction.

Charles Sanders Peirce's tri-partite model of the sign can be considered a tacit acknowledgement of semiosis as a modelling process. As Peirce observes:

> A *sign* is a thing which serves to convey knowledge of some other thing, which it is said to *stand for* or *represent*. This thing is called the *object* of the sign; the idea in the mind that the sign excites, which is a mental sign of the same object, is called an *interpretant* of the sign. (Peirce 1895)

A sign is a model which "stands for or represents" an object. The vast variety of other semiotic theories (Lotman's semiosphere, Greimas square, etc.) are effectively models built upon models, in their attempts to stand for different aspects of culture.

This should not be viewed as problematic. But it is important to acknowledge that (as with Uexküll's tick) all semiotic models are necessarily simplifications and that "models can obfuscate truth as much as they reveal it" (Malmgren 2016: 59). Despite this, as Sebeok and Danesi observe,

> Models serve many functions in human life. They allow people to recognise patterns in things; they act as predictive guides or plans for taking actions; they serve as exemplars of specific kinds of phenomena; and the list could go on and on. (Sebeok and Danesi 2000: 2)

It is the simplifications necessary in the construction of models that allows them to highlight certain aspects of 'reality', and act as guides, while excluding other elements. In this sense, simplifications are the source of the power of the model, as they enable a model's ability to clarify the state of things and identify the key drivers of meaning. As Uexküll observes, it is the "impoverished" model of its reality that allows a tick to act decisively, because "the poverty of this environment is needful for the certainty of action, and certainty is more important than riches" (1934: 51). Ultimately, the continued usefulness of any model is its most important characteristic; if it ceases to be effective, it will soon be modified or abandoned.

The Role of Models in Commercial Semiotics

Commercial semiotics necessarily exists in a space "de-fanged" of much of its theoretical context. When communicating with brand managers under pressure to demonstrate "twice the impact, in half the time, at half the cost" (Mediratta et al. 2016), a focus on clear, actionable outputs (e.g., "do this, don't do that") is necessary over and above the full explanation of the models or theories used to unearth the outputs. That said, some semiotic models have proven useful as a means of clearly communicating brand positioning opportunities, notably Algirdas Julien Greimas's semiotic square, and Raymond Williams's concept of the residual, dominant, and emergent within culture. These models have proved to have enduring value for commercial semioticians. In his influential *Semiotics, Marketing and Communication*, Jean-Marie Floch states that:

> The interest of the semiotic square clearly lies in its ability to organise a conceptual universe coherently, even one that is not recognised as "rational". It allows anticipation both of the ways in which meaning may unfold, and of the positions of meaning that are logically present but not yet in force. (Floch 1998: 145)

The fact that the semiotic square presents all of this information in a simple one-page diagram, and that its spatial organisation satisfies the client's desire to identify any "white space" within a category, have all contributed to this model's ongoing popularity within commercial semiotics.

Similarly, since its introduction by Malcolm Evans during his time at the pioneering commercial semiotics agency *Semiotic Solutions* (Evans 2016: 20mins, 50secs), Raymond Williams's concepts of residual, dominant, and emergent have entered the commercial semiotician's lexicon, with practitioners striving to identify "emergent codes and trends in culture that can be leveraged for purposes of innovation" (Oswald 2012: 38). These models have gained traction within commercial semiotics as they have proven to provide the right kind of simplifications for clients, enabling them to take decisive brand action.

This paper looks at a rather more complex semiotic model, Roman Jakobson's model of communication; and I will argue that, while prone to the limitations and simplifications evident in all semiotic models, there are a number of useful outputs for commercial semioticians that can be gained by integrating this model into their analysis of packaging design. While the complexity of this model may not make it suitable for presentation to clients directly, the model and its associated "communication functions" can, I feel, help to bring clarity to the packaging decoding process and ultimately assist in the identification of the kinds of concrete actionable outputs desired by clients.

Roman Jakobson's Model of Communication

Roman Jakobson (1896–1982) was a Russian-American linguist, important in the fields of phonology, structuralism, translation, and literary theory. His model of communication has been very influential within linguistics and literary semiotics; and it recently made ripples in popular culture, featuring as the central plot device in Laurent Binet's (2017) novel, *The Seventh Function of Language.* Yet, despite this high profile, it is this authors' feeling that Jakobson's model of communication has potential that is currently untapped by semiotics at large.

Jakobson's model of communication breaks down any instance of verbal communication into six constituent factors. He states that, for any instance of verbal communication:

> The Addresser sends a Message to the Addressee. To be operative the message requires a Context referred to [. . .] seizable by the addressee and either verbal or capable of being verbalised; a Code fully, or at least partially, common to the addresser and addressee [. . .], and, finally, a Contact, a physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and addressee, enabling both of them to enter and stay in communication. (Jakobson 1960: 353)

The six factors identified and defined by Jakobson are the addresser, addressee, message, context, channel, and code. The precise nature of these six factors in verbal and written communication is identified in Table 1, while their arrangement is shown in Figure 1 (both on next page).

Crucially, for Jakobson, "verbal behaviour is goal directed" (1960: 351). As such, each of the six communication factors he identifies governs a certain "function" of language, specifically the referential, emotive, poetic, phatic, metalingual, or conative function. The specific function associated with each of the communication factors can be seen indicated in the brackets beneath it in Figure 1.

Jakobson states that: "the verbal structure of a message depends primarily on the predominant function"; though, "the accessory participation of the other functions in such messages must be taken into account by the observant linguist" (Jakobson 1960: 353). For Jakobson, a communication function becomes "predominant" and guides the overall meaning of a statement when a given message's verbal structure is "oriented towards" the relevant communication factor (Jakobson 1960: 353). For instance, statements that are oriented towards the addresser, would be those making prominent use of "I", "my", "personally", or other extra-lingual sounds that draw attention towards the sender, such as tutting or exhaling. Statements that are oriented towards the addresser in this way fulfill the emotive function.

To illustrate Jakobson's concept of orientation within a verbal statement, I have listed some examples below, with the predominant

Table 1. Nature of Jakobson's Six Constituent Factors of Communication

Factor	Spoken Communication	Written
Addresser	The person speaking the message	The person writing the message
Addressee	The person hearing the message	The person reading the message
Context	The shared cultural/physical environment in which they speak/listen	The shared cultural/physical environment in which they write/read
Message	The audible utterances of the Addresser	The written text of the Addresser
Contact	The sonic channel through which they speak	The visual sensory channel in which the text sits
Code	The social agreement linking certain sounds to operations and phenomena	The social agreement linking certain images/shapes to the operations and phenomena

CONTEXT
(Referential)

MESSAGE
(Poetic)

ADDRESSER —————————— **ADDRESSEE**
(Emotive) **(Conative)**

CONTACT
(Phatic)

CODE
(Metalingual)

Figure 1. Arrangement of Jakobson's Six Constituent Factors of Communication

communication function identified and the part of the statement that points towards the relevant communication factor underlined:

Referential: "Isn't the weather nice today"
Emotive: "I'm enjoying the weather"
Poetic: "sizzling summer sunshine"
Phatic: "Hey, take a brolly it's raining"
Metalingual: "I'd say it's more of a drizzle"
Conative: "You should wear a hat"

The examples given for the referential, emotive, and poetic functions, all describe similar real-world situations, but as we can see, the subtle differences in the verbal structure of each, result in a complete change of predominant function, coloring the overall connotations of the statement. These examples are simplified, and I have chosen to highlight one communication function in each case; but, as is probably evident, Jakobson's communication functions do not operate in isolation. As he comments:

> Although we distinguish six basic aspects of language, we could [. . .] hardly find verbal messages that would fulfil only one function. The diversity [of possible messages] lies not in a monopoly of some one of these several functions but in a different hierarchical order of functions. (Jakobson 1960: 353)

Any instance of linguistic communication might have one or two predominant functions, but the others will remain present in supporting roles. Just as we cannot conceive of a verbal communication situation that would exist in the absence of one of the communication factors (without context for instance), all functions must be present to some extent (albeit in reduced roles) in order for an instance of communication to occur. It is not the presence of functions, but their hierarchy that distinguishes a particular instance of communication and is responsible for the diversity of ways in which we can express ourselves linguistically.

The importance of this concept of hierarchy is a key point for commercial semioticians as Jakobson's model of communication locates an important aspect of linguistic meaning, not simply "in" the words employed, but in their structural interrelation. Due to their emergence from this structural hierarchy, and not from individual signifiers, Jakobson believes that the communication functions he identifies are present in all global languages, commenting that: "each language encompasses several concurrent patterns which each are characterised by a different function" (Jakobson 1960: 352–353).

Jakobson's communication functions emerge from meta-level hierarchical interrelations between each of the communication factors, and it is therefore reasonable to assume the probability of their existence for other non-linguistic sign systems, if reasonable equivalents for each of the communication factors can be identified. Jakobson (1960: 351) alludes to this possibility, stating, "language shares many properties with some other systems of signs or even with all of them (pansemiotic features)." It is therefore reasonable to postulate the possible existence of Jakobson's communication functions for other non-linguistic sign systems. In this paper I will investigate the viability of incorporating Jakobson's model into the analysis of packaging, a primarily visual and tactile medium.

Why Packaging?

That brands offer consumers benefits beyond the functionality of their products is abundantly clear. In his paper "Discourses of Identity", Theo Van Leeuwen identifies an important shift in the history of marketing, when disposable income allowed purchasing decisions to become less a reflection of necessity, and more an expression of a consumer's personal "lifestyle". As Van Leeuwen states:

> After 1960 [. . .] a new concept of style was developed in the field of marketing, the concept of 'lifestyle' [. . .] such lifestyles, however, much as they were concerned with intangibles such as attitudes and personality traits, nevertheless had to be signified by appearances, for instance styles of dress, interior decoration etc. (Van Leeuwen 2009: 213)

For Van Leeuwen, this change in the culture "introduced choice where there used to be destiny" (2009: 214), effectively freeing consumers from habitual consumption practices based on "age, gender, class, occupation and even nationality" (2009: 214). Due to this cultural shift, consumers became able, through their purchasing behavior, to "play" at different identities, and to take ownership of their own personal narrative.

In contemporary practice commercial semioticians are directly involved in this process of communicating 'lifestyle'; and, as participants in a "discipline of form" (Floch 1998: 3), are very much aware that all touch points in the consumer journey are important vehicles for these aspirational messages. Yet, despite its potential communicative importance, packaging is often relegated to the role of mimicking or repeating messages found in other brand communications. This can be clearly seen in a recent *L'Oréal* print advertising campaign, which features imagery of packaging designs that serve as miniatures of the print copy in which they are featured. These packaging designs closely mimic the advertising imagery, and employ the same model, slogans, and livery featured in the advertising. This represents an extreme example, but similar "repetition" strategies are particularly common for hair and personal care brands and are a widespread practice in a number of other Fast-moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) categories.

The linguistic division between "packaging" (used to refer to the materials within which a product is sold), and "communications" (used to refer to advertising and promotional materials intended to convey a message) within marketing and branding texts, is further evidence of the overlooked potential of packaging as a communication medium in its own right. Simply replicating advertising messaging on packaging fails to account for the different contexts in which we observe packaging and advertising, as well as ignoring the multisensory communication potential that packaging, as a physical medium provides. This failing overlooks a unique opportunity for brands to provide strongly differentiating and sensorially rich messaging.

Semioticians must strive to engage more with packaging development and research, as it is an area where the ability to decode multisensory inputs is of particular importance. As such, packaging design is an area in which it is worth exploring the potential of Jakobson's model of communication as a tool to provide strategic guidance, and actionable feedback, to commercial clients.

Adapting Jakobson's Model of Communication to the Commercial Setting

Jakobson states that "many poetic features belong not only to the science of language but to the whole theory of signs, that is, to general semiotics" (1960: 351). While Jakobson's model of communication is currently conceived as a model of linguistic communication, we can see that there are reasonable grounds for exploring the applicability of the model to a diverse range of other sign systems. If Jakobson's communication functions do indeed emerge from the hierarchical inter-relations of communication factors, exploring how this might work in different sign systems will clarify our understanding of the original linguistic model, and perhaps allow us to approach a general semiotic model for all of Jakobson's communication functions. In the interests of this paper, I will not proactively pursue a general semiotic model of this nature but will attempt to translate the functions of Jakobson's original into the sphere of packaging design, resulting in a model grounded in the practical considerations of commercial semiotic analysis.

In order to do this, we need to carefully consider the implications of adapting a linguistic model, focused on fundamentally visual and auditory experiences, into something applicable to the range of sign systems involved in our interpretation of packaging. In order to start this process of adaptation, it is worth interrogating the flexibility that already exists within Jakobson's model of communication due to its applicability to both written and spoken language. Let's review Jakobson's summary of the communication factors again:

> The Addresser sends a Message to the Addressee. To be operative the message requires a Context referred to [. . .] seizable by the addressee and either verbal or capable of being verbalised; a Code fully, or at least partially, common to the addresser and addressee [. . .], and, finally,

> a Contact, a physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and addressee, enabling both of them to enter and stay in communication. (Jakobson 1960: 353)

In this description, Jakobson describes a situation of linguistic communication which could be either spoken or employ written language. In each of these situations Jakobson's addresser, addressee, context, message, contact, and code terms denote slightly different things, albeit ones that fulfil the same role in the act of communication. Table 1 identifies what these would be in each specific case.

As we can see there are shared roles in each case that help define the key aspect of each of these communication factors. For the addresser, this is the role of sending, and for the addressee this is the role of receiving, as is simply implied in their respective names. The message is the meaningful material sent by the addresser and received by the addressee. Getting a little more complicated, the context has the role of being accessible to both participants, and to be referred to by, while existing outside of, the message. Contact is the sensory channel or channels, through which the message is sent, and code is the set of conventions employed in the construction of a mutually intelligible message.

Considering these fundamental roles, in what way does a package communicate that might be similar to the spoken or written communication situations? Firstly, the predominant use of the visual channel for packaging seems to indicate that the experience of decoding a package will be most similar to the written example. Additionally, spoken language has an actively 'performed' element, potentially involving gestures and vocal inflections, that are absent from packaging (though some unusual and dynamic packaging solutions may approach these capacities). For these reasons, the "written" example from Table 1 provides the strongest initial basis for the adaptation of Jakobson's linguistic model for a packaging analysis context.

If we think of a package on a shelf in a store, who is sending a message to whom? In the context of commercial semiotics, the addresser is the brand, the figurehead or organization existing above the product or range in question; the addressee is the consumer they are communicating with. The message therefore is the package itself, while the contact is predominantly the visual channel, through which the package and consumer first make "contact". The context is a little more complicated but is informed by the types of messages that consumers are used to receiving within the space of commercial exchange shared by the brand and consumer. This context is the conventional space of "brand promises" a flexible space based on the types of benefits that the brand and consumer can reasonably expect a product to offer. These promises are most readily evident in the functional value benefits frequently mentioned on promotional packs (e.g., "50% extra free", "new lower price", "better for your skin", "healthier recipe", "makes you a more attractive person"), and can also be seen in comparative messages, such as "50% more than the leading brand". Code is also more complex in the visual realm as it includes not just explicit linguistic rules of grammar and punctuation, but also a wide range of unspoken visual and multisensory conventions and interpretation biases.

Based on these considerations we can summarize the proposed alignment of communication factors between the written linguistic model and its packaging-based correspondences in Table 2.

Table 2. Alignment of Communication Factors to Packaging

Factor	Written	Corresponding Factor of the In-store Commercial Situation
Addresser	The person writing the message	Brand
Addressee	The person reading the message	Consumer
Context	The immediate cultural/physical environment in which they write/read	The shop environment/commercial culture
Message	The written text of the Addresser	Package
Contact	The visual sensory channel in which the text sits	Visual channel (with support from other senses
Code	The social agreement linking certain images/shapes to the operations and phenomena	Familiar visual and linguistic conventions

This will serve as our starting point for reimagining Jakobson's model of communication for the analysis of packaging in a way that is faithful to the original model. All of these communication factors and their relationship to aspects of commercial packaging will be explored in more depth in the specific individual sections that follow; and, as we will see, this starting point is a better fit with some functions than others but does provide us with a reasonable theoretical basis for pursuing the adaptation of this model into the space of packaging analysis.

Addresser: The Emotive Function

> The so-called Emotive or "expressive" function, focused on the Addresser, aims a direct expression of the speaker's attitude toward what he is speaking about. It tends to produce an impression of a certain emotion whether true or feigned. (Jakobson 1960: 354)

For Jakobson, the emotive function "orients towards" the addresser (sender) and is best exemplified linguistically by words and sound changes providing information about the addresser's opinions and worldview, such as "wow!", or "phew!" In written texts, the use of unconventional morphology is a frequently employed tactic for highlighting the subjective role of the addresser in sending the message. This is evident in the difference between describing an object as "big", verses using "biiiiiiiiig" (Jakobson 1960: 354). In the first case, the statement describes an object in a conventional and fairly dispassionate manner (favoring the referential function); but, in the second example, the message is oriented back to the addresser due to their irregular use of language. The authorial control that the addresser exerts in lengthening the vowel sound serves to highlight the subjective and emotional nature of their response (Jakobson 1960: 354). Expanding on this, Jakobson gives the example of an actor asked to "make forty different messages from the phrase [. . .] 'this evening' by diversifying its expressive tint", going on to describe how the actor "made a list of some forty emotional situations, then emitted the given phrase in accordance with each of these situations" (Jakobson 1960: 354). From these examples we can see that it is less so the nature of the content of the message, than the way in which it is delivered (a related property) that characterizes the use of the emotive function. Specifically, messages which are delivered in such a fashion as to highlight the subjective perspective of the author, employ the emotive function, but when we look at a package, who or what is communicating with us? Culture, the product, or the brand, would all seem to be reasonable answers, and the truth is probably a blend of all three, but in terms of the communicative intent and the "subjective perspective" behind the message, this is driven wholly by the brand. So, what is a brand? And how does a brand talk about or point to itself?

Brands can elevate products and invest them with a sense of specialness and personality. Former *Sunkist* CEO, Russell L. Hanlin, commented that; "an orange . . . is an orange . . . is an orange. Unless, of course, that orange happens to be a *Sunkist*, a name eighty percent of consumers know and trust" (Aaker 1996: 1). In this sense, a brand presents a personality and a relatable, and trustable identity, it expresses emotions and ideas, which in turn allows consumers to respond to it in an emotional and ideological way.

Brands invest products with human characteristics. This is evident in a metaphor that brand building expert, David Aaker, uses when he states that "a brand is the face of business strategy" (Aaker 2014: 7). This "face" metaphor is often employed literally in a brand's visual identity. Think for example of *Uncle Ben's*, *Aunt Bessie's*, *Captain Morgan's*, *Wendy's*, or *Papa John's*, these are all highly visible brands with well-known faces (real or imagined), embedded at the "heart" of their visual identities (another humanizing metaphor). These faces literally create a character for the brand, a human or anthropomorphic physical identity, to which we can ascribe relatable motivations and emotions. The same is implicitly true when a brand employs a first, full, or family name in the absence of a visible "face": e.g., *Jim Beam*, *Hershey's*, *Levi's*, *Ben & Jerry's*, *Cadbury's*, *Denny's* or *Trader Joes*, or uses a face or supporting character in branding separate from their name, e.g., *KFC*'s Colonel Sanders, the *Marlboro* man, the *Pillsbury* dough boy, or *Monopoly*'s Rich Uncle Moneybags. These strategies all employ humanizing signifiers to establish an emotionally resonant personality for a brand.

For packaging specifically, there are a number of additional signifiers that can be powerful ways of communicating a relatable identity. The tone of voice employed in text on packaging can communicate the emotive function. For example, *Kellogg's* well known "they're grrreat!" slogan for their *Frosted Flakes* range, which directly echoes Jakobson's linguistic "biiiiig" example. Alternatively, the use of informal or slang language can imply membership of a certain socio-cultural group, creating a sense of connection and relatability between brands and similar consumer demographics, and help to establish the brand's emotional and ideological worldview.

Beyond linguistics, the style of imagery employed on a package can also invoke the emotive function. For instance, the use of high or low color saturation, contrast and brightness levels, visual filters such as black white or sepia tone, or hand drawn illustration styles can be used to anchor a brand in a certain historical period or align it with certain artistic movements, building up an identifiable persona for the brand. Similarly, typography can be used to build up the personality of a brand. Theo Van Leeuwen observes in his paper "Towards a Semiotics of Typography" that:

> The 'Herculaneum' typeface, imports aspects of the language of informal Ancient Roman inscriptions on papyrus, into a contemporary typeface, and can therefore be used to connote the values we associate with Antiquity and the Roman Empire. (Van Leeuwen 2006: 146)

Script typefaces are often a simple means of communicating a brand's gender, as is evident with the observation that "script typefaces are often given gendered names" (Lemon 2013: 22), in contrast to "androgynous" digital type (Schwemer-Scheddin 1998: 66).

Typography can also communicate ideas about a brand's personality through the use of experiential metaphors. These metaphors are a result of the fact that; "a material signifier has a meaning potential that derives from our physical experience of it [. . .] and from our ability to extend our practical, physical experience metaphorically" (Van Leeuwen 2006: 146). These experiential metaphors can be used for emotional purposes, such as the ability of "irregular" letterforms to communicate a rebellious attitude, due to the fact that:

> In our own physical experience of writing, such irregularities stem from an inability or unwillingness to apply the rules of 'neat writing' we are taught in school. As a result, irregularity has, amongst other things, the potential to signify a kind of rebellion against the norms of the school, or, by extension, other coercive institutions. (Van Leeuwen 2006: 147)

All of these signifiers tell us something (whether real of fabricated) about the brand, be it its gender, history, personality, values, and ideology. This information is not necessarily overtly emotional in content, but it does serve the role of defining a brand's subjective perspective on the world and helping to build a sense of relation between a brand and a consumer. The articulation of this subjective worldview is vital for any culturally resonant brand. As David Aaker suggests:

> A brand should not only define its functional purpose, the job that it is going to do, but also to express the brand's higher purpose. The higher purpose suggests emotional and social benefits coming from choosing that brand. Coca Cola's functional purpose is to "relieve thirst with a good taste." Its higher purpose is to "deliver happiness." (Kotler 2016)

Note that this notion of higher purpose is differentiated from the product's functional role, and is explicitly linked to an emotional benefit (delivering happiness) thereby aligning Aaker with Jakobson's notion of the emotive function.

It is clear that, during this process of adapting Jakobson's model of communication from a person-to-person model, to a brand-to-person model, a brand actually mimics and fulfils multiple roles similar to that of a person. In the brand context, however, there is a slight shift; and overt emotionality is often masked or communicated through a subtler ideological perspective. This is natural, as while we can empathize or support the aims of a brand, we are less likely to be brought to tears, or experience deep joy at their ability to deliver on them, in a way that we might when relating to the successes or failures of a close personal friend. It is clear, however, that it is not sufficient for a brand to dispassionately communicate its ability to deliver functional benefits. If it is to endure, a brand must foster a relatable ideological connection that engenders a degree of emotional response in consumers. As we can see, this aim is fulfilled on packaging by signifiers that are oriented towards the addresser brand, either by giving it a human face or name, expressing feelings, communicating an ideology, or building a relatable back story.

Addressee: The Conative Function

> Orientation towards the Addressee, the Conative function, finds its purest grammatical expression in the vocative and imperative. (Jakobson 1960: 355)

In the situation of packaging analysis, the addressee, or receiver, is the consumer viewing the package on the shelf. This being the case, in what ways can packaging design directly address a consumer? Most simply, this is done linguistically, through statements including "you" to directly address the consumer. This strategy can be seen in *L'Oréal*'s famous packaging and advertising slogan: "Because you're worth it".

In an article chronicling the history of their slogan, former face of *L'Oréal* (there's the brand as human metaphor again), Aimee Mullins, described the slogan, stating:

> for me, [the slogan] was a defiant call to action for women, [. . .] it was saying, 'You know what, I'm not doing this so I can snag a man or get a promotion. I'm doing this for whatever my reasons are and that's good enough'. (Verner 2017)

Mullins's reference to a "call to action" is particularly interesting, as, for Jakobson, statements oriented towards the addressee invoke the conative function, a function which aims to directly produce some change in action or state of mind, such as when a character commands another, "drink!" (Jakobson 1960: 355). The *L'Oréal* slogan that "came to represent a movement as much as a product range" (Verner 2017) perfectly fulfils this function.

That said, the *L'Oréal* slogan has actually changed subtly over its history, and this change represents an interesting shift in emphasis between two different communication functions. The original slogan was "because I'm worth it", spoken in a commercial by Joanne Desseau. In this case the "I'm" prominent in the statement invokes not the conative, but the emotive function, serving to personify the brand as charismatic, assured, and confident. The shift to "because you're worth it", puts the focus instead on the consumer, framing the brand in the role of a supportive friend, encouraging a moment of personal enjoyment. In this example we can see how a superficially small linguistic change utilised the conative function to communicate a sense of empowerment to the consumer, resulting in a "movement" around the brand.

The conative function is similarly employed on packaging by a number of other brands, for instance *Budweiser*'s large "this Bud's for you" wording on packages, or British tea brand *Typhoo*'s slogan "you only get an 'oo' with *Typhoo*", which employs both the conative and emotive function to communicate a product that provides a personal emotional uplift. All instructional wording on a package (e.g., "open here") directly fulfils the conative function, but there are also non-linguistic ways of addressing the consumer. For example, imagery that references before and after moments of consumption, application, or product use, visually pushes the addressee toward the moment of consumption, implicitly stating, that "you too could be this refreshed", or "your kitchen could be this clean". Additionally, images that imply a sense of change, such as the sparkling teeth featured on many toothpaste products, or shiny surfaces on tins of polish, all utilize the conative function to code products that offer a potent transformative effect on the lives of consumers.

Message: The Poetic Function

> "Focus on the Message for its own sake is the Poetic function of language [. . .] promoting the palpability of signs [. . .]". (Jakobson 1960: 356)

As we have discussed, in the case of packaging design, the package itself serves as the message between the brand and consumer. For Jakobson, orientation towards the message invokes the poetic function, and is displayed linguistically in instances when the sounds themselves, or the "palpability of signs", is the focus of communication. As is familiar within the English language, the repetition of certain syllables emphasizes the materiality of the sounds employed. In English, commonly recognized forms of this type of repetition are rhyme, alliteration, assonance, sibilance, and fricatives, although others exist, and there are various other mechanisms in different languages. The use of the poetic function is a key component of communication found in nonsense verse, rhyming slogans, and lyrics (which instead must repeat tonal elements found in the musical melody). Each of these also employs other communication functions; but as Jakobson states, "the poetic function is not the sole function of verbal art, only its dominant function" (Jakobson 1960: 356). How then can a package orient towards itself in order to utilize the poetic function?

Unlike language, packaging has numerous material resources on which it can draw. Similar to language, repetition is a common tool for emphasizing the materiality of these resources. When something is gift wrapped, or packed inside several layers, each layer reinforces the package's overall materiality, invoking the poetic function to communicate the specialness of the object contained within. Other strategies can also be employed, such as contrast, which can be highlighted through the presence of multiple distinct textures as part of a single package, such as the fabric bag and embossed glass of *Crown Royal* whiskey, or velvet ribbons, crepe paper and etched glass components of perfume packaging. In this case, materiality is reinforced through diversity rather than repetition, emphasizing the breadth of sensory potential available to packaging.

Increasingly common is another contrast strategy, that of employing unpolished/unrefined industrial textures that contrast with our cultural expectations for polished and glossy packaging. This increasingly popular strategy can be seen with the rough brown paper bags used by *Whole Foods* and other premium grocery stores. The contrast between these unrefined materials and the processed and polished surfaces that we have become accustomed to handling remind us of the basic material nature of packaging.

Another strategy that invokes the poetic function is the use of iconicity, or packages that have been specifically designed to resemble other products, such as Jean-Paul Gaultier's fragrances sold in 'tin can' style packaging or special edition spirits bottles sold in barrel style cases. When an object resembles another object but is revealed (through package functioning or opening) to not in fact be that object, we are made aware of the semiotic contrivances employed in packaging design and construction. Similarly, packaging employing elaborate folds and mechanisms, such as *Apple*'s sliding laptop boxes, orient toward their own material "artifice", coding poetic products that have been "crafted" to provide a richly textured multisensory experience.

In short, any superfluous physical package features not essential to the transportation and selling of a product evoke the poetic function. This may include such features as ribbons, textures, additional wrapping, display cases, and fabric bags—all of which emphasize the materiality of the packaging itself. Employing the poetic function, packaging fulfils the role of the message in Jakobson's communication model, and this becomes the predominant focus of its own instance of communication. In such instances references to the product or the consumer are secondary and limited only to what can be inferred about the product through the specific "poetic" means made available by the packaging. Repetition of soft textures, for instance, might communicate an indulgent and sensual product, while packaging featuring novel paper engineering might carry connotations of the technical and scientific proficiency of the brand. Poetic packaging strategies have proven particularly popular for luxury fragrance brands where the carefully constructed nature of the package can communicate the care and attention that has gone into the fragrance, something that might not otherwise be immediately apparent when viewing the perfume liquid itself.

Context: The Referential Function

> An orientation towards the Context—briefly the so called Referential [. . .] function—is the leading task of numerous messages. (Jakobson 1960: 353)

For Roman Jakobson, the referential function corresponds to the factor of context and is displayed in descriptions and pointing words (such as "that" or "there") identifying individuals and objects: e.g., "Is that your car?" But what is the context for a piece of packaging? Considering that the package must be able to point towards it, and that it must be "seizable by the addressee" (Jakobson 1960: 353), this context needs to be immediately available when a consumer first views the package. Obviously, packaging can sit in a diverse range of store or sale environments, in this sense the context cannot be physical so much as conceptual. It is the thematic context of financial exchange for a product—the context of western capitalism at large.

In practice the context of financial exchange is pointed to through a variety of means on packaging, such as prominent price indicators, banners featuring linguistic references to affordability (e.g., "great value", "50% extra free", "new low price"), or wording suggesting the product's scarcity (e.g., "limited edition"), which reference value as a product of supply and demand. In addition, brand or range names that employ financial terminology (e.g., "budget", "value", "cost", "saver", "dollar") and use logo imagery of price labels, bar codes, calculators, or coins, foreground the commercial context connoting products endowed with anthropomorphic awareness that they exist to be purchased and make being sold their primary function.

Signifiers of commerce and selling are often particularly visible on proprietary or budget ranges. These ranges frequently strip back all other signifiers, solely focusing on price-focused messaging. This is often achieved through very minimal, or largely white, package color schemes and a scarcity of product imagery, allowing the referential value message to speak without having to compete too closely with any of the other communication functions. The reduction of other messages is culturally acknowledged in the "no frills" description often given to these product ranges and services.

It is interesting to note that Jakobson identifies the referential function as "the leading task of numerous messages" (Jakobson 1960: 353). There is no doubt that selling products is the leading task of a great deal of packaging imagery, text, and additional features, which all (albeit indirectly) communicate the benefits of purchasing the product. Other functions may accompany, or mask, the referential function on an individual package; but this selling role is implicitly true in the majority of packaging designs and is strongly present even when expressed less directly.

While these value signifiers are embedded in a number of specific ranges, package details relating to the referential function are often fleeting details, intended to gain consumer attention and drive sales for a brief period (e.g., "buy one get one free" promotions). Due to this there is frequently an overlap of the referential function with our next focus: the phatic function.

Contact: The Phatic Function

> To check whether the channel works, to attract attention of the interlocutor or to confirm his continued attention[: This is the] Phatic function. (Jakobson 1960: 355)

For Jakobson, the phatic function is used linguistically to open or maintain a channel of contact, for instance when calling "hey!" to someone across the street or nodding and saying "hmmm" to communicate that you are listening during conversation. In the case of packaging, consumers are faced with a cacophony of potential in-store messages. As Phil Barden notes, for marketers, "Perception is crucial because it is the entry point for influencing purchase decisions" (Barden 2013: 71). Establishing contact between a brand and a consumer and opening a channel of communication is clearly of great importance.

In the in-store environment, consumer perception is frequently impaired. Barden refers to the mental state of consumers when shopping as "autopilot", stating:

> Look at a retailer shelf through the lens of autopilot. The products are blurred. None of the text can be read, so no verbal messages follow. The cues we have to recognise and find the product, or the benefits, for which we are searching are mostly colours, shapes, and sizes. (Barden 2013: 73)

But how can a brand assert its message in such a perceptually impaired space? Jean-Marie Floch (1998: 144) reminds us of "Saussure's assertion that there is no meaning without difference." This point is crucial, as, if a package is to assert its meaningful nature, it must first establish its difference from the other available packaging. As a predominantly visual medium, packaging establishes this difference, and metaphorically shouts "hey!" to consumers through the use of "eye-catching" visual elements, such as bright colors that contrast with competitors, unusual shapes, flashing or noisemaking components, or glitter or sparkling elements that interact with ambient light to create an impression of dynamic movement. Treat products, like confectionery, frequently employ these kinds of eye-catching strategies, knowing that the inherent desirability of the product is likely to drive sales once the consumer's attention has been gained.

The perception of movement or sound is potentially powerful as sonic or dynamic signifiers can attract attention from locations outside the centre of a consumer's narrow field of vision. Such elements are used infrequently on packaging though; so standard visual strategies employing color and shape must engage with what Barden refers to as "peripheral perception". For Barden:

> Peripheral perception is key for maximising the effectiveness of our marketing: through it the brain scans the environment to 'decide' what to focus on next. We want shoppers in supermarkets to be able to detect our brand through peripheral perception before they detect those of our competitors. This implies that we must use implicit signals to uniquely communicate the brand and the value it offers. (Barden 2013: 73)

Packaging must utilize designs that contrast with competitors enough to stand out and get noticed by consumers under extreme sensory duress.

As mentioned in the previous section, the phatic function is frequently used to deliver messages relating to changes in product price, or package size, particularly those which are communicating promotional deals. The use of the phatic function can help these short-term messages to cut through the automatized processes of shopping, but as Phil Barden notes:

> The most common relaunches are tactical ones which involve only small changes in packaging. Maybe the product's scent has a new name, or a new benefit has been added. If the announcements of such changes are not perceivable through 'blurred vision', we should not expect any significant impact on sales. (Barden 2013: 75)

It is only the proper use of the phatic function that allows brands to assert difference, whether that is the uniqueness of their proposition in general, changes to the product, or special pricing deals.

In addition, the phatic function is regularly employed by new to market brands, or smaller brands lacking the means to produce promotional campaigns. In this situation the use of the phatic function can serve as a tool to drive consumer awareness, catching their eye and making them aware of the brand's very existence. This strategy is particularly prevalent in the craft beer space, where the number of small scale producers (lacking significant marketing budgets) encourages the use of brightly colored packages as a key means of getting a product noticed. The number of brands employing this tactic, however, has started to diminish the effect of bright colors and has even driven alternative visibility strategies such as minimalist black and white cans, which now stand out against the visual eclecticism of competitors.

Code: The Metalingual Function

> "Metalanguage" speaking of language [. . .] whenever the addresser and/or the addressee need to check up whether they use the same code, speech is focused on the Code: it performs a Metalingual function. (Jakobson 1960: 356)

For Jakobson, the metalingual function is utilized in instances of checking mutual understanding of the code being used. In Jakobson's case the code is language, and an instance of this would be the enquiry, "do you know what I mean?" (Jakobson 1960: 366). A recent cultural example of the linguistic use of the metalingual function is evident in articles such as "What is covfefe? The tweet by Donald Trump that baffled the internet" which appeared in *The Guardian* on 31 May 2017. Articles like this one are examples of a linguistic community working to check the code, and attempting to further mutual understanding by invoking the metalingual function.

Codes are the conventions that make up the fabric of a language. They range from the explicit grammatical rules of formal symbol combination, to the learned links determining that the string "w-o-m-a-n" refers to a female human. A number of these codes have a degree of ambiguity in their application (such as the codes of slang), and their precise use is informed by an individual's prior experiences of language and the world. The metalingual function allows language users to limit this ambiguity and check that they are using the code in the same way. Intelligible communication depends upon the mutual agreement of how certain symbols are used and as such the metalingual function is a vitally important function of linguistic communication.

In the context of packaging however, the term “metalingual” is misleading. A package contains many different sign systems, many of which are not linguistic. Due to this, Louis Hébert proposes calling this function the “metasemiotic”, “metacode”, or “metasystem” function (Hébert 2011). These terms all account for application to non-linguistic messages, but it is my view that the best term for this extra-linguistic function of signs checking signs, might actually be another of Jakobson’s terms the notion of the “intersemiotic”. Roman Jakobson uses this term in his 1959 essay “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation”, in which he comments; “intersemiotic translation or transmutation is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems” (Jakobson 1959: 233). Jakobson is writing from a linguistic perspective here, so it is natural that, within the context, he focuses on the interpretation of “verbal signs” in other sign systems, but actually other interpretive processes are also relevant. For instance, the interpretation of the non-verbal signs in verbal terms would still be intersemiotic, as would translation between two distinct non-verbal sign systems, such as between the colors and typefaces used in an advert.

In practical terms how is this intersemiotic function realized on packaging design? In short, this function refers to any instance where signs comment on signs. There are a number of common ways that this is done on packaging, for instance when diagrams are used to illustrate instructions on how to use the product. Additionally, pictures that support product provenance stories (such as pictures of vineyards on wine labels), or glossaries explaining unique brand neologisms or specialist terminology are all examples of the intersemiotic function. These are all cases of brands checking and refining consumer understanding, and as such this strategy is frequently used when introducing new packaging formats or product innovations that might be unfamiliar or challenging for the consumer, such as the explanatory packaging imagery used to support *Miller Lite*’s introduction of punch top cans, or the wording and marked guidelines illustrating the opening procedure for the safety caps on bottles of household bleach.

Less obviously, the intersemiotic function is a crucial factor in the construction of a strong brand, as it helps clarify and sharpen ambiguities in brand meaning and ensure that as many key signifiers as possible are contributing to a cohesive brand identity. As Howard Schultz, former CEO of *Starbucks* comments, “Customers must recognize that you stand for something” (Aaker 1996: 67). Achieving this clearly and consistently is promoted through awareness that, semiotically “elements which are structurally distinct, may substantively agree (the connotations of their content are similar)" (Middleton 1990: 241). Ensuring that structurally distinct elements of brand communications coalesce and point in the same direction is a key component of strong brands, just as consistency of messaging, both over time and across any given packaging or communication executions, is vital for communicating authenticity. As Laura Oswald notes:

> Brands 'speak' to consumers through marketing communication, from advertising and packaging to retail design, in the same way a speaker engages other speakers in conversation. Just as ambivalence and inconsistency raise doubts about the trustworthiness of speakers, so ambiguity, irrelevance, or inconsistency in brand communication threaten consumer trust and long-term value. (Oswald 2012: 106)

Authenticity is an increasingly valued attribute among contemporary consumers. A 2014 study by Cohn and Wolfe discovered that characteristics associated with authenticity, such as "communicating honestly", and the "environmental impact and sustainability" of a brand, were valued at around 85–90 percent by consumers (Cohn & Wolfe 2014) in terms of their influence on a positive brand impression. By way of contrast, product utility was valued at just 61 percent, and popularity at 39 percent. It is clear that the honesty and consistency of a brand's communications can have a much greater influence in driving consumer interest in a brand, than even their product range. As such, proper consideration of the intersemiotic function when undertaking packaging analysis and design practices for NPD and brand redesign projects should be of the utmost importance if a brand is to refine and reinforce its messaging and communicate a clear, and culturally compelling, proposition. This is a key task for the practicing commercial semiotician.

Conclusions and Further Applications

Overall, we are now in a position to draw some conclusions about the adaptability and relevance of Jakobson's model of communication to the field of commercial semiotics. Table 3 (next page) summarizes each of Jakobson's linguistic communication functions, their related factors, the proposed factor that a package must point to in order to invoke this function, and some example packaging signifiers that fulfill this role. Adapting Jakobson's model of communication for application in this way we have seen that has significant potential as a model that commercial semiotic practitioners can use to analyze packaging and apply to the development

Table 3. Jakobson's Model of Communication in Packaging Design

Factor	Corresponding Factor of In-store Commercial Situation	Communication Function	Example Packaging Signifiers
Addresser	Brand	Emotive	Face of a brand ambassador; gendered typography; image filters etc.
Addressee	Consumer	Conative	"You"; before and after imagery
Context	The shop environment/ commercial culture	Referential	Layers of packaging; multiple textures; decorative components etc.
Message	Packaging	Poetic	References to price and value; imagery of coins and price labels
Contact	Visual channel (with support from other senses	Phatic	Bright colours; unusual package shapes; dynamic or noisemaking elements etc.
Code	Visual and linguistic conventions	Metalingual/ Intersemiotic	Language that clarifies imagery; imagery that supports language; signifiers working together

of packaging that can build strong brand meaning going forwards. Considering the communication functions detailed by Roman Jakobson can help semioticians focus creative thinking, and aid in the understanding and development of novel packaging solutions.

It is clear that with a considerate approach to packaging design, packaging can operate as an important strategic tool for brand messaging. From creating a sense of empathy and connection with consumers, informing consumers of special deals and product innovations, or communicating a sense of "lifestyle", there are an array of ways that brands can communicate through packaging. Reflecting on Table 3, what becomes especially clear is that certain brand challenges are best addressed through the use of certain communication functions, and that some specific product categories or types of brand favor the use of certain packaging communication functions, while overlooking others.

The type of communication strategies that are applicable to a certain product, depend on its function. Food brands, for example, will often favor referentially communicating their value, or emotively dialing up the personal resonance of their products. These brands are less likely to engage with poetic messages. Fashion brands on the other hand are usually strongly concerned with the communication of poetic messages reinforcing craft and sensorial pleasure and are less concerned with utilizing the referential function to communicate the financial value of their products (as is evident in the absence of prices in many high-end fashion boutiques). Some proposed categories that strongly favor certain communication functions are listed below:

Referential:	Grocery Store Own Brands
Poetic:	Fragrances
Emotive:	Foods
Conative:	Self Improvement Products / Nutritional Supplements
Phatic:	Confectionary
Intersemiotic:	Power Tools / Cleaning Products

Being aware of these category communication biases can help both with the development of packaging for new brands who wish to be seen as native within a category, or to identify unexploited category white spaces that could be claimed by daring or disruptive brands, such as *Brandless*, who remove emotive signifiers of personal connection and relatable human brand identity, in favor of a ubiquitous referential "$3" price message across categories of their diverse ranges.

Additionally, considering the primary communication function employed on the packaging of a certain category can give us real insight into the cultural understanding of these products and services. For instance, revealing the strong bias towards clear functionality and application for cleaning products, vs. the artistry and poeticism of the fragrance category, gives us a clear set of implications for the distinct ways that a brand in each of these categories should be managed and could also help identify hybrid codes to inform packaging development for a new luxury perfumed cleaning product.

If different categories can be shown to favor different communicative functions, can we also define residual, dominant, and emergent category narratives by their favored functions? For instance, in the last few years there seems to have been a shift within the confectionary category from a dominant focus on phatic communication (brightly colored packages) to an emergent increase in presence of the emotive function ("homestyle" brands, with identified makers and founding stories). Revealing this shift in communication functions implied by the concrete changes in packaging signifiers within a category can help commercial semioticians to identify the shifting cultural role of confectionary and provide actionable guidance for packaging refinement to brands looking to engage with this emergent narrative.

Moving beyond simply packaging, and looking at a broader cultural level, we can also use Jakobson's communication functions to identify key differences between artistic movements and genres. Different artists and genres of music, film, or art can perhaps be described by their preference for certain functions. For instance, jazz music might be characterized by the intersemiotic manner in which the different melodic lines and instruments comment on and weave around each other, resulting in music that is itself about music. By way of contrast pop songs might focus less on melodic complexity, but instead lyrically employ the referential function by referencing the "club", "beat", "dance" and "drinks", of a typical nightclub context.

These cultural speculations are beyond the scope of this packaging focused interpretation of the model; but, in freeing Jakobson's model of communication from its linguistic underpinnings, these are the sort of theses that might be interesting for commercial semioticians to explore when developing the model further for different multisensory contexts.

Having identified and explored the specific execution of Roman Jakobson's six communication functions in terms of packaging design, we can see that there are several useful outputs of this exploration and a number of avenues available for future exploration of this model. But, if this model is to reach its potential as a tool, and fully realize its usefulness in the commercial semiotic sphere, it is vital that semioticians continue to explore potential applications and share their experiences of doing so.

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