



Interpreting UNICEF's Visual Messages: A Multimodal Pragmatics Analysis of Child-Focused Campaigns

Noor Alaa Abulrazaq, (M.A.)

College of Dentistry, Mustansiriyah University

Email: noor.alaa@uomustansiriyah.edu.iq

تفسير الرسائل البصرية لليونيسف: تحليل تداولي متعدد الوسائط للحملات الموجهة للأطفال

م.م. نور علاء عبدالرزاق

كلية طب الاسنان، الجامعة المستنصرية

Abstract

The Relevance Theory, which Sperber and Wilson established between 1986 and 1995, is used in this study to examine how UNICEF poster campaigns convey humanitarian themes. The study examines four visual posters that deal with child labour, child marriage, emotional maltreatment, and child recruiting using a qualitative, interpretive methodology. Based on three research objectives, the study examines 1. How does UNICEF apply the principles of Relevance Theory in designing the content of its poster campaigns? 2. How do the implicit messages in UNICEF's posters affect the cognitive and emotional responses of the audience? 3. To what extent do UNICEF's campaigns create an interactive context that enables viewers to infer meanings and encourages responsible attitudes toward humanitarian crises? According to the investigation, UNICEF uses high-context imagery and little text in its visual campaigns, which encourage viewers to use contrast, emotional tension, and symbolic representation to deduce deeper meanings. As an ostensive stimulus, each poster involves the spectator in an interpretive process, generating moral responsibility, empathy, and prior knowledge activation. Relying on implicit communication and contextual inference, the campaigns convey strong, socially charged themes that encourage introspection and raise awareness of global issues while achieving maximum relevance. In humanitarian settings, the study emphasises how visual discourse can serve as a tactical instrument for advocacy and behavioural influence.

Keywords: UNICEF, Relevance Theory, poster campaigns, Implicit Meaning

الملخص

تُستخدم نظرية الصلة، التي وضعها سبيربر وويلسون بين عامي ١٩٨٦ و١٩٩٥، في هذه الدراسة لفحص كيفية نقل حملات ملصقات اليونيسف للمواضيع الإنسانية. تدرس الدراسة أربعة ملصقات بصرية تتناول عمالة الأطفال وزواج الأطفال والإساءة العاطفية وتجنيد الأطفال باستخدام منهجية نوعية وتفسيرية. بناءً على ثلاثة أهداف بحثية، تدرس الدراسة ١. كيف تطبق اليونيسف مبادئ نظرية الصلة في تصميم محتوى حملات الملصقات الخاصة بها؟ ٢. كيف تؤثر الرسائل الضمنية في ملصقات اليونيسف على الاستجابات



المعرفية والعاطفية للجمهور؟ ٣. إلى أي مدى تخلق حملات اليونيسف سياقاً تفاعلياً يمكن المشاهدين من استنتاج المعاني ويشجع على اتخاذ مواقف مسؤولة تجاه الأزمات الإنسانية؟ وفقاً للتحقيق، تستخدم اليونيسف صوراً ذات سياق عالٍ ونصاً قليلاً في حملاتها البصرية، مما يشجع المشاهدين على استخدام التباين والتوتر العاطفي والتمثيل الرمزي لاستنتاج معانٍ أعمق. كحافز واضح، يُشرك كل ملصق المشاهد في عملية تفسيرية، مُولِّداً المسؤولية الأخلاقية والتعاطف وتنشيط المعرفة السابقة. بالاعتماد على التواصل الضمني والاستدلال السياقي، تنقل الحملات مواضيع قوية ومشحونة اجتماعياً تُشجع على التأمل الذاتي وتزيد الوعي بالقضايا العالمية مع تحقيق أقصى قدر من الأهمية. في البيئات الإنسانية، تؤكد الدراسة على كيفية استخدام الخطاب البصري كأداة تكتيكية للمناصرة والتأثير السلوكي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اليونيسف، نظرية الصلة، حملات الملصقات، المعنى الضمني

Introduction

Pragmatics is the discipline of linguistics that studies how context influences the understanding of utterances. The topic has undergone tremendous evolution over the last three decades, with the goal of explaining how linguistic meaning interacts with contextual assumptions during communication. Achieving this goal necessitates not only theoretical development, but also a thorough examination of how utterances are perceived in various communicative contexts.

Relevance Theory is one of the most important methods in modern pragmatics. It is a cognitive framework for human communication that was created by linguist and cognitive scientist Deirdre Wilson and anthropologist Dan Sperber. Relevance: Communication and Cognition (1986; 2nd ed., 1995), their seminal book, expanded on previous works that used Grice's Cooperative Principle to compare this idea. Since its inception, Relevance Theory has influenced many different research and been used to analyze many different kinds of pragmatic discourse.

Sperber and Wilson revisited three critical areas that have historically been the focus of pragmatic research: (a) the interpretation process, where they argue that the inferential model of communication is a better way to explain human interaction than the traditional code model; (b) the role of context, offering a dynamic perspective where context is not pre-established but is instead constructed and adjusted during interpretation; and (c) a critique of the traditional idea of mutual knowledge, offering the more adaptable and cognitively plausible idea of mutually manifest assumptions.

Relevance Theory is based on two sets of principles. The cognitive principles describe relevance as a balance between processing effort and cognitive benefits, and they argue that human cognition is designed to maximize relevance. According to communicative principles, understanding an utterance requires



inferring both the speaker's informative and communicative goals. At the heart of this is the Presumption of Optimal Relevance, the principle underpinning the relevance-theoretic comprehension strategy—the strategy which enables the listener to navigate the way to the desired interpretation. Relevance theorists model their theory of communication on the operation of this cognitive mechanism.

2. The Problem of the study

Pragmatics investigates how meanings in communication are negotiated through the interaction of language use and context. Relevance Theory developed by Sperber and Wilson (1986, 1995), provides a robust framework to interpret how signals are constructed and interpreted in context. This view takes the stance that communication and meaning are informed by the premise that human cognition inherently aims for maximal relevances, that is the most cognitive payoff for the least processing effort.

This research is focused on the application of Relevance Theory to UNICEF poster campaigns. UNICEF poster campaigns communicate to the public to take responsibly to publicize humanitarian conditions that effect children including child labour, child marriage, child soldiers and violence against children. Campaigns in this manner are so crucially important because they can influence public perceptions and attitudes through constructed meanings that fit the cognitive environment of the target group.

UNICEF provides rich stimuli with the help of visual and linguistic means to guide users toward intended meanings without using explicit language. The primary Problem this study attempts to address, however, is how UNICEF campaigns use Relevances Theory to create meanings and inspire the audience to adopt a responsible stance towards humanitarian problems that impact children. This issue underscores the necessity of examining how messages are crafted to optimise cognitive impacts while reducing processing effort, and how this strategy helps viewers select interpretations that support the objectives of the campaigns.

3. Research Questions:

1. How does UNICEF apply the principles of Relevance Theory in designing the content of its poster campaigns?
2. How do the implicit messages in UNICEF's posters affect the cognitive and emotional responses of the audience?



3. To what extent do UNICEF's campaigns create an interactive context that enables viewers to infer meanings and encourages responsible attitudes toward humanitarian crises?

3. Literature Review

3.1 Preliminary studies on relevance

The idea of relevance was not given much thought in the 1970s because many scholars felt that earlier attempts to integrate it into semantic theory had not produced results strong enough to be accepted in pragmatics. Dascal's (1977) study, which examined the idea from both semantic and pragmatic angles, was an exception to this pattern. However, interest in relevance did not start to increase dramatically until the 1980s. Early iterations of Sperber and Wilson's theory, which highlighted the crucial role of relevance in pragmatic interpretation, were a major factor in this revived interest. They maintained that compared to Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and related maxims, the idea of relevance provided a more clear and cognitively based framework. In fact, they advocated distilling Grice's various maxims into a single overarching concept of relevance. This increased interest in the concept of relevance is also seen in the work of Werth (1981, 1984), who saw conversation as a collaborative effort between speakers and listeners to develop mutually acceptable ideas (Yus, 1997, p. 306).

3.2 The concept of Relevance Theory

All communication styles serve to connect people within a specific group, whether it is large or small, close-knit or dispersed. Each style has features that the members of the group find acceptable for sharing information. (Khamis, 2023, Pp.114-115) Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory is a cognitive approach to communication that expands upon and alters significant elements of Grice's research. It views communication as an inferential process in which listeners deduce a speaker's intended meaning from both contextual information and language signals (Wilson, 2016, p. 1). Relevance Theory provides a more comprehensive explanation of communication that takes into consideration both verbal and non-verbal clues, in contrast to Grice's theory, which concentrated primarily on how speakers convey implicatures through cooperative principles. It changes pragmatics' emphasis from a set of conversational maxims based on rules to a psychologically tenable explanation of how utterances are understood through cognitive processes.

Relevance Theory in pragmatics redefines the function of context and utterance



meaning. It broadens the discipline by examining how both explicit and implicit meanings are produced, viewing interpretation as a dynamic process that entails altering phrase meaning in response to contextual assumptions (Wilson, 2016, pp. 3-4). The theory also questions traditional divisions between 'what is stated' and 'what is implicated' by introducing the concept of explicatures—interpretations that go beyond language decoding but remain part of the speaker's intended meaning (Wilson, 2016, p. 10). Relevance Theory has offered a platform for examining phenomena such as metaphor, irony, and indirect communication in more nuanced and empirically grounded ways, so expanding pragmatics' explanatory ability.

3.3 The Principles of Relevance

The first is **the cognitive principle of relevance**, which states that human intellect is inherently inclined to maximize relevance. The underlying premise of the principle is that humans have an innate or ingrained ability to maximize the relevance of incoming stimuli. This ability has been heightened by evolutionary pressure, leading to the development of cognitive systems that identify potentially relevant stimuli and attempt to make pertinent inferences (Clark 2013, p. 78). Sperber and Wilson (2004) state that “It is against this cognitive background that inferential communication takes place”.

Relevance theory's main contention is that the human cognitive system has evolved a number of specialised (innate or acquired) mental mechanisms or biases as a result of ongoing selection pressures. These biases tend to focus attention on inputs that are most likely to be relevant and process them in a way that maximises relevance. (Al-Hindawi & Abdulmajeed, 2017, p. 18)

In the Relevance Theory article, Wilson and Sperber (2006, p. 610) define cognitive principles as follows: According to intuition, an input—a sight, sound, utterance, or memory—is relevant to a person when it relates to previously acquired knowledge to produce conclusions that are important to him, such as addressing a question he had in mind, expanding his understanding of a particular subject, resolving a doubt, validating a suspicion, or clearing up an incorrect impression.

The second, **communicative principle of relevance** states that a speech connects or delivers information that is not only relevant, but also worth the hearer's effort to absorb. The second part of the communication principle of relevance argues that an utterance refers to information that is not only relevant but also compatible with the communicator's talents and preferences (Clark 2013, p. 78).



According to the Communicative Principle of Relevance, each statement makes an assumption about its own optimal relevance. The hearer must always go beyond the meaning of the linguistically encoded sentence in order to understand an utterance. We shall take a quick look at other components of explicit content that fall under determinate, such as referential indeterminacies and ambiguities. The notion of optimal relevance and the Communicative Principle of Relevance offer a workable process for formulating a hypothesis regarding the speaker's meaning. The hearer should follow the path of least effort when considering interpretive hypotheses (disambiguations, reference assignments, implicatures, etc.) and should stop when he obtains an interpretation that meets the relevance requirements set forth by the utterance itself (Wilson & Sperber, 2002, Pp. 583-632)

To summarise, the two relevance principles—the relevance-theoretic comprehension process and the presumption of optimal relevance—combine to assert that "relevance varies inversely with effort" (Wilson & Sperber, 2004 cited in Gauché, 2017, p.66). When communicating, people pay more attention to the mental processes that result in the development of the utterances and their inferential interpretation than they do to the actual words themselves. Naturally, each person has different thoughts, therefore both interlocutors must practise mind-reading. However, "relevance is a matter of degree" that ultimately rests on the continuum of cognitive consequences and processing effort. "The more cognitive effects achieved for the least processing effort, the greater the perceived relevance of the input. If the processing effort required exceeds the perceived cognitive effects, there are multiple potential outcomes, including misinterpretation of the speaker's intentions, confusion, and the hearer evaluating the speaker as an unreliable communicator." (Gauché, 2017, p.66).

3.4 Grice's Maxims in Light of Relevance Theory

Sperber and Wilson contend that Grice's (1975) four maxims are superfluous and that a single maxim, or "relevance," is sufficient to explain all forms of communication. Their definition of "relevance" is as follows.

Condition 1: The degree to which an assumption has significant contextual implications in a given setting indicates its relevance.

Condition 2: For an assumption to be considered relevant in a given context, it must be processed with little effort. (Sperber & Wilson, 1995, p. 125)



May (1993, p. 80), for instance, and other relevance theorists agree with Grice that utterances create expectations of relevance. According to him, the possible quality of ideas, memories, and inferences is relevance; that is, every internal or external representation that serves as an input to cognitive processes may at some point be pertinent to a particular person. The addressee develops an expectation of relevance with each word. "The underlying assumption of relevance, that in any given context, we have to assume that what people say is relevant". As an alternative, "achieving successful communication is a sufficient aim in conversation or other verbal interaction." (ibid.)

Lenk (1998, p. 22), however, claims that Grice's four conversational maxims are reduced to just one, "Be relevant," by Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory. Sperber and Wilson, he adds, maintain that three of the four conversational maxims—the Maxims of Quality, Quantity, and Manner—can be violated in a suitable conversational setting without necessarily leading to a breakdown in communication. Among conversational maxims, the "Maxim of Relevance" is the only one that can be violated without instantly disrupting communication.

Grice's concept of "explicit communication" is criticised by Sperber and Wilson. Rather, they generate the concepts of "explicature" and "implicature." "Any assumption communicated, but not explicitly so, is implicitly communicated" is the definition of the latter concept, whereas "an assumption communicated by an utterance U is explicit if and only if it is a development of a logical form encoded by U." (Sperber & Wilson, 1995, p. 182).

According to them (ibid.: p.193), listeners can understand conversational implicature by just picking out pertinent context elements and identifying each speaker's statement as pertinent to the discussion. Interpreting the relationships between utterances as significant, hearers and readers form conclusions from the text by using their prior knowledge of the world.

3.5A Relevance-Based View of Implicature

A number of researchers, including Peccei (1999) and Yule (1996), agree that pragmatics looks at the meaning of words and utterances in the context where they occur. This requires examining the elements of meaning shaped by the physical and social worlds, along with the social and psychological traits that influence communication (Al-Ganabi, 2023, p.4). Relevance theory seeks to offer a fresh method for interpreting ostensive inputs, particularly speech. From a different angle, proponents of relevance theory assert that the audience can use the comprehension process to determine the most logical interpretation that meets



their relevance expectations. According to Wilson and Sperber (2004, Pp. 613–15), even though the procedure may appear to be rather straightforward, there are still a few steps involved. Deriving implicature is one of these steps. The perspective of implicature form relevance theory must then be addressed.

Grice introduced the idea of implicature more than thirty years ago in the William James Lectures (Grice 1967, 1989), according to Haugh (2002, p.117). As is widely known, Grice used the idea to present an innovative model of communication that addressed the meaning that is indicated in utterances. Furthermore, Kreb (2010, p. 19) notes that implicatures are described differently in relevance theory than Grice. However, it can only be inferred and is tied to the implicit content of the encoded information. According to Haugh (2002, p. 120), implicature in relevance theory is limited to the extent that it can only include particularised conversational implicatures.

The Gricean concept of implicature was supplemented by the concept of explicature, which Sperber and Wilson (1995, p. 182) established to demonstrate that pragmatic inferences contribute to both what is explicitly stated and what is implied. According to their definition, an explicature is a logical form that is encoded by an utterance and is a "explicit" assumption conveyed by the speech (ibid: p.182).

Conversely, "any other propositional form communicated by an utterance; its content consists of wholly pragmatically inferred matter" is what is meant by an implicature (Carston 2000, p. 10). This concept of implicature is derived from Sperber and Wilson's initial premise that any implicit assumption that is conveyed must be an implicature (Sperber and Wilson 1995, p. 182). Stated differently, the main way that implicatures are defined in relevance theory is by their connection to another idea. An implicature is basically any expressed assumption that is not an explicature, according to relevance theory.

٤. Methodology

Using a qualitative, interpretive methodology grounded in Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986, 1995), this study examines how UNICEF poster campaigns use few visual and linguistic clues to convey complex humanitarian messages. Three research questions serve as the basis for this analysis: how does UNICEF include relevance principles into its designs; how do implicit messages impact audience reactions; and how do the campaigns establish an interactive framework for ethical reflection and meaning inference?



All four UNICEF posters selected highlighted a different issue: child labour, child marriage, emotional neglect, and child recruitment. These posters purport to keep the viewer in the space of relevant analysis using primarily emotional imagery, imply meaning with few text descriptors, and create equivalently meaningful relationships with the viewer. Considering the ways in which colour was deployed, textual framing and the graphic arrangement of the images and verbiage, and how that may have created emotional and cognitive attunement was analyzed.

The analysis does not focus on creating a translation effect of impact, rather investigates how representations yield co-construction of meaning through inference alone. The example studies show how UNICEF campaigns rely on active meaning making and emotional engagement with the issues as the active semiotic form to effectively communicate global humanitarian issues.

5. Data Collection

The data-set of this case study is a carefully curated selection of four official UNICEF poster campaigns, that were collected from publicly accessible places on UNICEF's official website and related campaign pages. The poster campaigns were selected as they lent themselves to the focus of child labour, emotional neglect, child marriage, and child recruiting issues, all of which are the purview of child protection and children's rights. The sources can be explored from a Relevance Theory lens, as they contain emotionally charged images with low verbal content that rely on viewers' access to inferred agency when interpreting the content.

Rather than attempting to collect data through surveys or interviews, posters are defined here as multimodal discourse texts. They were chosen as a means of generating cognitive and emotional responses with light textual signals and forms of ostensive stimuli. To ensure authenticity, all posters were collected with no changes to fonts, colour, or content, and were viewed on the official UNICEF website (UNICEF, n.d), where there is a full listing of awareness campaigns from around the world.

٦. Data Analysis

In this section, the context of relevance theory originally put forward by Sperber and Wilson in the 1980s and 1990s is used to conceptually investigate how the UNICEF poster campaigns convey compassion. This analysis is driven by three central research questions which are: 1. How does UNICEF apply the principles



of Relevance Theory in designing the content of its poster campaigns? 2. How do the implicit messages in UNICEF's posters affect the cognitive and emotional responses of the audience? 3. To what extent do UNICEF's campaigns create an interactive context that enables viewers to infer meanings and encourages responsible attitudes toward humanitarian crises? These issues are investigated by means of a thorough semiotic and pragmatic examination of a particular UNICEF poster, with an emphasis on the interaction of the textual message, visual components, and the viewer's cognitive involvement.

1. First campaign: Stop child recruitment.



The chosen UNICEF poster effectively illustrates how the organisation uses Relevance Theory to convey a potent humanitarian message with little to no textual input. A little girl in a bright red traditional dance outfit, representing culture, play, and innocence, is positioned in the middle of the picture. The military salute, which is connected to conflict, obedience, and battle, is how she is pictured, though. Relevance Theory refers to this intentional visual contradiction as an ostensive stimulus, which is a trigger that fosters inferential processing and demands the viewer's attention. Instead of stating the child's predicament directly, the poster allows viewers to make connections between the visual disparity and more general information concerning child soldiers and the infringement of children's rights. This is consistent with the first research question, as the design reflects optimal relevance: the poster provides sufficient



cognitive reward (insight, emotional engagement) for the minimal effort required to interpret the content.

"*She wants to be a dancer, not a child soldier*" is a straightforward but powerfully contrastive piece of writing. The child's agency is reflected in the modal verb "wants," which suggests that her future and desires are in jeopardy. Despite being brief, the term "child soldier" elicits strong feelings and, without further explanation, alludes to a worldwide human rights concern. Relevance Theory states that this kind of implicitness improves audience cognitive engagement because viewers fill in the blanks with their own moral framework, knowledge, and beliefs. The second research question is clearly addressed by this: the implicit communication elicits emotional reactions, most likely empathy, urgency, and sadness, as well as cognitive deductions.

Using colour also improves the communication effect. The girl's vivid red outfit, which commands attention right once and represents both vibrancy and danger, takes centre stage in the composition. While letting the child's figure take centre stage, the background's gradual shift into darker hues hints at danger or loss. The third research question is addressed by this visual method, which enables viewers to consider their own social duty and mentally model the girl's possible futures. The image turns into a collaborative place where viewers co-create meaning rather than having it dictated to them, which is a fundamental component of relevance-driven communication.

Ultimately, the poster is effective not because it overwhelms the audience with content, but it gives a compact message and harnesses deep inferential processing, both text and image. It exemplifies the fusion of cognition and emotional salience and relevance to create a simple image that calls for global, ethical consideration.

2. Second campaign: EVERY CHILD HAS THE RIGHT TO BE LOVED



The second UNICEF poster illustrates a clear and emotionally impactful message meant to stimulate both inferential reasoning and emotional engagement. The main image provides a young child, alone in a shadowy room, with his arms wrapped tightly around his knees. His countenance is clearly distressed and dejected. Even with the lack of overt narrative signals, the child's closed, slumped, and reclusive body language conveys emotional isolation and vulnerability. According to Sperber and Wilson's theory (1986/1995), this visual composition functions as an ostensive stimulus that demands the viewer's attention and starts a search for significance. The campaign asks viewers to speculate about the emotional and social circumstances surrounding the child's situation—possibly abuse, neglect, or abandonment—by omitting any clear background or explanation.

"EVERY CHILD HAS THE RIGHT TO BE LOVED" is a categorical, universal, and ethically appealing textual message. Instead than openly describing the child's state, it presents a universal moral concept that subtly contrasts with the image of an unloved and defenceless infant. The reader must balance the ideal expressed in the text with the reality portrayed in the image due to the interaction between implicit meaning and visual evidence. Relevance Theory is particularly effective in this situation since the poster is rich in inferences rather than just being informative. The poster's critique of society's or family systems' inability to



meet a child's emotional rights leads the observer to fill in the conceptual gaps. In order to ensure optimal relevance with the least amount of processing work, UNICEF uses Relevance Theory to answer the first study question by striking a balance between limited textual input and strong contextual implication.

The combination of colour and lighting in the poster heightens its emotive tone. The child feels more alone and afraid because of the overwhelming darkness that surrounds him. Emotional resonance is increased by the contrast between the child's face's gentle glow and the dark background, which directs the viewer's attention to the expression of agony and longing. Meanwhile, the bright blue strip at the bottom, which features UNICEF's logo and the words "EVERY CHILD HAS THE RIGHT TO BE LOVED," offers clarity and hope in addition to organisational branding. The colour blue, which is frequently connected to safety, harmony, and trust, serves as a counterpoint to the image's emotional gloom by implying a potential intervention or resolution. This clearly addresses the second research question since the poster's subliminal emotional messaging evokes feelings of pity, uneasiness, and perhaps even guilt in the viewer, which leads to a more thorough consideration of how vulnerable youngsters should be treated.

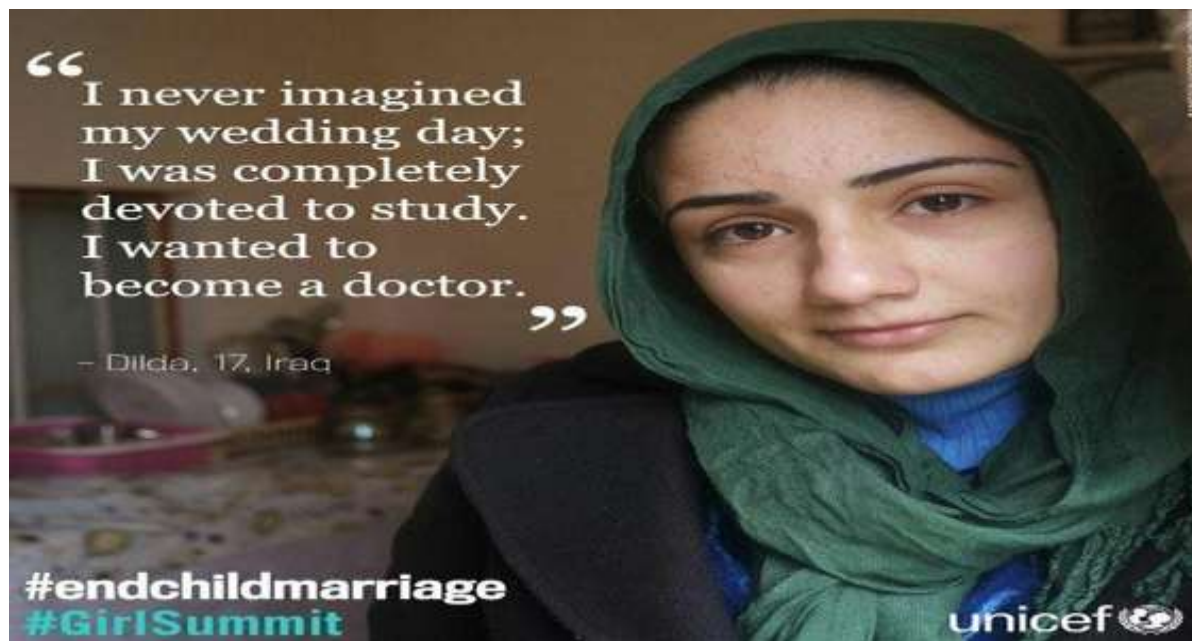
There is no background information, data, or calls to action on the poster that would encourage interactive interaction. To complete the communicative act, it instead depends only on the viewer's moral compass and contextual knowledge. Because of this, the audience is able to actively construct meaning based on what is shown and what is not expressed, creating a highly dynamic interpretative space. Through viewer cognition, the implied meaning—that the youngster is emotionally deprived and society is not protecting him—is co-constructed rather than imposed. The third research question is engaged through this approach that encourages ethical reflection and understanding about humanitarian matters related to child rights and emotional neglect. The strength of the poster is not what it says but rather what it implies to the viewer.

In summary, this UNICEF campaign communicates a very relevant message in a very visually and emotionally strong design that is constrained in content. The poster is an excellent example of how relevance-theoretic communication can provoke moral awareness and social responsibility using a few but well chosen pieces of communication exploiting a meaning implicit, an emotional counterpoint and visual framing.

3. Third campaign: # end child marriage



Girl summit



This UNICEF campaign poster strongly illustrates how developing feasible, relevant design and communication can humanise global issues like child marriage in a context rich use of a simple design. The poster has an up-close image of Dilda, a 17-year-old girl from Iraq, along with her personal statement: *"I never imagined my wedding day; I was completely devoted to study. I wanted to become a doctor."* According to Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986/1995), the verbal and visual cues act as a powerful communicative act that encourages the audience to engage inferentially with Dilda's story and the larger issue of child marriage, despite their initial modest and unadorned appearance.

Using Relevance Theory, UNICEF chooses a format that maximises relevance while requiring the least amount of processing work. The girl conveys honesty and vulnerability without resorting to overt dramatisation through her modest clothing and calm, direct look. Despite not overtly showing violence or misery, the poster depends on the viewer's ability to distinguish between what is stated and what is suggested. The past tense suggests that her desire of becoming a doctor was dashed, most likely due to an early marriage that was imposed upon her. The message is not conveyed as a condemnation, but rather as a lost aspiration. Since UNICEF deliberately crafts a message that asks the audience to deduce meaning through oblique clues rather than explicit explanation, this strategy responds to the first study question. The design perfectly satisfies relevance expectations since it is culturally and emotionally rich while remaining cognitively efficient.

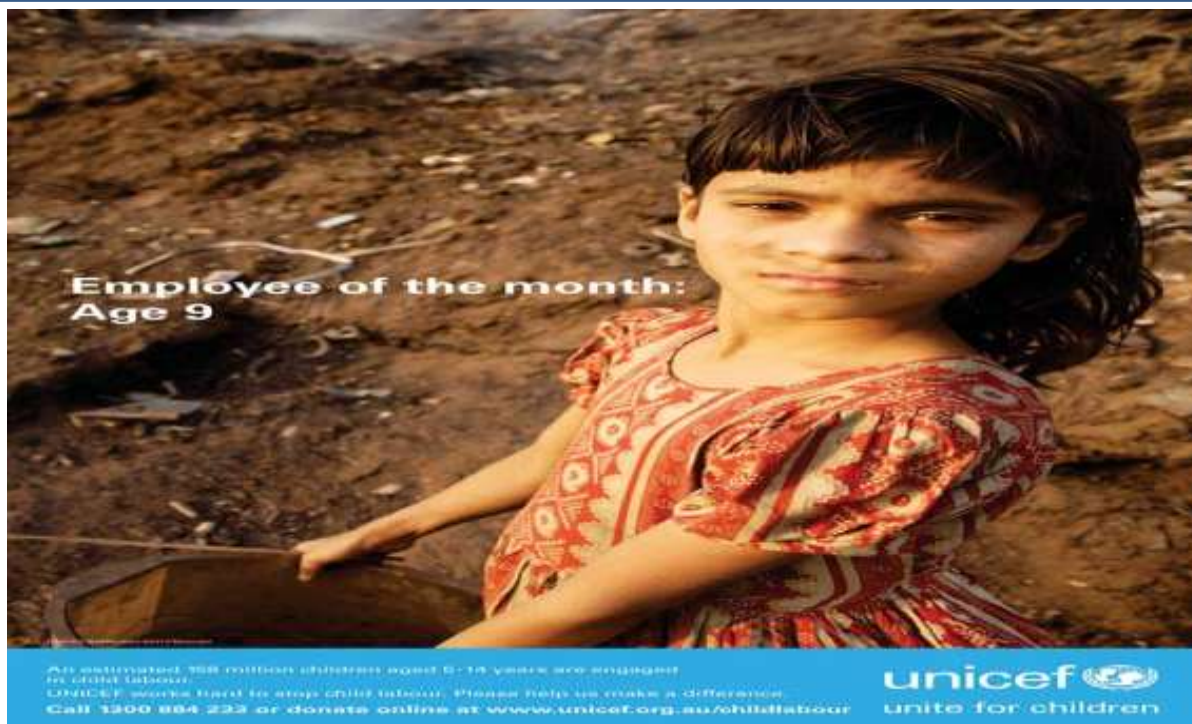


Through the emotional impact of Dilda's statements, the poster's underlying message—that an early marriage compromises a girl's right to education and self-determination—becomes clear. The audience is moved to sympathise with her predicament via a silent, introspective story rather than overt pleas. This supports the idea put out by Relevance Theory that the hearer's capacity to make contextual deductions from sparse but well-chosen information frequently determines the effectiveness of communication. Credibility and a sense of personal connection are increased when a personal voice is chosen over a generic slogan. The second research question about cognitive and emotional involvement is thereby addressed, and the viewer's emotional reaction is more likely to be genuine and significant. The campaign effectively evokes feelings of unfairness, sorrow, and empathy, which inspires more thought on the effects of child marriage.

Additionally, the poster creates an environment for interactive interpretation. Viewers must rely on their own presumptions and general societal understanding because it lacks background information, data, and clear references to laws or statistics. The audience is not only understanding a message but also helping to construct it through the implied contrast between education and marriage, autonomy and control, and dream and reality. This interactive element answers the third research question by allowing viewers to move away from passive observation and towards an ethical position around girls' rights globally. Additionally, hashtags like "#endchildmarriage" and "#GirlSummit" take the link further into the digital space, thriving on viewers to share, dialogue, and act.

To conclude, this poster has shown the work of UNICEF, effectively taking concepts from Relevance Theory and communicating a multilayered, emotive message using very few verbal and visual indicators. The campaign motivates deep inferences, and provides space for socially acceptable interpretation by drawing on subtle forms of contrast and implicit narratives - all while achieving clarity, emotional weight, and cognitive expedience.

3. Fourth campaign: “Employee of the Month: Age 9



With respect to Relevance Theory, this UNICEF illustration employs irony, emotional contrast and contextual implicature in order to provide a strong condemnation of child labour. The image features a young girl, probably about the age of nine, standing in a challenging and soiled outdoor location, possibly a building site or a garbage dump. She has a harsh, expressionless visage and is holding a container that is usually used for labour. "Employee of the month: Age 9" is a satirical statement superimposed on this photograph. Through inference and emotional disruption rather than explicit instruction, this text-visual combination engages the observer and immediately triggers inferential thinking.

The poster uses Relevance Theory to address the first study question by eliciting the greatest cognitive effect with the least amount of verbal input. Here, the satirical phrase "Employee of the month" is startlingly combined with the child's small age and obvious misery, even though it usually connotes adult achievement and job acclaim. Through contradiction, this incongruity creates significance, making the audience realise that the youngster is being exploited by the system rather than being praised for real accomplishment. Without the image's context, the caption alone would not have this effect; hence, the combination of text and visual signals is crucial for evoking the desired meaning and upholding the optimal relevance principle.

Regarding the second research question, the audience's emotional and cognitive reactions are significantly impacted by the implicit message. The poster uses



emotional reasoning to persuade the audience that child labour is a global problem and a violation of human rights, even if it does not explicitly say so. Empathy, remorse, and moral unease are evoked by the child's sad countenance, the filth around her, and the lack of any indications of youthful joy or education. Indeed, viewers are likely to connect this girl's life to what is normally expected for a child of her age—school, safety, and play—rather than hard labour. Relevance Theory posits that these effects are the result of inferences generated by contextual signals.

Addressing the third research question, the poster skilfully creates an interactive environment in which the audience must fill in the blanks. The poster fills in the blanks by drawing on common information about child labour abuses around the world, rather than providing the girl's name, location, or particular employment. Furthermore, rather than encouraging passive acceptance, the text's sarcastic tone encourages critical thought and more in-depth ethical inquiry. With the factual statement, "An estimated 158 million children aged 5-14 years are engaged in child labour," the bottom panel reaffirms the larger issue and grounds the emotive appeal in empirical statistics. In line with the fundamental communication objectives of relevance-based public discourse, this blend of human narrative (visual) and global context (textual) produces a participatory process in which the audience mentally reconstructs the scope and injustice of the problem.

In conclusion, this poster is a perfect demonstration of UNICEF's strategic application of Relevance Theory to communicate an urgent humanitarian issue. Irony, visual opposition, and subliminal messaging are all used to allow the audience to come to that understanding of the child labour scenario. Therefore, the message is much more likely to prompt authentic ethical engagement and social responsibility as it is simply felt and implied versus articulated and inferred

7. Conclusion

The conclusion obtained from the Relevance Theory evaluation of four campaigns of UNICEF posters is that it purposefully developed its visual representation work to achieve optimal relevance through the integration of contextually and emotionally resonant imagery and very little text. By introducing ostensive stimuli (that is, facial expressions, symbolic places and settings, not many words but a word which creates a sense of contrast), UNICEF is guiding the viewer towards intended interpretations, without the requirement that it applies direct explanation to the imagery and text. Drawing on the first research question, the organisation is using aspects of Relevance Theory, the



posters do not rely on excessive informative statements by anticipating an audience's use of the inference capacity to create the connection to what is meant versus what is depicted.

In answering the second question, the subliminal meaning of the posters, for example, the contrast of what children wish to achieve versus what they are subjected to, or the contrast between universal childhood rights but the obvious suffering, leads to emotional and cognitive experience. More powerful though than the overt meaning of statements, their tacit meanings creates enduring impact, evoking the viewer's moral codes, emotional empathy and knowledge from the past. Instead of making outright claims, the ads could make communication more impactful and personal by allowing the viewer to more deliberative analyses the message.

Lastly, to answer the third question, UNICEF's campaigns successfully create an active communication environment. By using contextual reasoning to clarify the implied meanings, the posters encourage viewers to build their own understanding. These interactive interpretations not only raise awareness but also inspire viewers to take responsible stances on the humanitarian crises presented. The campaigns respect the viewer's ability to think for themselves while promoting reflection, moral awareness, and action.

In summary, UNICEF's use of relevant communication demonstrates how visual campaigns can be effective tools for social change. They involve audiences in thoughtful, focused, and meaningful content that engages them intellectually, emotionally, and ethically.

References:

Al-Ganabi, M. N. (2023). Discourse analysis and its implications for e-English language learning during Coronavirus (COVID-19) quarantine. *Adab Al-Mustansiriya Journal*, (104), 1–23.

Al-Hindawi, F., & Abdulmajeed, R. K. (2017). The Cognitive Principle of Relevance and its Application to Anti Iraq War Posters. *Kufa Journal of Arts*, 1(30), 9-30. <https://doi.org/10.36317/kaj/2016/v1.i30.6062>

Carston, Robyn (2000) Explicature and Semantics. *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics* 12: 1-44.

Clark, B. (2013). *Relevance theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



Gauché, A. M. (2017). *A relevance-theoretic analysis of selected South African English pragmatic markers and their cultural significance* (Master's thesis, Stellenbosch University). SUNScholar Research Repository.

<https://scholar.sun.ac.za/items/6caf1842-34cd-4288-9af1-358f72be6f5b>

Haugh, M. (2002). The intuitive basis of implicature: Relevance theoretic implicitness versus Gricean implying. In *Proceedings of the International Pragmatics Association* (pp. 117–134). Retrieved from

<http://www98.griffith.edu.au/>

Kreb, C. (2010). *An analysis of comprehension problems based on discourse analysis and relevance theory* (M.A. thesis). Retrieved from GrinVerlag website:

<http://www.grin.com>

Khamis, H. A. S. (2023). A stylistic analysis of Parker's short story "A Telephone Call". Al-Mustansiriya University, *Adab Al-Mustansiriya Journal*, Issue 801, Linguistics Section.

Lenk, U. (1998). *Marking discourse coherence: Functions of discourse markers in spoken English*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.

May, J. J. (1993). *Pragmatics: An introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Sperber, D., & Wilson, D. (1995). *Relevance: Communication and cognition* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Sperber, D., & Wilson, D. (2002). Truthfulness and relevance. *Mind*, 111(443), 583–632. <https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/111.443.583>

Wilson, D., & Sperber, D. (2004). Relevance theory. In L. Horn & G. Ward (Eds.), *The handbook of pragmatics* (pp. 607–633). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Wilson, D., & Sperber, D. (2006). Relevance theory. In L. R. Horn & G. Ward (Eds.), *The handbook of pragmatics* (pp. 607–632). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

UNICEF (n.d.). Campaigns and Initiatives. Retrieved from

<https://www.unicef.org>

Wilson, D. (2016). Relevance theory. In Y. Huang (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199697960.013.25>



Yus, F. (1998). A decade of relevance theory. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 30(3), 305–345. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166\(98\)00015-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(98)00015-0)