

‘HOW COME, CHIEF WILLOUGHBY?’ - or the power of metaphorical utterances

Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to analyse the metaphorical utterances used in the advertising messages in Three Billboards outside Ebbing, Missouri, 2017. The framework of analysis is provided by Forceville (1996), who applied the relevance theory to metaphors used in advertising.

The three billboards feature simple messages in black capital letters against a crimson red background, without any pictures, which however trigger thoughts and events not necessarily anticipated or expected by the sender. The journey of the intended message to the desired action meant by the communicator is long and twisted, and makes the tragi-comedy enthralling, despite its lack of verisimilitude.

The POLICE ARE GUARDIANS metaphor is challenged (hence the question mark in the message printed on the third billboard) throughout the movie and the fantasy-like ending offers no redemption at all (ex-officer Dixon is no longer lawfully entitled to pursue the alleged culprit). The police are ultimately and undeniably useless, trust is shattered, traditional institutions are contested, as they can no longer provide justice. Controversially enough, there is a backward trajectory for Dixon, who almost achieves redemption at the end of the movie, in joining forces with Frances, in order to fight a righteous cause.

Keywords: *Multimodal metaphor; POLICE ARE GUARDIANS Metaphor; Relevance Theory; Three Billboards outside Ebbing, Missouri.*