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Pictorial Irony in ARC Billboards

The ARC billboard poster exhibition has been organized in Hungary since 2000. The posters created for the exhibition use the means of advertising in order to communicate messages of social, political, and philosophical content. Even though these posters differ considerably from classic billboard posters in their reception, aim, and message, they use the same kind of visual and language games in order to capture the attention of their audience. However, one source of significant difference between advertising posters and ARC posters is that while the former use primarily humor, the latter use primarily irony in order to attract attention.

Irony is usually regarded as a verbal feature, however, it can be visual one as well. This latter aspect of irony is discussed in detail by Scott (2004), who emphasizes that at the visual level the attention of the recipient is drawn to irony by incongruity.

After a characterization of ARC posters and the introduction of the notions of verbal and visual irony as well as the description of their pragmatic mechanism, this talk analyzes a collected corpus of ARC posters, explaining their communicative mechanism and linguistic characteristics.

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