

## Relationship/Participant Focus in Multimodal Market Communication

### Abstract

In this article, we present an integrated multimodal method of analysing marketers' discursive strategies. Using a social semiotic, multimodal framework, we propose 'the relationship/participant focus analysis' (RPF analysis). This method is socially significant in that it helps us identify the strategies marketers use to influence the consumer.

RPF analysis reveals how marketing communication – exemplified with the register of packaging – relies on two fundamental factors, namely (i) communication perspective and (ii) personalisation. The communication perspective resides within the interpersonal realm of semiosis, focusing on the enactment of relationships, while personalisation resides within the ideational realm of semiosis, focusing on the construal of represented participants.

RPF analysis suggests a way of tackling the multimodal complexity of marketing texts when these are seen as consisting of social semiotic acts of meaning, combining different semiotic resources. In the article, our focus is on the instantiated verbal and visual resources used on food packaging.

### 1. Introduction

There is considerable agreement that an act of meaning making – **semiosis** – integrates several semiotic systems, i.e. communication happens through a number of meaningful activities, and that language is one of these activities (see e.g. Kress/van Leeuwen 2001, and Baldry/Thibault 2006). At the core of the **multimodal** perspective employed in this paper lies the assumption that pictures, paintings, drawings, movies, buildings, clothing, music, etc. communicate, just as words do (see e.g. O'Toole 1994, 2004; Riley 2004; O'Halloran 2004; Stenglin 2009; Pang 2004; van Leeuwen 1999). Any description of semiosis – and any analysis of an act of meaning making – should, therefore, take into account all the resources deployed.

Multimodality is a relatively new and fast growing field of research, not least within the theoretical framework known as **social semiotics**. Pivoting around the pioneering work of scholars such as Kress, Hodge, O'Toole and van Leeuwen (see e.g. Hodge/Kress 1988; O'Toole 1994; Kress/van Leeuwen 1996, 2001), the development of multimodal social semiotics can be said to have gone through three basic phases (Boeriis 2009). The first phase is characterised by what Kress and van Leeuwen (2001: 4) call the traditional, **monomodal** view (known from and dominant in linguistics). Inspired by Halliday's work on linguistics, visual social semiotics was developed with the intention of describing similar semiotic functions across other semiotic modes<sup>1</sup> of meaning, such as images and sound. In this phase, different semiotic systems such as image and language were viewed as separate systems, existing side by side (see e.g. O'Toole 1994 or Kress/van Leeuwen 1996). The second phase is dominated by a more **polymodal** view where there is a growing interest in the interplay between different semiotic modes (see e.g. Kress/van Leeuwen 2001, Lim Fei 2004 or Machin 2007). The different modes are still viewed as more or less

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<sup>1</sup> Kress defines a mode as "a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning" (2010: 79). He semi-tautologically sees modes as that which is used and understood as a mode in a community, but adds the formal condition that it also needs to represent full metafunctional meaning.

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separate but they affect each other in complex ways when instantiated as an act of meaning. The third phase, currently under development, is more radically multimodal. The dominant view now is that the various semiotic systems are mere theoretical abstractions, and that the systems ‘unite’ in complex combined acts of meaning (see e.g. Lemke 1998, O’Halloran 2004, Baldry/Thibault 2006, Jones/Ventola 2008 or Kress 2010). Thus, the task for multimodal scholars is to understand complex multimodal meaning-making in a consistent way which takes into account the interplay of many resources. In other words, the task is to develop an analytical framework that transcends a range of more or less interconnected monomodal descriptions.

In this article we present a multimodal analytical tool, which we call ‘the relationship/participant focus analysis’ (RPF analysis). RPF analysis represents an integrated multimodal tool for discursive analysis in which no semiotic system *a priori* is regarded as more basic than any other, and in which language – hence linguistics – plays its part alongside other systems.

RPF analysis holds not only theoretical and analytical implications but also social implications. RPF analysis, as developed in this article, takes its point of departure in a study conducted of the meanings represented on food packaging. Packaging is a socially significant **register**<sup>2</sup> (of communication) (see Thomas 2009), and is crucial in the exchange of goods in our society. When doing our shopping in the supermarket, we are surrounded by packaging designed to attract our attention and cause us to choose one product over another. RPF analysis allows us to analyse these attempts; and to see through ‘the stories’ intended to influence our preferences. In other words, knowledge of relationship and participant foci is important to be able to analyse the various multimodal discursive strategies companies employ to convince us as consumers that “we belong together”. Packaging is not just an embodiment of semiosis at play in the supermarket – at the point of sale (see Clement 2007). Also at the point of consumption, packaging ‘means’. Because when at home, we are surrounded by packaging made by marketers in their attempt to have us prefer one product to the other.

## 2. Multimodal social semiotics – theoretical prerequisites

The work presented in this paper is based on a multimodal approach to social semiotics. We understand social semiotics in the Hallidayan sense of a theory of meaning and meaning making relying on stratified systems of meaning in a social context (see e.g. Halliday 1978 or Matthiessen 2007).

Our notion of multimodality builds upon the idea that any act of meaning integrates resources from several semiotic systems (see e.g. Kress/van Leeuwen 2001). As Baldry/Thibault (2006: 18) put it:

These resources are not simply juxtaposed as separate modes of meaning making but are combined and integrated to form a complex whole which cannot be reduced to, or explained in terms of the mere sum of its separate parts (...). The separation of different resources into different modalities is an *analytical abstraction*. Different resources are analytically, but not constitutively, separable in actual texts.

Our notion – originating from Baldry/Thibault’s point that separate modes constitute a complex, inseparable whole – conflicts with the position of Halliday/Matthiessen (1999: 3) when they note that “All knowledge is constituted in semiotic systems, with language as the most central; and all such representations of knowledge are constructed from language in the first place”. We do not find language to be *the* central system in the human construal of experience; from our point of view, it is *a* central system alongside, and intertwined with, numerous other semiotic systems such as image, gesture, facial expression, music, architecture, etc. Language serves a large number of communication purposes but this also holds true for other semiotic systems. So, departing from the route taken by Halliday/Matthiessen, and also by Hasan (see Hasan 2005: ch. 4), we regard all semiotic systems as basically equal for the creation of meaning by humans, i.e. **semogenesis**.

2 Please refer to page [7] for a definition of register.

The basis of multimodal social semiotics is constituted by a number of theoretical axioms:

1. Firstly, there is the hypothesis that a semiotic system is a paradigmatic ordering of possible choices in meaning making. Semiotic systems are viewed as resources – i.e. a meaning potential – for registers and texts; this is the concept of instantiation. In social semiotics, the concept of instantiation is regarded as a cline which illustrates the relationship between system and text, and a text is regarded as an instance – i.e. an actualisation – of certain parts of the system (see Halliday/Matthiessen 2004: 26-29). In other words, instantiation relates what Saussure would label *langue* and *parole* (see Saussure 1949).
2. Secondly, it includes the hypothesis that semiotic systems are organised into a number of strata (see Lamb 1966), e.g. context, semantics, lexicogrammar, phonology and phonetics for spoken language (see Halliday/Matthiessen 2004: 24-26). We understand semantics as a stratum of meaning at the interface between the stratum of lexicogrammar and the stratum of context (see Halliday 1961: 74). The lexicogrammatical stratum holds the resources for converting and organising semantic meanings into e.g. wordings and graphic elements (Halliday 1979: 58).
3. Thirdly, it incorporates the hypothesis that the stratified semiotic system is itself embedded in another stratum, namely the stratum of context. Context plays a crucial role in that it constrains the possible choices made in the system if these are to be functional (i.e. adequate in the context), and it plays a similar crucial role in the way a given act of meaning is understood. This is also emphasized by Baldry/Thibault (2006: 3): “texts are embedded in, and *help to constitute*, the contexts in which they function”.
4. Fourthly, it rests on a hypothesis about **metafunctions** whereby an act of meaning comprises three metafunctions: the **ideational** (construal of represented experience), the **interpersonal** (enactment of relationships) and the **textual** (organisation of message) (see Halliday 1997)<sup>3</sup>.

These fundamentals constitute the theoretical frame for our RPF analysis in the following ways: our conceptualisation of the relationship/participant focus is basically structured by an intersection of stratification (axiom 2 and 3) and metafunction (axiom 4), and when analysing the relationship/participant focus of a text, we focus on the instantiated systemic choices and their distribution in the text. Regarding axiom 3, we see our texts as socially significant acts of meaning in a (commercialised) context.

### 3. Relationship/participant focus – towards a new analysis

RPF analysis focuses on the discursive resources used by marketers in their attempt to market their product or service towards an intended consumer. In literature on how to be persuasive (e.g. in marketing communication literature) and, hence, effective in getting the seller’s message across to the targeted perceiver (the consumer), it is a classic assumption that communication should be built on two fundamentals: (i) it should be personal, and (ii) it should directly involve the perceiver (see e.g. Ogilvy 1983, Lynge 1989 or Gabay 2003). However, as we show below, messages containing an impersonal story, or a story that is not aimed directly at the perceiver, are also used when a product or a service is marketed.

Inspired by the classic assumption stated above, the RPF analysis revolves around two fundamental factors, namely (i) **personalisation** and (ii) **communication perspective**. These are the factors we wish to explore with RPF analysis – in other words, RPF analysis is a method by which

<sup>3</sup> Linguistically, the ideational metafunction represents experience as configurations of processes (formed by verbal groups) and participants (formed by nominal groups); the interpersonal metafunction organises relationships through speech functions realised by clause structures; and the textual metafunctions organises a message by theme-rheme-structures and given-new-structures.

we can examine (i) whether a text tells a story about (living) persons or about (dead) things, and (ii) whether a text is focused on its performer or its perceiver.

Our method to do a RPF analysis of a text builds on the stratification/metafunction hypothesis in social semiotics. We thus draw on resources from the interpersonal and the ideational metafunctions, and we look at our object from three strata: context, semantics and lexicogrammar.

From the perspective of stratification, relationship/participant focus should be understood as the combination of two clines designating a phenomenological context: the first cline has ‘performer’ and ‘perceiver’ at its poles, while the second cline has ‘person’ (: conscious being) and ‘thing’ (: unconscious being) at its poles. Figure 1 below is an illustration of personalisation and communication perspective, respectively, as contextual clines.

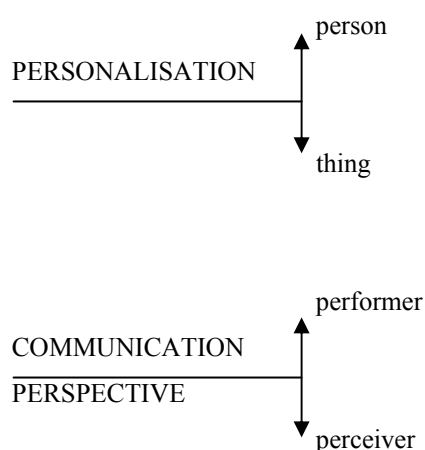


Figure 1. The two systems; PERSONALISATION and COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE

Personalisation has to do with the construal of participants. Following Halliday and Matthiessen (1999: 190-191) and their taxonomy of ‘simple things’ as the basis for constructing participants, we regard a ‘person world’ as a world dominated by and focussing on conscious participants, while a ‘thing world’ is dominated by and focussing on non-conscious participants, i.e. objects, institutions and (abstract) concepts. Communication perspective has to do with the discursive enactment of relationships. Are the situation and the text focussing on the performer, or are they focussing on the perceiver trying to involve her?<sup>4</sup>

As indicated by our choice of words<sup>5</sup>, personalisation is mainly **ideational** in its focus, while communication is mainly interpersonal. Focussing on these two metafunctions, we concentrate on the aspects directly reflecting and enacting the world, namely how semiotic resources are “a meaning potential, at once both a part of experience and an intersubjective interpretation of experience” (Halliday 1996: 89). An intersection of the two clines results in a coordinate system, as illustrated in Figure 2 below.

4 We have chosen ‘performer’ and ‘perceiver’ in lack of better terms – it should be emphasized that we do not see communication as a simple act of transmitting a message but as a dialogical act (see Halliday/Matthiessen 2004: 106-107).

5 ‘Construes’ for the ideational metafunction and ‘enacts’ for the interpersonal metafunction (see Matthiessen 2002: 59).

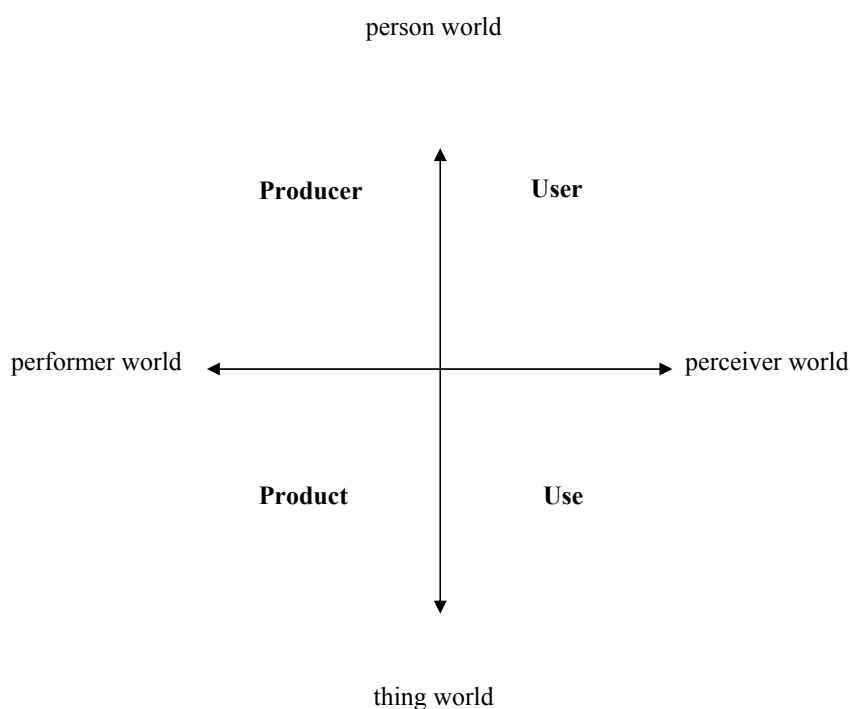


Figure 2. Fields of relationship/participant focus within a system of coordinates

The contextual clines in the coordinate system constitute four quadrants. These quadrants designate four different discursive fields of relationship/participant focus, namely a user-field, a use-field, a producer-field and a product-field:

- 1) The producer (person/performer); in this field we find stories about the producer (maybe a company history) and the producer's intentions with the product.
- 2) The user (person/perceiver); in this field we find stories about the user, e.g. stories about the behaviour of the user.
- 3) The product (thing/performer); in this field we find stories about the product itself and its qualities.
- 4) The use (thing/perceiver); in this field we find stories about the product in use, e.g. its consumption.

These four fields of relationship/participant focus are **registerial fields** in the sense that they are distinct configurations of semantic resources with lexicogrammatical realisations; Halliday (1978: 35) defines a register as “variety according to the use” and states that “registers are: different ways of saying different things and tend to differ in: semantics (and hence in lexicogrammar, and sometimes phonology, as realisation of this)”.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the contextual clines reflect (i) a (dialogic) world oriented around a performer or a perceiver, and (ii) a world oriented around a thing or a person. These worlds are semanticised (reflected and construed) in a text as the four fields of relationship/participant focus.

6 The registerial fields forming the four fields of focus are also discursive fields in Matthiessen's sense where a discourse is understood simply as a “text in context” (Matthiessen 1992: 18). Since the notion of context in social semiotics is to be understood as a social construction, Matthiessen's understanding of discourse concurs with Fairclough's understanding, since he regards a discourse as an instance of sociocultural practice (see Fairclough 1992).

#### 4. Relationship/participant focus – method of analysis

So far, we have presented the basic meanings involved in RPF analysis, namely the contrasts between performer and perceiver, and between conscious and unconscious beings, and we have presented the theoretical frame within which the RPF analysis deals with these meanings, namely multimodal social semiotics. The basic meanings, hence the basic construction of our tool for doing RPF analysis, are inspired by marketing communication literature (as stated in section 3). What we have done, then, is to test the usability of our model through text analysis. We have analysed a corpus consisting of 31 instances of packaging. All instances – that is, all of our texts – are examples from a Danish context.

All the instances of packaging are defined by the same register (see Halliday 1978: 62) as they contain breakfast cereals. The choice of packaging is motivated by the observation that packaging is a rich text type, employing several semiotic systems in order to communicate with the consumer.

From our text analysis, we have been able to modify our model, and even more important: we have been able to model the semantic and lexicogrammatical resources making up the four different fields of the relationship/participant focus. In other words, our text analysis provides the ground on which we are able to present a more elaborate description of the relationship/participant focus in Figure 3 than the one presented in Figure 2.

Our analyses, of which we present a few samples in order to exemplify the RPF model (see section 5), are based on the following methodological terms from social semiotics.

#### 4.2. Modes involved and analytical progress

Our RPF analyses are primarily focused on a linguistic and visual analysis of the two-dimensional layout of the package sides. Examining three-dimensional layout, tactile design and maybe even the smell and sounds of the product and package would probably have brought even further insights, but our studies do not yet include these modalities/perspectives.

Each analysis begins with the front and then moves to the back and occasionally to the other box sides. The front functions as the primary text in the supermarket when consumers are exposed to the product, while the back (and sides) functions as an equally significant text when the product is in use/being consumed. In other words, while the front is important at the point-of-sale, the other sides are important at the point-of-consumption, where they function as a “continuous communicator” of the brand’s values (see Hardt-Mautner 1994: 36).

#### 4.3. Cluster

In the analysis of packaging, we utilise Baldry and Thibault’s (2006) Multimodal Cluster Analysis as our basic structural approach. Baldry/Thibault (2006: 31) define a cluster as “a local grouping of items” and in taking inspiration from gestalt theory (see e.g. Koffka 1935 or Arnheim 1974), they argue that these items are “spatially proximate thereby defining a specific region or subregion of the page as a whole to which they belong as parts” (Baldry/Thibault 2006: 31). Baldry/Thibault’s cluster analysis divides the surface into areas based on the structural arrangement of elements, and since this division is made on plausible rather than entirely objective grounds, the analyst must, of course, be aware of the analytical implications of the choices in her cluster division. It is imperative, however, that the cluster analysis is not an *ad hoc* description, but indeed a plausible approach, based on theoretical assumptions, to how the text structures elements for the viewer.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Of course, these theoretical assumptions are themselves still based on rather tentative pioneering work (e.g. Kress/van Leeuwen 2006), but this is an unavoidable consequence of multimodal social semiotics being a relatively young theory. In due course, the work performed in these years by scholars worldwide will further qualify the multimodal social semiotic paradigm.

Baldry/Thibault's cluster analysis allows for intra-textually defined scalar rank levels, which makes it possible to describe how "larger-scale items and the relationships in the visual field contain smaller-scale ones just as smaller-scale ones such as clusters are contained within larger ones" (Baldry/Thibault 2006: 31). We prefer this dynamic approach to rank scale related multi-modal complexities of visual texts, but incorporate further means to creating clustering besides relative spatial proximity of elements. Thus the clustering can be a result of different types of framing and segregation devices such as lines or space used to separate certain elements from the rest in order to group them (Kress/van Leeuwen 2006: 203). Also, we find that different types of visual rhyme in colour and shape can affect the clustering, and so can similarities in represented processes (Boeriis 2009: 146; cf. Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 79).

#### 4.4. Saliency

Taking the idea of clusters as our point of departure, we describe the saliency hierarchy (see Kress/van Leeuwen 2006: 202) of the clusters found on our bags and boxes. Kress/van Leeuwen (2006: 201) point out that "regardless of where they are placed, saliency can create a hierarchy of importance among the elements, selecting some as more important, more worthy of attention than others".<sup>8</sup> The saliency hierarchy is viewed as the way in which the text is structured through complex choices of contrasting whereby certain elements are represented as more prominent than others. This foregrounding or highlighting is viewed to be less of a psycho-sensory than a semiotic phenomenon, and the hierarchy may or may not correspond with the actual pattern of eye fixations across the page<sup>9</sup>. The non-sequential decoding of images makes it problematic to even talk about a "most plausible reading path" as is done by Kress/van Leeuwen (2006: 205). Rather, the saliency hierarchy describes how the text constitutes a unique hierarchy of importance between its elements as an internal structure of the text. The text performer presents the elements hierarchically in the text with a specific communicative purpose. What is salient depends on contrasts in the layout of the text; we utilise an array of contrast types such as contrast through foregrounding/backgrounding, contrast in relative size, in tonal value, in colour, in sharpness of focus, in process type and in perspective (Kress/van Leeuwen 2006: 202 and Boeriis 2009: 210).<sup>10</sup>

#### 4.5. Using the social semiotic vocabulary

The different clusters in the saliency hierarchies are described for their relationship/participant focus, providing us with a more thorough description of the lexicogrammatical and semantic resources used for constituting the four fields of relationship/participant focus. The terminology used in our analyses is based on the terminology in social semiotics/systemic functional linguistics (Halliday/Matthiessen 2004, Matthiessen 1992, and Halliday/Matthiessen 1999) and multi-modal theory (Baldry/Thibault 2006, Kress/van Leeuwen 2001 and Boeriis 2009). The social semiotic terminology may not be easy to negotiate, if one is not acquainted with it, so in order to accommodate the reader not familiar with social semiotic terms, we have employed both a general terminology and the social semiotic one in our analyses.

8 We are grateful to one of our anonymous reviewers for pointing towards the work of Greg Myers; the idea of 'saliency' is very similar to Myers' notion of 'foregrounding' (Myers 1994: 31).

9 Tracing the path of viewer's gaze through eye-tracking may certainly provide interesting information about the fixations across the surface, but this does not necessarily describe the functional saliency hierarchy. The first and/or longest fixation does not necessarily point to the most prominent element although, of course, it may. The combined time span needed for the dynamic scrutiny of images is probably not the same as the time span needed for the sequential reading of written language. This is another aspect of the perception of multimodally constituted texts that may distort the results of eye-tracking studies. Another potentially problematic aspect of eye-tracking is the role of the peripheral vision outside the foveal vision, where again, the sequential reading obviously differs from the dynamic scrutiny of images (see Holsanova et al. 2006).

10 This understanding is to some extent based on the gestalt theoretical notion of figure-ground (see Koffka 1935) where the elements function as figure when they on some formal level differ from the overall image, called the ground.

#### 4.6. The elaborated relationship/participant focus

Our analyses of relationship/participant focus (see section 5) based on the methodology described above have yielded a more elaborate picture of the resources that constitute the four different fields of relationship/participant focus than the picture we have presented in Figure 2. This different picture of the relationship/participant focus is shown in Figure 3 below. Here, we have added **realisation statements** to show in more detail how the fields of user, use, producer and product are construed discursively. The realisation statements show both semantic and lexicogrammatical properties of the four fields in the relationship/participant focus analysis.

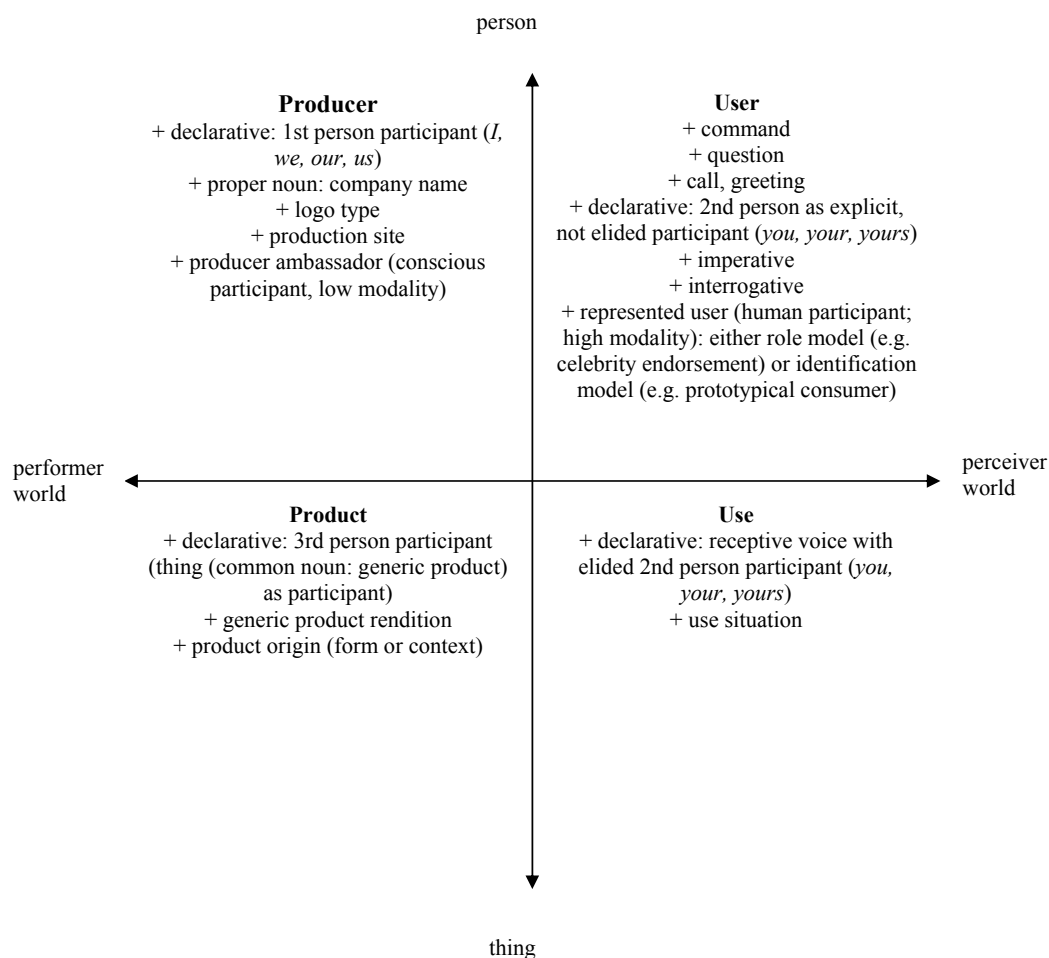


Figure 3. Fields of relationship/participant focus within a system of coordinates, elaborated with realisation statements

It should be noted that we have included only those (linguistic and visual) resources that function as distinctive features of each field of the relationship/participant focus. For example, the speech functional category of **command** is listed, since this is the only one associated with the user field; the speech function of **statement** is not listed in the model, since this belongs in all fields of relationship/participant focus.<sup>11</sup>

As Figure 3 shows, the four fields of relationship/participant focus are characterised by a number of distinct features:

<sup>11</sup> The social semiotic taxonomy of speech functions consists of the following four speech functions: statement, question, offer and command (Halliday 1984).



In the producer field, we find stories about the producer (maybe a company history) and the producer's intentions behind the product. This field is realised by proper nouns and/or logos representing the performer. Furthermore, in the longer stretches of linguistic text, we find declarative clauses with first person pronouns (*I, we, us*) or proper nouns (designating the performer) as participant. Producer focus can also be represented by what we call the 'producer ambassador' which is a visual depiction of a conscious participant, such as *Tony the Tiger* representing the producer *Kellogg's*. Also included in a producer focus are depictions of the production site.

In the user field, which dialogically complements the producer field, we find stories about the user, e.g. stories about the behaviour of the user. Such meanings are realised by declarative clauses with the second person pronoun (*you*) as explicit (non-elided) participant, and by imperative clauses<sup>12</sup> and interrogative clauses (e.g. *Spiller du fodbold?* (in English: 'Do you play soccer?')). Different realisations of calls and greetings<sup>13</sup> also constitute a user focus, as do visual representations of an identification figure, either a celebrity role model endorsing the product or a role model who, from the point of view of the perceiver, possesses desirable characteristics.

In the product field, we find stories about the product itself and its qualities. A product focus can be realised visually by a generic product rendition or a depiction of the origin of the product. Linguistically, we find declarative clauses with third person pronouns and general nouns (designating the product category) as participant; these are either subject or object in a clause.

In the use field, we find stories about the consumption of the product. The use field is a more complex field than the other three with regard to its visual and linguistic realisation, since use focus occurs with the perceiver *implicitly* present in the text. This is the case when the story is presented from the perceiver's point of view. If the perceiver were explicitly present, the focus would be toward user, not use. So, the story involves non-conscious participants seen from the perspective of the perceiver, or declarative clauses in receptive voice<sup>14</sup> with an elided second person participant. A use focus can further be realised by a depiction of a use situation, i.e. the product/packaging in use.

In text analysis, the analysis of relationship/participant focus – and the four fields defined above – may focus on the longer stretches of text. These may be unambiguous in their relationship/participant focus, i.e. be clear in their focus, or be ambiguous, e.g. be more or less oriented towards one particular field of focus (see Andersen/Boeriis 2008). Different clusters of the same text may also take on different relationship/participant foci.

The complexity of RPF analysis is related to the fact that a given picture, clause or string of text may be made up of elements holding different foci; this can be exemplified by the clause *Mød os ved målstregen* (in English: 'Meet us at the finishing line') from the *Kellogg's Special K* box, which holds both a producer focus (stemming from the personal pronoun *os* (in English: 'us')) and a user focus (stemming from the imperative clause structure realising a command).

## 5. Applied RPF analysis

In this section, we present two fuller RPF analyses in order to exemplify this method, i.e. in order to illustrate what an RPF analysis reveals about a text (packaging), and in order to showcase the resources constituting each of the four fields of focus.

The first example is a box containing the cereal *Kellogg's Special K*, and the second example is a paper bag containing organic oats under the Danish brand name of *Kornkammeret Økologiske Havregryn*. The two examples hold different foci: the first balances between focus on the product and focus on the user, thereby trying to establish some kind of communication situation between

<sup>12</sup> In imperative clauses, the participant is often implicit, but nevertheless the clause involves a conscious being (see Halliday/Matthiessen 2004: 138).

<sup>13</sup> As presented in Martin 1992: 44.

<sup>14</sup> See the distinction between operative and receptive voice in Halliday/Matthiessen 2004: 297.

the performer and the perceiver; the latter primarily employs a product and a producer focus, i.e. it is primarily focused towards the performer.

### 5.1. Kellogg's Special K



Figure 4. The front of the Kellogg's K box; reproduced with permission from Kellogg's

If we look at the front of the Kellogg's K box (the box is represented in Figure 4 with numerals identifying its various clusters), the most salient level consists of a single element, the red letter *K* (1). The salience is achieved by the relative size of the letter and the saturated red hue, and overlap as well as the distribution of highlights and shadows, making it stand out from the background. The *K* refers to the producer's logo type (which is placed at the top of the front), and it functions as (part of) the name and logo for the specific product. In this respect, the *K* signifies a simultaneous focus on the product and the producer.

The second most salient level consists of the following elements:

- The *classic* cluster (2a); this designates the product. The product focus is amplified by the nominal group *Sprøde flager af ris og fuldkornshvede* (in English<sup>15</sup>: 'Crisp flakes of rice and full grained wheat'), which syntactically is related to *classic* in an elliptical be-clause. In social semiotic terms, *Sprøde flager af ris og fuldkornshvede* functions as Attribute to the

<sup>15</sup> Our translations throughout this article are literal translations and should not be regarded as translations of the Danish text into stylistically well-written English.

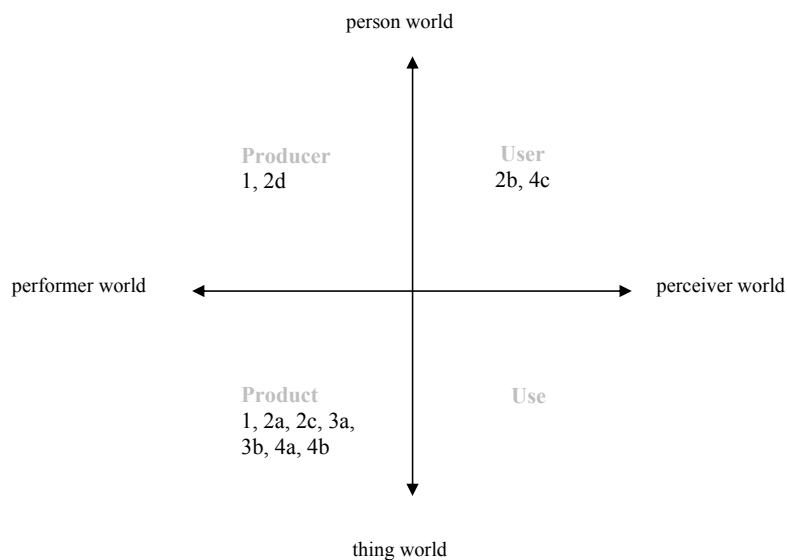
Carrier *classic* in a relational process. The cluster functions as a declaration of the content in the box.

- The *løbepit* (in English: Runner's pit stop) cluster (2b) which holds a user focus because it pivots around the behaviour of the user: the light blue silhouette represents a woman, i.e. the user in an action process: *running*, and this corresponds to the linguistic part of the cluster which is made up of two commands realised by imperative clauses, hence two realisations of a speech function that is directly aimed at the perceiver, i.e. the user: *Få en ny god løbevane – se bagsiden* (in English: 'Get a new good habit of running – see the back').
- The term *Special* (2c); this designates a product focus.
- The term *Kellogg's* (2d) which functions as a producer focus.

Linguistically, the combination of *Special* and the red K functions as one cluster naming the product, but visually the *Special* element occupies its own space, whereas the *classic* element seems more proximate to the K since it is placed within the space inside the graphical structure of the K. This constitutes a discrepancy between the linguistic and the visual cluster structure, potentially leading to an unclear understanding of the product name.

On the third level in the salience hierarchy, we find information about the percentage of fat in the product: *1,5% fedt* (in English: '1.5% fat') (3a), as well as a visual representation of the content of the box, namely the flakes in the lower left corner. Both these clusters designate a product focus. The fourth level in the salience hierarchy consists of three clusters: the quantity, *500g* (4a) (product focus), the decoration of the red K with the capitulum from the wheat (4b) (product focus), and of the white t-shirt in the background (4c) (user focus).

The salience hierarchy designating the RPF profile of the front of the Kellogg's K box is captured by Figure 5.



- |                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1: The red letter K            | 3b: The flakes                               |
| 2a: The <i>classic</i> cluster | 4a: <i>500g</i>                              |
| 2b: The <i>løbepit</i> cluster | 4b: The capitulum of wheat on the K          |
| 2c: <i>Special</i>             | 4c: The white t-shirt forming the background |
| 2d: <i>Kellogg's</i>           |  |
| 3a: <i>1,5% fedt</i>           |  |

Figure 5. The RPF profile of the front of the Kellogg's K box

At the back of the box (see Figure 6), we find as the single most salient element a woman who is about to start running (1). This is due to her relative size, the color of her t-shirt (color rhyme cohesion with the K on the front of the box), and the fact that she is the only human participant being depicted. Thus, the woman represents the user. This user is positioned as a runner ready to race, using the product (two boxes of Special K) as her starting blocks. This cluster presents mainly a user focus supplemented by the lesser salient product.

Special K er hovedsponsor af Femina Kvindeløb 2007 – mød os ved målstregen **FEMINA**

**6**

**2** Kom ind i en ny god løbevane med Special K

**1**

**3** Special K's Løbepit er genvejen til de gode resultater

**5** Undskyldningerne står i kø  
 Løbet er så blød. Regn i sigte. Dobbelt-afsnit af din løbsangsserie. Undskyldningerne for at undgå løbeturene står i kø – det er svært at komme i gang. Men faktum er, hvis du går og drømmer om gode former, er det bare med at komme ud af starthullerne. Og ind på løbepitten på specialk.dk.

**Løbepitten???**  
 Jeps, specialk.dk's Løbepit er hjælpen til dig, der har mod på at komme i gang. I Løbepitten kan du invitere dine venner med på en ny god løbevane – det er jo som bekendt lidt nemmere at lykkes, når man er flere om det. Du kan vælge mellem forskellige gratis løbeprogrammer eller et personligt program, som lægges i samråd med dinform.dk – med Special K-rabat. Derudover bliver du tanket op med alt, hvad der er værd at vide om brændstof, sko, sports-BH'er m.m.

**Spejlet viser resultaterne**  
 Løb regelmæssigt og spis en sund morgenmad. To vaner, der er gode for formerne og dit BMI. Start f.eks. dagen med en portion Special K, fuldkornsbrød med ost og et stykke frugt. Følg op med løb et par gange om ugen. Det kan være svært at komme i gang, men hold ud. Og hold øje med spejlet – de gode resultater viser sig hurtigt.

**4a** **LØBEPIT**

**4b**

Kellogg's Special K - gode vaner gl'r dig gode former

Figure 6. The back of the Kellogg's K box; reproduced with permission from Kellogg's

The user focus combined with a marginal product focus is continued in the second most salient cluster, namely the headline: *Kom ind i en ny god løbevane med Special K* (2) (in English: 'Get into a new good habit of running with Special K'). The headline is an imperative clause realising a command (more specifically a challenge) aimed directly at and involving the perceiver. At the same time, however, the headline does not ignore the product itself: in the command (/challenge) directed at the perceiver, the product is positioned as the object helping the user to meet the challenge. In social semiotic terms, the product functions as Means in a material process. Metafunctionally speaking, Kellogg's is interpersonally setting up a situation for the user (a situation that the company believes to be desirable to the user: to be fit and live an active life), while ideationally positioning the product as the user's means to obtain this desirable life.

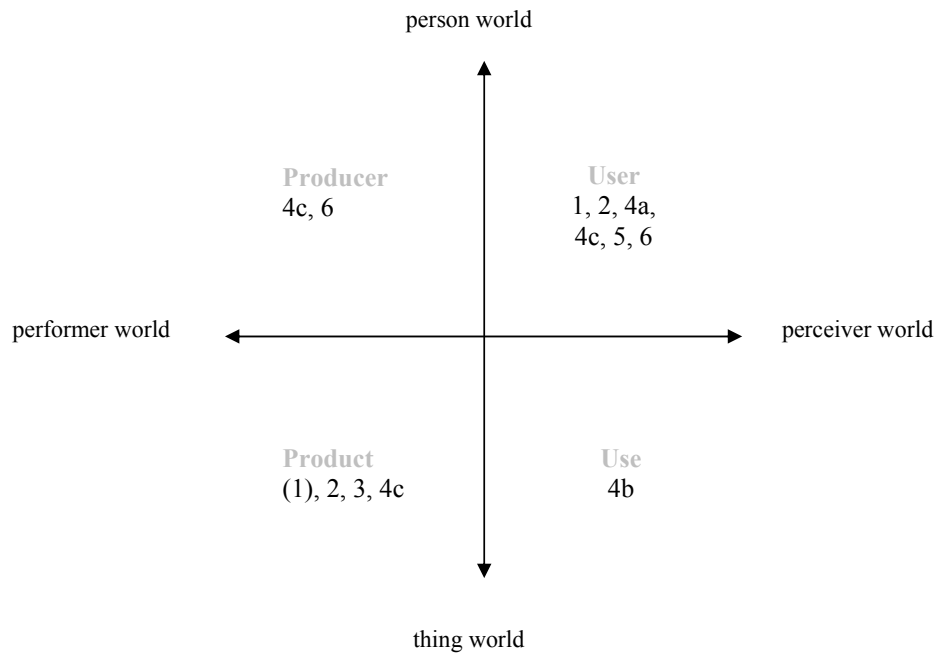
This ideational construal is elaborated at the third most salient level, namely in the clause with a product focus: *Special K's Løbepit er genvejen til de gode resultater* (3) (in English: 'Special K's running pit is the short cut to the good results'). Here, *Special K's Løbepit* is identified as the one and only short cut to improved performance. There is no other way, *Special K's Løbepit* is not presented as one out of several ways to get the good results, it is the only way. Using the social semiotic terminology, *Special K's Løbepit* functions lexicogrammatically in an identifying relational process.

On the fourth level in the salience hierarchy, we find the cluster in the bottom right corner. This cluster has a threefold focus: the logo for the *Løbepit* (4a) is focussed on the user (we have a repetition from the front of the light blue silhouette representing the user in a training situation encouraged by the *Løbepit* programme); while the second part of the cluster (4b) takes a use focus, showing a serving of the product, i.e. the product in a breakfast situation. These illustrations are underlined by the slogan (4c): *Kellogg's Special K – gode vaner giver dig gode former* (in English: 'Kellogg's Special K – good habits give you good shapes'). This slogan expresses a complex focus: at the same time, it is focused on the user with its direct address of the user through the personal pronoun *dig* (in English: 'you'), and towards the product and the producer with *Kellogg's Special K* functioning as the one initiating the *good habits*. In social semiotic terms, *Kellogg's Special K* fills the functions as Initiator and Theme.

The body text, which constitutes the fifth level in the salience hierarchy (5), primarily adopts a user focus because of the many commands realised by imperative clauses at the end of the text, for instance: *Løb regelmæssigt og spis en sund morgenmad. (...) Start f.eks. dagen med en portion Special K, fuldkornsbrød med ost og et stykke frugt. Følg op med løb et par gange om ugen. (...) Og hold øje med spejlet – de gode resultater viser sig hurtigt* (in English: 'Run regularly and eat a healthy breakfast. (...) Begin e.g. the day with a serving of Special K, whole grain bread with cheese and a piece of fruit. Follow up by running a couple of times a week. (...) And keep an eye on the mirror – the good results will show quickly').

Probably, the least salient element on the back of the box is the blue bar at the top (6). The first part of the linguistic element in the blue bar, i.e. the declarative clause realising a statement: *Special K er hovedsponsor af Femina Kvindeløb 2007* (in English: 'Special K is main sponsor of the Femina women's race 2007'), holds a focus towards the producer. In this clause, *Special K* is the most significant participant, since it functions as agent, and it is placed first in the clause; we regard *Special K* as an expression not of the product but of the producer, i.e. the Kellogg's corporation. This is because a product (a thing) cannot sponsor anything, only a conscious being can. The second part of the linguistic element in the blue bar, i.e. the clause: *Mød os ved målstregen* (in English: 'Meet us at the finishing line') is both producer and user focused. Its producer focus stems from the personal pronoun *os* (in English: 'us'), while the imperative clause structure, realising a command, signifies a user focus.

The salience hierarchy designating the RPF profile of the back of the Kellogg's K box is illustrated in Figure 7.



- |                                  |                                |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1: The woman (+ starting block)  | 4b: The serving of the product |
| 2: <i>Kom ind i en ny god...</i> | 4c: The slogan                 |
| 3: <i>Special K's løbepit...</i> | 5: The body text               |
| 4a: The <i>Løbepit</i> logo      | 6: The blue bar on the top     |

Figure 7. The RPF profile of the back of the Kellogg's K box

The numerals in Figures 4 and 6 above illustrate how a single cluster can occupy more than one field of focus, which is the case, for instance, for the single most salient cluster on the front (the red letter K), since it holds a dual focus. In case of a dual focus, we have placed a number in both of the two relevant fields of focus instead of on the cline separating these two fields; this illustrates that one focus does not outweigh the other but both foci are in fact present.

All in all, what we find on the Kellogg's Special K classic box is a balance between a product and a user focus. Predominantly, the front is focused on the performer (i.e. the producer/product side of the system of coordinates) with most elements focusing on the product. At first sight, the box focuses equally on the product and the producer, but further down in the salience hierarchy, the product focus is being elaborated. On the back, the balance between a product and a user focus is even more pronounced. This general picture of the focus on the Kellogg's Special K classic box indicates a communicative situation where the product plays a more significant role than the producer, and where it is not the use, e.g. serving of the product, but the user of the product, who is in focus.

## 5.2. Kornkammeret Økologiske Havregryn

Our next example is the *Kornkammeret Økologiske Havregryn* package<sup>16</sup> (see Figure 8), where we find a somewhat different overall focus.

<sup>16</sup> *Kornkammeret* is a brand marketed by Havnemøllerne/Lantmännen Cerealia A/S.



Figure 8. The front and back of the *Kornkammeret Økologiske Havregryn* bag; reproduced with permission from Dansk Supermarked Indkøb I/S

On this paper bag, another strategy is applied in the attempt to convince the perceiver to choose this particular cereal. The focus is mainly towards the producer but the product is also heavily in play. And on this bag we also see an increase in focus on the use of the product rather than the actual user. The relationship/participant focus is illustrated in Figures 9 and 10.

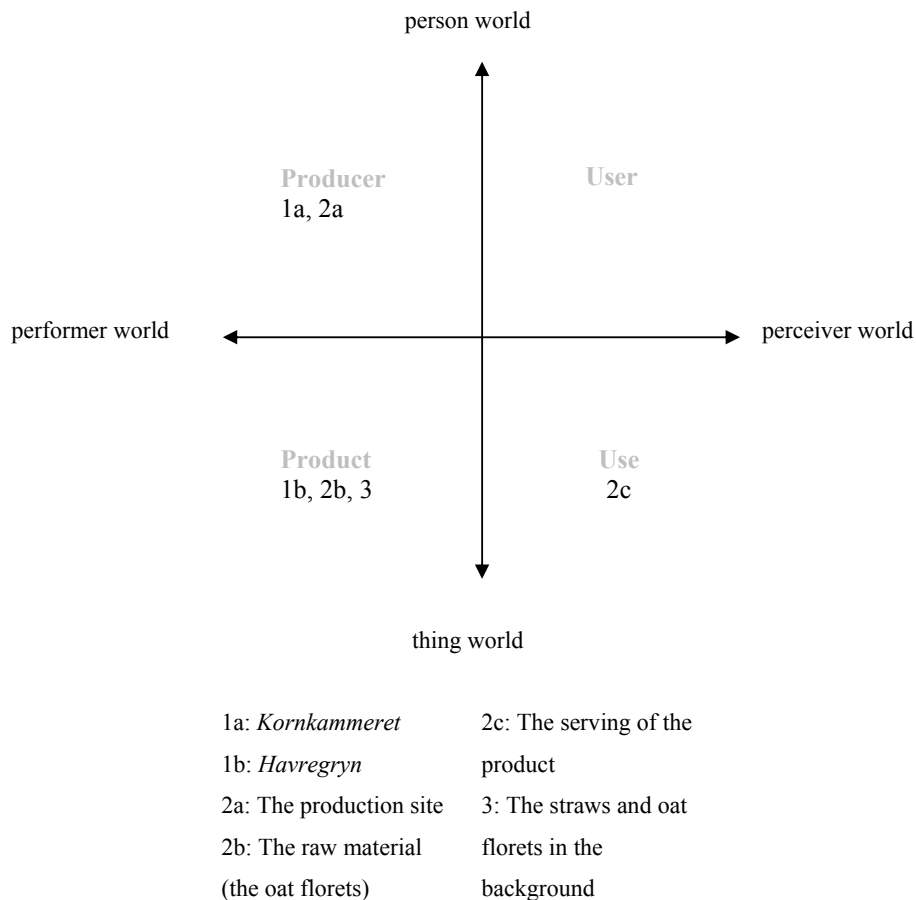


Figure 9. The RPF profile of the front of the *Kornkammeret Økologiske Havregryn* bag

On the front of the bag, the most salient clusters are linguistic, namely the words *Kornkammeret* (1a) and *Havregryn* (1b) (in English: ‘Oats’), respectively. *Kornkammeret* is a proper noun identifying the producer/brand while *Havregryn* is a general noun identifying the product.

The second level in the salience hierarchy consists of two clusters. First, there is the rather complex cluster at the top of the front illustrating the origin of the oats in respect to both its site of production (2a) (depicted in a low modality, i.e. in a less than photo realistic and highly saturated manner), and its raw material (2b) (illustrated by a generic drawing of two oat florets; we regard the drawing as generic since the oat florets are rendered in a less detailed and colour modulated manner). This cluster is at the same time focused on the producer and the product. Second, a simpler cluster at the bottom of the front depicts a photo realistic serving of oats (2c), which constitutes a use focus.

On the third level in the salience hierarchy, we find the background (3), especially the photo realistic rendition of straws and the oat florets separating the top and the bottom of the bag. This part of the background holds a product focus.

On the back of the bag, we find a more elaborate salience hierarchy than on the front. The single most salient cluster is the logo type (1); this is a repetition of the logo type on the front, and it has a producer focus. The photographic depiction of a breakfast meal with oats (2) on the second level of the salience hierarchy has a more pronounced use focus than on the front because the oats are relatively less dominant in comparison to the rest of the breakfast menu depicted.

The third most salient cluster is the headline and text above the just mentioned depiction of a breakfast meal (3), containing the following linguistic element: *Liv fra jorden. Kornkammeret er ren økologi, der henter al sin kraft fra naturligt forekommende liv i jorden. Organisk gødning*



*og grønne afgrøder holder jorden i balance og beriger den i en naturlig cyklus* (in English: 'Life from the soil. Kornkammeret is pure organics which gets all of its energy from naturally occurring life in the soil. Organic manure and green crops maintain the farm land in a balance and enriches it in a natural cycle'). In this cluster, a strong product focus is expressed through uses of participants and processes referring to the product and its biological growth.

The fourth level in the salience hierarchy consists of two separate linguistic clusters under the headings *Mere liv i smagen* (4a) (in English: 'More life in the taste') and *Din garanti for kvalitet* (4b) (in English: 'Your guarantee of quality'), respectively. The first of these clusters tells a story about the product and how *Kornkammeret Økologiske Havregryn* has a rich taste stemming from its organic growth; this story constitutes a product focus. On the surface, the story seems to embody a personal angle beyond the mere product focus since we find the endorsing utterance: *Mange mener, at produkter fra Kornkammeret smager af mere* (in English: 'Many people find that products from Kornkammeret taste of more'). This, however, is an impersonal reference not to a single user (or to the perceiver of the bag) but to an indefinite number of 'endorsers'. The second cluster is interesting in that it embodies both a producer and a user focus, since the cluster is, possibly, a communication between the producer and an (dissatisfied) user, exemplified by the following complex of clauses: *Skulle et af vores produkter ikke leve op til dine forventninger, håber vi, at du vil returnere produktet til os med resten af indholdet samt den del af emballagen, hvor datoen står* (in English: 'Should one of our products not live up to your expectations, we hope that you will return the product to us with the rest of the contents and the part of the bag with the sell-by date).

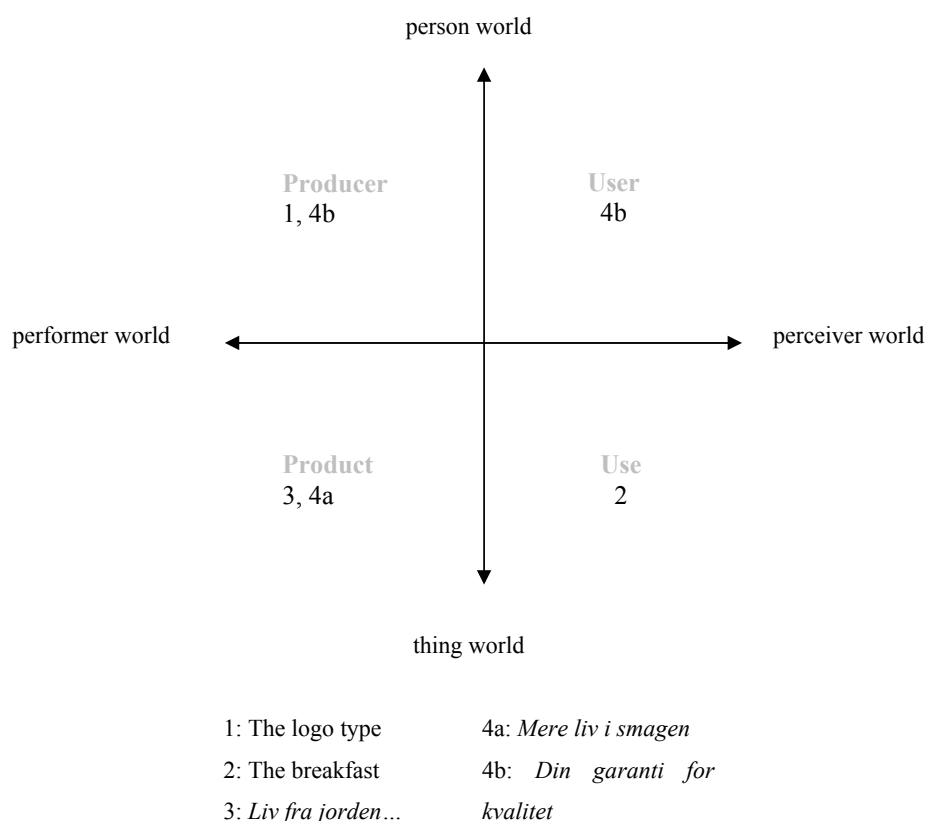


Figure 10. The RPF profile of the back of the *Kornkammeret Økologiske Havregryn* bag

The text from the side of the package for *Kornkammeret Økologiske Havregryn* also exemplifies the somewhat complex use field (see section 4.6). The text begins with a use focus, setting the scene:

- (1) Glad og sund fra morgenstunden

*En god dag starter med et godt og solidt morgenmåltid. Kroppen skal have tilført ny energi – og med en god portion havregryn styrkes koncentrationen i skolen eller på jobbet.*

(In English: ‘Happy and healthy from the morning hour

A good day starts with a good and healthy breakfast. The body must be given new energy – and with a good serving of oats, the power of concentration in school or at work is strengthened.’)

At the end of the text, we find another example of the use focus, this time with a description of different types of servings of oat:

- (2) Et frisk pift

Der er mange måder at servere en portion havregryn på. Der er klassikeren med et drys sukker og mælk, men det er nemt og hurtigt at give grynene et frisk pift.

(In English: ‘A refreshing touch

There are many ways of serving oats. There is the classic way with a sprinkle of sugar and milk, but it is easy and quick to give the oats a refreshing touch.’)

The description of these servings is contrasted to the text segment that follows immediately after, where the text shifts to a user focus (the imperative embodies the idea of a conscious participant, see note 10), elaborating on the different ways to serve oats, now with commands directed at the perceiver:

- (3) Prøv f.eks. en portion med æbletern og grofthakkede nødder eller mandler og rosin. Eller prøv med bananskiver og rosiner.

(In English: ‘Try e.g. a serving with apple cubes and coarsely chopped nuts or almonds and raisin. Or try with slices of banana and raisins’).

## 6. Relationship/participant focus, multimodality and social significance

In this article, we have set out to describe some of the multimodal communication strategies applied by marketers to persuade consumers to choose certain products. Our ambition has been to develop a multimodal discourse analytic tool that encompasses both verbal and visual choices. Through a couple of examples, we have demonstrated how the notion of relationship/participant focus provides a way of understanding some of the key discursive strategies applied in multimodal packaging used for the marketing of a given product.

The RPF method describes how a text can be produced from the perspective of four different general fields of focus. It may hold a focus towards the product itself, ascribing it with certain desirable values, e.g. through the visual aesthetic of a lower modality, depiction of the base product or linguistic description of positive features of the product. Producer focus does not employ a focus on the value of the product itself, but on the value of the producer, as seen in e.g. salient logo types and producer names. Another relationship/participant focus strategy is to focus on the consumer of the product, pointing at her in a direct verbal address (e.g. using personal pronouns or imperatives), or by representing her visually (usually in an idealised way). Often, it seems to be the argument that one would become as beautiful and fit as the idealisation (the model), if one were to purchase the product. The final strategy would be to employ a use focus, with its focus on the situation of product use, as seen in visual depictions of servings or verbal declarative clauses in receptive voice.

What we find of particular interest is that the relationship/participant focus may vary across the individual package to the extent that a given discursive strategy may employ several different focus choices. It may for instance be the strategy to use one relationship/participant focus to get the attention of the user, and another to keep it and fortify the persuasion. Another strategy is to alternate the focus between the producer and the user, even within a single clause, focusing the overall text on dialogue between seller and buyer (performer and perceiver), which brings about a kind of represented intimate relationship.

Bringing together analyses of the instantiated verbal and visual resources, we have sought to comprise the complexity of the multimodal structure on packaging. In doing so, we have proposed the overall structuring systems to be those of salience and clustering. Within the various clusters, then, different choices realise distinct foci. Although this context does not allow a more comprehensive description of the packaging register as such, we have found typical structures in our studies; for instance, the front tends to be more focused on the performer, and the back more towards the perceiver. This mirrors, of course, that the product on the shelf is placed frontally, whereas the back gets attention when the product is being used (eating while reading the back of the box).

Multimodal scholars have a challenging task before them, working on ways to comprehend the complex meaning making of the multimodal age. RPF analysis suggests one way of appreciating the multimodal complexity of packaging from the perspective of combining social semiotic acts of meaning. If a social semiotic approach to communication is to be truly multimodal, it is imperative to understand that meaning is made by combined, not complementing, resources. This, in our view, is the best way of accounting for the strategies employed by marketers. On the other hand, bridging the gap between the marketing industry and the academic world will provide the industry with useful tools. RPF analysis may be one such tool.

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