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Article

A Semantic Analysis of Figurative Language and Meaning Construction in English Slogans

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Annisha Dyuli Adha, Dian Christina, Shally Amna[abc]
[123]Universitas Putra Indonesia YPTK Padang, Indonesia
Corresponding Author: annishadyuliadha@upiyptk.ac.id

A B S T R A C T

This study examines figurative language and meaning construction in English slogans from a semantic perspective. It aims to identify the semantic categories found in the selected slogans, describe how linguistic expressions construct meaning, and interpret their communicative functions. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach supported by quantitative frequency analysis. The data consisted of 100 English slogans purposively selected from an online collection published on SloganLoop. The slogans were selected based on the presence of semantic features relevant to the study, while literal expressions were included as a point of comparison with figurative expressions. Each slogan was analyzed as a unit of meaning and classified into six categories: metaphor, literal expression, personification, idiom, symbolic expression, and metonymy. The findings indicate that metaphor is the most frequent category, occurring in 46 slogans (46%), followed by literal expressions in 41 slogans (41%). Personification accounts for six slogans (6%), while idioms and symbolic expressions each account for three slogans (3%). Metonymy appears in one slogan (1%). The qualitative analysis shows that metaphors connect abstract concepts with more familiar domains of experience, whereas literal expressions convey messages more directly. Other figurative categories provide additional ways of representing aspirations, human qualities, conventional meanings, symbolic associations, and broader concepts. These findings demonstrate that meaning construction in the selected slogans involves both figurative and literal strategies. However, the results describe only the purposively selected dataset and should not be generalized to English slogans as a whole.

Keywords: *English Slogans, Figurative Language, Conceptual Metaphor, Lexical Semantics, Meaning Construction*

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INTRODUCTION

Slogans are concise linguistic expressions used to communicate ideas, values, identities, and messages in a memorable form. They are commonly found in commercial advertising, educational campaigns, environmental movements, public communication, and motivational discourse. Despite their limited length, slogans can convey complex meanings through carefully selected words, conceptual associations, and rhetorical structures. Their concise nature makes the relationship between linguistic expression and meaning particularly important, as a small number of words may communicate broader messages and interpretations. Hodges et al. (2024) explain that the lexical, semantic, and emotional properties of words influence how consumers perceive and remember slogans.

From a semantic perspective, the meaning of a slogan is not always limited to the literal meanings of its individual words. Some slogans communicate their messages directly, whereas others construct meaning through figurative expressions and conceptual associations. For example, the slogan "Education builds futures" uses the verb *builds*, which is commonly associated with the construction of physical structures, to describe the development of future opportunities through education. This expression invites readers to understand an abstract concept through a more familiar experience of construction. Such a relationship illustrates how figurative language can contribute to meaning construction in slogans.

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The relationship between figurative language and meaning construction can be explained through Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), proposed by Lakoff & Johnson (1980). According to this perspective, metaphor is not merely a decorative feature of language but a conceptual mechanism through which people understand one domain of experience in terms of another. Abstract concepts may therefore be understood through more concrete or familiar experiences. Kövecses (2010) further explains that conceptual metaphors involve relationships between a source domain and a target domain. The source domain provides a familiar conceptual structure through which the target domain is understood. In "Education builds futures," for instance, physical construction functions as the source domain, while the development of future opportunities through education represents the target domain.

Nevertheless, not all slogans depend on metaphor or other forms of figurative language. Some expressions communicate their central messages through relatively direct or literal meanings. For example, "Respect everyone" conveys an instruction to treat all people respectfully without requiring a central metaphorical interpretation. Literal expressions are therefore important to include in semantic analysis because they demonstrate that meaning construction in slogans can occur through both direct and figurative linguistic strategies. Their inclusion also allows the study to compare how different semantic choices communicate messages.

Other forms of figurative language may also contribute to the interpretation of slogans. Personification represents nonhuman entities or abstract concepts through human characteristics or actions. Idioms communicate conventional meanings that cannot always be fully predicted from their individual components. Symbolic expressions use particular words or expressions to represent broader ideas through shared or contextually inferred associations. Metonymy, meanwhile, involves the use of one concept to refer to another concept closely associated with it. These categories provide different ways of examining how linguistic expressions represent ideas and construct meaning. However, their identification requires clear operational criteria because some expressions may have overlapping interpretations depending on their context.

Previous studies have investigated the linguistic features and communicative functions of advertising slogans. Fuertes-Olivera et al. (2001) examined the role of meta discourse in advertising slogans and headlines, highlighting how linguistic choices contribute to the organization and presentation of advertising messages. Skorupa & Dubovičienė (2015) analysed commercial and social advertising slogans, identifying the use of figurative language and sound techniques. Vestić & Stojan (2026) also examined syntactic and rhetorical characteristics in online product and social advertising slogans, including features such as metaphor, metonymy, and imperative constructions. In addition, Purba et al. (2022) discussed figurative language in advertisement slogans from a semantic perspective. These studies demonstrate the relevance of examining slogans as linguistic expressions that involve semantic and rhetorical choices.

Although previous studies have provided valuable insights into advertising language, further examination is needed regarding the relationship between semantic categories and meaning construction in a selected collection of English slogans. In particular, the present study focuses on the distribution of six primary semantic categories: metaphor, literal expression, personification, idiom, symbolic expression, and metonymy. It also examines how representative expressions construct meaning through their lexical choices and conceptual relationships. Unlike studies that focus primarily on sound patterns, syntactic structures, or general persuasive features, this study emphasizes the semantic interpretation of individual slogans. It further distinguishes primary semantic categories from additional rhetorical features, such as repetition, parallelism, contrast, and imperative structures, so that these linguistic features are not treated as interchangeable analytical categories.

The data for this study consist of 100 English slogans purposively selected from an online collection published on SloganLoop. The slogans were selected based on the presence of semantic features relevant to the research objectives. Literal expressions were also included to

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provide a comparison with figurative expressions. Since the data were purposively selected from an online compilation, the findings are intended to describe the selected dataset rather than represent all English slogans or advertising campaigns.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) What semantic categories are identified in the 100 selected English slogans, and how frequently does each category occur? (2) How do selected slogans construct meaning through metaphor, literal expression, personification, idiom, symbolic expression, and metonymy? (3) What communicative functions can be interpreted from these semantic patterns?

This study contributes a descriptive semantic analysis of meaning construction in a selected collection of English slogans by combining category-based frequency analysis with qualitative interpretation. By examining both figurative and literal expressions, it provides an account of how different semantic strategies represent ideas and communicate messages through concise linguistic forms.

Semantics and Meaning Construction

Semantics concerns the study of meaning in language. Saeed (2016) discusses meaning through linguistic relationships involving words, sentences, and interpretation. Cruse (2011) similarly presents semantics as a field concerned with the organization and interpretation of linguistic meaning. In slogan analysis, meaning construction can be understood as the process through which linguistic choices guide readers toward a particular interpretation. This process may involve literal word meanings, conceptual associations, conventional expressions, and relationships between a word and a broader idea.

For instance, "Make today count" communicates a recommendation to use the present day meaningfully. The verb count can refer to numerical calculation, but in this context it conveys the idea of being significant or worthwhile. Interpretation therefore requires attention to contextual meaning rather than a mechanical reading of each word. This study treats meaning construction as an analytical concept for explaining how the linguistic form of a slogan conveys an intended or reasonably inferable message. It does not claim to measure the actual psychological responses of audiences, since no reader-response experiment was conducted.

The Concept of Metaphor

Lakoff & Johnson (1980) propose that metaphor can structure conceptual understanding by relating one domain of experience to another. In this account, metaphor is not limited to poetic language; it can also occur in ordinary expressions through which people understand abstract experiences. Research on figurative thought likewise emphasizes the relationship between language and conceptual interpretation (Gibbs Jr., 1994).

Kövecses (2010) develops this approach by explaining how conceptual metaphors involve relationships between a source domain and a target domain. The source domain supplies a more familiar structure through which the target domain is understood. For example, in "Education builds futures," the source domain is physical construction, while the target domain is the development of future opportunities through education. The word builds evokes gradual construction, effort, and the creation of something that did not previously exist in its completed form.

Metaphor identification, however, requires careful analysis. The Group (2007) proposes the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), which compares a word's contextual meaning with its more basic contemporary meaning to determine whether a contrast and a comparison can be understood between them. Steen et al. (2010) further develop a systematic procedure for linguistic metaphor identification. The present study draws on these approaches as general guidance, while its six-category coding system remains the operational framework used for the dataset.

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Literal Expression

Literal expressions communicate meaning relatively directly, without requiring the interpretation of a central figurative mapping. This does not mean that they are incapable of persuasion or that they contain no implied meaning. Rather, their primary interpretation can be derived from the conventional meanings of their words and their grammatical arrangement.

For example, "Respect everyone" directly encourages respectful treatment of all people. The slogan can be persuasive because of its imperative form and ethical message, but its central semantic content does not require a metaphorical interpretation. The inclusion of literal expression as a separate category is therefore important. It allows the analysis to recognize that directness can be a meaningful linguistic choice rather than treating figurative language as the only significant feature of slogans.

Personification

Personification occurs when nonhuman entities, abstract concepts, or inanimate things are represented as possessing human characteristics or performing human-like actions. In the slogan "Your dreams are waiting," dreams are represented as though they could wait for someone. The wording presents an abstract aspiration as an entity that can remain available until the addressee takes action.

Personification may make an abstract concept more relatable by representing it through a familiar human action. In motivational discourse, such wording can create a sense of opportunity, anticipation, or personal responsibility. These functions are interpretations of the linguistic form, not experimentally verified effects on readers.

Idiom

An idiom is a conventional expression whose overall meaning cannot always be fully predicted from the literal meanings of its individual components. Idiomatic expressions are interpreted through established patterns of language use. The phrase "Rise and shine" conventionally encourages someone to get up and become active or alert. Its meaning is therefore not simply a combination of the literal actions of rising and shining.

In slogan analysis, idioms can contribute familiarity and compactness because they draw on expressions that readers may already recognize. However, an expression should be classified as an idiom only when its conventionalized meaning is supported by established language use, not merely because it sounds catchy.

Symbolic Expression and Metonymy

Symbolic expression involves the use of a word, object, action, or image to represent a broader idea. Its interpretation may depend on shared cultural, social, or communicative associations. Because symbols are often context-sensitive, their classification requires particular care when the original visual or situational context of a slogan is unavailable.

Metonymy, meanwhile, involves a relationship of association or contiguity between concepts. A term can refer to something closely associated with it rather than directly naming the intended referent. In "Your voice matters," the word voice can be interpreted as representing a person's opinion, expression, or right to be heard. Under that interpretation, the slogan uses a concrete or embodied means of expression to refer to the broader act of expressing a viewpoint.

This interpretation is plausible but context-dependent. In some contexts, voice may be understood literally as the sound produced by a person. The classification of the slogan as metonymy therefore depends on the intended meaning adopted in the coding framework.

Slogans and Persuasive Communication

Advertising and slogan studies show that linguistic form is relevant to how messages are presented and interpreted. Fuertes-Olivera et al. (2001) examine metadiscourse as a resource for organizing advertising messages and engaging readers. Goddard (2002) and

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Leech (1966) provide broader linguistic accounts of advertising language, while Skorupa & Dubovičienė (2015) investigate the phonological and semantic characteristics of commercial and social slogans, highlighting the use of figurative language and sound techniques. Purba et al. (2022) also address figurative language in advertisement slogans from a semantic perspective. These studies provide a relevant foundation for examining slogans as linguistic constructions rather than as isolated promotional statements.

The present study builds on this research by applying a six-category semantic classification to 100 English slogans, reporting category frequencies, and discussing how representative examples convey meaning. Its main focus is the relationship between semantic category and interpretation, not the experimental measurement of advertising effectiveness.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach supported by quantitative frequency analysis. The qualitative approach was used to examine and interpret how semantic expressions in English slogans construct meaning. Meanwhile, quantitative frequency analysis was applied to identify the distribution of the six semantic categories in the selected dataset. This combination allowed the study to describe the frequency of each category while providing qualitative explanations of the linguistic features and meanings represented in the slogans.

Data Source and Sampling Technique

The data consisted of 100 English slogans selected from an online collection published on SloganLoop, entitled "*310+ Effective Slogans in English for Any Brand or Cause*." The collection presents slogans under several thematic sections, including education, environment, school, motivation, safety, health, and life.

The study employed purposive sampling to select the 100 slogans. The researcher first reviewed the available collection and then selected slogans based on the presence of semantic features relevant to the research objectives. The selection focused on expressions that could be examined through the six semantic categories used in this study: metaphor, literal expression, personification, idiom, symbolic expression, and metonymy. Literal expressions were also included to provide a point of comparison with figurative expressions.

The selected slogans were taken from different thematic sections to provide variation in the messages represented in the collection. The online compilation was treated as the source of the linguistic data; therefore, the study did not assume that every slogan originated from an independently verified company, brand, or advertising campaign. Since the data were purposively selected, the findings describe the selected dataset and are not intended to represent all English slogans.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis was each complete slogan. Each slogan was examined as an independent linguistic expression to identify its central semantic meaning and the linguistic features contributing to its interpretation. Each slogan was assigned one primary semantic category for the purpose of classification and frequency calculation.

Coding Categories

The analysis used six primary semantic categories. Their operational definitions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Operational Definitions of Semantic Categories

Code	Semantic category	Operational definition
MET	Metaphor	An expression in which one conceptual domain is understood in terms of another domain, allowing an abstract or less familiar concept to be represented through a more familiar experience.

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LIT	Literal expression	An expression whose central meaning is communicated relatively directly through the conventional meanings of its words, without requiring a central figurative interpretation.
PER	Personification	An expression that attributes human characteristics, feelings, or actions to nonhuman entities, objects, or abstract concepts.
IDI	Idiom	A conventionalized expression whose overall meaning is not fully predictable from the literal meanings of its individual components.
SYM	Symbolic expression	An expression that represents a broader idea through a symbolic association that is recognizable or reasonably inferable from the wording and available context.
METO	Metonymy	An expression in which one concept is used to refer to another concept closely associated with it.

The categories were treated as mutually exclusive for frequency analysis. Thus, each slogan received one primary category according to its dominant semantic interpretation. Although a slogan could contain additional rhetorical features, such as repetition, parallelism, contrast, or imperative structures, these features were not counted as separate semantic categories.

Metaphor identification was informed by the general principles of the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) proposed by the Group (2007). This procedure emphasizes the comparison between a word's contextual meaning and it's more basic meaning to determine whether a metaphorical relationship can be identified. However, MIP was used as a theoretical guide rather than as a separately reported reliability-tested instrument.

Particular attention was given to distinguishing metaphor from symbolic expression. Metaphor was identified through a relationship between conceptual domains, whereas symbolic expression was identified through an association in which an expression represents a broader idea. The classification was based on the dominant interpretation of each slogan within the available textual context.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection involved the following steps. First, the researcher accessed and reviewed the English slogan collection published on SloganLoop. Second, the slogans were examined to identify expressions relevant to the semantic focus of the study. Third, 100 slogans were purposively selected from the thematic sections of the collection, including education, environment, school, motivation, safety, health, and life. Fourth, the selected slogans were compiled into a dataset and numbered for systematic analysis. Finally, each slogan was prepared for semantic examination and classification according to the six predetermined categories.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data were analysed through qualitative interpretation and quantitative frequency calculation. The analysis involved the following steps: 1) Data preparation: The 100 selected slogans were organized and numbered as the research dataset; 2) Semantic examination: Each slogan was read carefully to identify its central message, contextual meaning, and relevant lexical or conceptual relationships; 3) Category identification: The semantic features of each slogan were examined based on the operational definitions of the six categories; 4) Primary coding: Each slogan was assigned one primary semantic category according to its dominant interpretation; 5) Qualitative interpretation: Representative examples from the categories were analyzed to explain their literal or intended meanings and the ways their linguistic expressions contributed to meaning construction. For metaphorical expressions, attention was given to the relationship between the source domain and the target domain; 6) Frequency calculation: The number of slogans in each category was counted and converted into a percentage of the total dataset; 7) Interpretation of findings: The frequency patterns and qualitative interpretations were discussed in relation to conceptual metaphor theory, lexical semantics, and previous studies on advertising and slogan language.

The percentage of each semantic category was calculated using the following formula:

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$P = (f / N) \times 100$

Where:

P = Percentage of a semantic category

f = Frequency of slogans in a particular category

N = Total number of slogans analyzed (100)

The calculated frequencies were then used to identify the most frequently occurring semantic category in the selected dataset.

Coding Reliability and Research Limitations

The classification presented in this study represents the researcher's semantic interpretation of the selected slogans. No independent second-coder assessment or inter-rater reliability statistic was available. Therefore, the coding results should be interpreted as a descriptive classification rather than as an independently validated classification with demonstrated inter-coder agreement.

Furthermore, the slogans were selected purposively from a single online compilation, and detailed information about the original campaigns, brands, and publication contexts was not consistently available. These limitations may affect the interpretation of context-dependent categories, particularly symbolic expression and metonymy. Accordingly, the findings are limited to the selected dataset and should not be generalized to all English slogans.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Distribution of Semantic Categories

The analysis identified six primary semantic categories in the 100 selected English slogans: metaphor, literal expression, personification, idiom, symbolic expression, and metonymy. Each slogan was assigned one primary category based on its dominant semantic interpretation. Table 2 presents the frequency and percentage of each category.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Semantic Categories in English Slogans

No.	Code	Semantic Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	MET	Metaphor	46	46%
2	LIT	Literal expression	41	41%
3	PER	Personification	6	6%
4	IDI	Idiom	3	3%
5	SYM	Symbolic expression	3	3%
6	METO	Metonymy	1	1%
		Total	**100**	**100%**

The results show that metaphor is the most frequent semantic category, accounting for 46 slogans (46%). Literal expressions represent the second-largest category, with 41 slogans (41%). Personification occurs in six slogans (6%), while idioms and symbolic expressions each occur in three slogans (3%). Metonymy is the least frequent category, appearing in one slogan (1%). These findings indicate that both figurative and literal expressions play important roles in constructing meaning in the selected dataset. Although metaphor is the most frequent category, the relatively high proportion of literal expressions demonstrates that slogans can also communicate their messages through direct linguistic forms.

Metaphor as the Most Frequent Semantic Category

Metaphor accounts for 46 slogans (46%), making it the most frequent category in the dataset. The examples illustrate how abstract concepts can be represented through more familiar experiences, particularly those associated with construction, effort, and achievement.

Example 1: "Education builds futures." The verb *builds* are commonly associated with constructing physical objects or structures. However, in this slogan, it refers to the role of

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education in developing future opportunities. Education is therefore represented as a constructive process, while the future is conceptualized as something that can be shaped through learning and effort.

From the perspective of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, physical construction functions as the source domain, while the development of future opportunities represents the target domain. The expression connects a familiar physical activity with the abstract concept of educational development. This interpretation illustrates how metaphor contributes to meaning construction by presenting an abstract idea through a more concrete experience.

Example 2: "Success is built, not given." This slogan conceptualizes success as something that is constructed through effort rather than simply received. The word *built* evokes the process of creating or developing something through work and participation. Meanwhile, the contrast between *built* and *given* emphasizes the difference between active achievement and passive receipt.

The underlying metaphor presents success as a constructed outcome. Its meaning encourages the interpretation that achievement involves continuous effort and personal contribution. The contrastive structure reinforces the message, although contrast itself is a rhetorical feature rather than a separate semantic category.

The examples demonstrate that metaphor can represent abstract concepts such as education and success through familiar experiences of construction and effort. This pattern is consistent with the conceptual approach proposed by Lakoff & Johnson (1980) and further discussed by Kövecses (2010), who explain how relationships between source and target domains contribute to conceptual understanding.

Literal Expressions and Direct Meaning Construction

Literal expressions account for 41 slogans (41%), making them the second-largest category. Their substantial proportion indicates that direct linguistic expressions are also prominent in the selected dataset.

Example 3: "Respect everyone." This slogan directly communicates the recommendation to treat all people respectfully. Its central meaning can be understood through the conventional meanings of the words *respect* and *everyone*, without requiring a conceptual mapping between different domains.

The imperative structure gives the expression a directive function because it encourages a particular behaviour. However, the presence of an imperative does not automatically make an expression figurative. The semantic meaning remains relatively direct.

Example 4: "Be kind always." This expression explicitly encourages kindness as a continuing principle of behaviour. The words communicate the message directly and do not require a metaphorical interpretation to convey their central meaning.

Example 5: "Believe you can." The slogan encourages confidence in one's ability. Its meaning is primarily direct, although the specific action or goal implied by *can* may depend on the context in which the expression is used.

These examples show that literal expressions can communicate motivational and ethical messages without relying on an obvious figurative mapping. Their presence demonstrates that meaning construction in slogans does not exclusively depend on figurative language. Direct expressions can also convey recommendations and values through concise wording.

The proportion of literal expressions is particularly relevant because it represents 41% of the selected dataset. This finding suggests that direct semantic communication is an important feature of the slogans examined in this study. Nevertheless, the result should be understood as a characteristic of the purposively selected sample rather than a general pattern of all English slogans.

Personification

Personification accounts for six slogans (6%). This category represents a semantic strategy in which nonhuman entities or abstract concepts are presented through human characteristics or actions.

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Example 6: "Your dreams are waiting." In this slogan, *dreams* refer to abstract aspirations or personal goals. However, the verb *waiting* commonly describes the action of a person or an animate entity. By attributing this action to dreams, the expression represents an abstract concept as if it could wait for someone.

The slogan can be interpreted as suggesting that opportunities or aspirations remain available and require individual action. The personification makes the abstract concept of dreams more accessible by presenting it through a familiar human action. Its communicative function can therefore be interpreted as motivational, encouraging readers to pursue their aspirations.

This example illustrates how personification contributes to meaning construction by giving an abstract concept a human-like quality. However, the interpretation describes the potential meaning of the linguistic expression and does not establish an experimentally measured response from readers.

Idioms

Idioms account for three slogans (3%). Although this category occurs less frequently than metaphor and literal expression, idiomatic expressions provide a way of communicating meaning through conventionalized language.

Example 7: "Rise and shine." The expression *rise and shine* conventionally encourages someone to get up and become active or alert. Its overall meaning extends beyond a literal interpretation of the individual verbs *rise* and *shine*.

The slogan communicates its message through a familiar expression whose meaning is established through language use. Its concise form allows a broader message to be conveyed without lengthy explanation. However, familiarity with idiomatic expressions may vary across linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

This example demonstrates that idioms can contribute to meaning construction through conventional meanings that are not fully predictable from their individual lexical components.

Symbolic Expressions

Symbolic expressions account for three slogans (3%). This category involves expressions that represent broader ideas through symbolic associations.

Example 8: "Go green. Live clean." In this slogan, the expression *go green* is associated with environmentally friendly choices and sustainability. The word *green* can evoke environmental awareness, while *live clean* suggests a responsible and environmentally conscious way of living.

The meaning is constructed through the symbolic association between the expression *green* and environmental responsibility. The slogan therefore communicates an environmental message through concise wording rather than providing a detailed explanation of sustainable practices.

The two clauses also display parallel structure and sound similarity. These rhetorical features contribute to the compact form of the slogan, whereas its symbolic interpretation concerns the broader associations conveyed by the expression.

It is important to note that the interpretation of *green* as a symbol of environmental responsibility depends on its context. The word should not automatically be classified as symbolic in every situation in which it appears.

Metonymy

Metonymy is the least frequent category, accounting for one slogan (1%). It involves the use of one concept to refer to another concept that is closely associated with it.

Example 9: "Your voice matters." The word *voice* can refer literally to the sound produced when a person speaks. However, in this slogan, it can also represent a person's opinion, expression, participation, or right to be heard.

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Under this interpretation, *voice* refers to the broader communicative contribution associated with speaking. The slogan therefore conveys the message that individual opinions and participation are important.

The metonymic relationship connects the means of expression with the ideas or opinions expressed through it. Nevertheless, this classification is context-dependent. If the slogan were used in a context specifically concerned with vocal sound, the word *voice* could be interpreted literally.

This example illustrates the importance of contextual interpretation in identifying metonymy and distinguishing it from literal meaning.

Discussion

The Relationship Between Figurative Language and Meaning Construction

The findings demonstrate that meaning construction in the selected English slogans involves both figurative and literal semantic strategies. Metaphor is the most frequent category, accounting for 46% of the dataset, while literal expressions represent 41%. The remaining 13% consists of personification, idiom, symbolic expression, and metonymy.

The prominence of metaphor indicates that conceptual associations are an important feature of the selected slogans. Expressions such as "Education builds futures" and "Success is built, not given" represent abstract ideas through familiar experiences of construction. Through these conceptual relationships, education and success are presented as processes that require development, effort, and participation.

This interpretation is consistent with Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by Lakoff & Johnson (1980). Their approach explains that metaphor is not merely a linguistic decoration but can structure the way abstract concepts are understood. Kövecses (2010) further emphasizes the relationship between source and target domains in conceptual metaphor. The present findings provide examples of how this relationship can be identified in concise slogan expressions.

However, metaphor is not the only strategy used to construct meaning. The substantial proportion of literal expressions indicates that direct wording also plays an important role. Therefore, meaning construction in slogans should be understood as involving different semantic resources rather than being limited to figurative language.

The Importance of Literal Expressions

The finding that literal expressions account for 41% of the dataset is an important aspect of this study. Slogans such as "Respect everyone" and "Be kind always" communicate their central messages directly. Their interpretations do not depend on identifying a metaphorical relationship or reconstructing a broader symbolic meaning.

This result indicates that direct linguistic forms can be used to communicate ethical values, recommendations, and motivational messages. Literal expressions should therefore not be considered less meaningful than figurative expressions. Instead, they represent a different way of organizing and communicating meaning.

The distinction between literal and figurative expressions is also relevant to the study of advertising language. Fuertes-Olivera et al. (2001) examine how linguistic choices contribute to the organization and presentation of advertising messages. The present study complements this perspective by focusing on the semantic interpretation of individual slogans and the distribution of their primary semantic categories.

Interpretive Functions of Less Frequent Categories

Personification, idiom, symbolic expression, and metonymy collectively account for 13% of the dataset. Although these categories occur less frequently, they demonstrate different ways of constructing meaning.

Personification, as illustrated by "Your dreams are waiting," represents an abstract aspiration through a human-like action. This linguistic strategy can make an abstract concept more accessible and present it as something that invites individual response.

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Idioms, such as "Rise and shine," rely on conventionalized expressions. Their meanings are associated with established language use rather than being derived solely from the literal meanings of individual words. Consequently, their interpretation may depend on readers' familiarity with the expression.

Symbolic expression, as illustrated by "Go green. Live clean," communicates a broader environmental message through an association between the word *green* and environmental responsibility. This interpretation shows how a particular expression can represent an idea beyond its immediate lexical meaning.

Metonymy appears in "Your voice matters," where *voice* represents a person's opinion or contribution. This relationship demonstrates how a concept associated with a particular means of expression can refer to a broader communicative activity.

Together, these examples show that the less frequent categories provide additional semantic resources for representing aspirations, conventional meanings, environmental values, and participation. Their relatively low frequencies do not indicate that they are unimportant; rather, they occur less often within the selected dataset and the coding framework applied in this study.

Relationship to Previous Studies

The findings can be discussed in relation to previous research on the linguistic characteristics of advertising slogans. Skorupa & Dubovičienė (2015) examined commercial and social advertising slogans and reported differences in the use of figurative language and sound techniques across the two groups. Their study is relevant because it highlights the importance of considering the type and communicative context of slogans when examining linguistic features.

Vestić & Stojan (2026) also examined syntactic and rhetorical characteristics in online product and social advertising slogans. Their discussion of metaphor, metonymy, and other rhetorical features supports the relevance of examining slogans at multiple linguistic levels. Similarly, McQuarrie & Mick (1996) investigated rhetorical figures in advertising, providing a broader perspective on how rhetorical forms can be examined in consumer communication.

Purba et al. (2022) provide another relevant perspective through their examination of figurative language in advertisement slogans from a semantic viewpoint. The present study extends this general line of inquiry by applying six primary semantic categories to a selected dataset and combining frequency distribution with qualitative interpretation.

Nevertheless, direct numerical comparisons with previous studies are not appropriate unless their datasets, sampling procedures, coding definitions, and units of analysis are comparable. The current findings are specific to the 100 purposively selected slogans and the classification framework used in this research.

Distinguishing Semantic Categories from Rhetorical Devices

An important analytical consideration is the distinction between semantic categories and rhetorical devices. A slogan may contain a particular semantic category while also displaying rhetorical features such as repetition, parallelism, contrast, rhyme, or imperative structures.

For example, "Go green. Live clean." can be examined in terms of symbolic association, while its parallel structure and sound similarity represent additional rhetorical characteristics. Similarly, "Success is built, not given" contains a metaphorical interpretation and a contrastive structure. These features contribute to the overall interpretation but belong to different analytical levels.

Distinguishing these elements is important because semantic categories explain how meaning is represented or interpreted, whereas rhetorical devices describe particular ways in which expressions are organized or presented. Treating them as interchangeable categories could create inconsistencies in the frequency analysis.

This distinction is relevant to previous research that examines semantic, phonological, syntactic, and rhetorical characteristics of slogans, including Skorupa & Dubovičienė (2015) and Vestić & Stojan (2026). The present study therefore focuses on one primary semantic

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category for each slogan while recognizing that additional rhetorical features may contribute to its overall linguistic form.

Implications and Limitations of the Findings

The findings provide a descriptive account of how semantic strategies are represented in the selected English slogans. The combination of frequency analysis and qualitative interpretation makes it possible to identify the most frequent categories and explain how representative expressions construct meaning.

The results also indicate that the interpretation of slogans requires attention to both lexical meaning and conceptual associations. Metaphorical expressions may require readers to relate one domain of experience to another, whereas literal expressions communicate their central messages more directly. Other categories, such as personification, idiom, symbolism, and metonymy, provide additional interpretive possibilities.

However, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the data were purposively selected from a single online compilation, so the frequency distribution cannot be generalized to all English slogans. Second, detailed information about the original campaigns and contexts of individual slogans was not consistently available. This limitation is particularly relevant to context-dependent categories such as symbolic expression and metonymy. Third, the classification represents the researcher's interpretation, and no independent second-coder assessment or inter-rater reliability statistic was available.

Accordingly, the communicative functions discussed in this study represent interpretations based on linguistic analysis rather than experimentally verified effects on audiences. Future studies may use slogans from identifiable campaigns, compare different types of advertising, and involve independent coders to strengthen the reliability and contextual interpretation of semantic classifications.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined figurative and literal expressions in 100 selected English slogans. The findings identified six semantic categories: metaphor (46%), literal expression (41%), personification (6%), idiom (3%), symbolic expression (3%), and metonymy (1%). Metaphor was the most frequent category, demonstrating its importance in connecting abstract concepts with familiar experiences, while literal expressions conveyed messages directly. Other categories contributed through human-like attribution, conventional meanings, symbolic associations, and conceptual representation. The slogans also communicated motivational messages, ethical values, environmental awareness, and social responsibility. Theoretically, this study contributes to semantic analysis by integrating conceptual metaphor theory and lexical semantics to explain meaning construction in concise persuasive expressions. However, the findings are limited by the purposive selection of 100 slogans from one online source, unverified campaign contexts, and the absence of independent coding and inter-rater reliability testing. Future research should examine larger corpora, involve multiple coders, and investigate audience responses. Overall, English slogans construct meaning through diverse figurative and literal expressions.

DECLARATION

Author Contributions: The research was carried out collaboratively. Annisha Dyuli Adha was responsible for data selection and initial analysis, Dian Christina assisted with semantic interpretation, and Shally Amna contributed to manuscript evaluation and editing.

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Ethical Approval: This study required no ethical review because it focused solely on publicly available slogan texts.

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Informed Consent: Consent was not applicable since the study did not involve human subjects.

Use of Generative AI: Any generative AI support was confined to language improvement. The authors retained responsibility for the analysis, findings, and final conclusions.

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