Reader Response #3: Figurative Language

Who hasn’t heard someone exaggerate before? What about making a comparison that helps you understand something better or asking a question that did not need an answer? Hyperbole, analogies and rhetorical questions are examples of figurative language that are used frequently in common communication. Hyperbole is the overstating of something for effect; otherwise known as exaggeration. Americans tend to use hyperbole quite a bit because everything has to be bigger, or more interesting than the last person’s story. Quite a few slogans use hyperbole to sell a product or promote a company. An example of this would be ‘Energy drink with attitude’ from Red Eye because an energy drink can only figuratively have attitude. Red Eye’s catchphrase could also have been personification though, because it was attributing a human quality, attitude, with an inanimate object, the energy drink. Coke’s slogan, ‘open happiness,’ is another example of hyperbole because happiness is not a tangible thing that can be opened or held.

A final example of hyperbole is ‘America runs on Dunkin,’ because America cannot literally operate solely on Dunkin. Hyperbole and analogy are not the only types of figurative language though. Another type of figurative language is antonomasia, which is the use of nicknames to argue a point. An example of antonomasia is Wheaties’ famous slogan, ‘breakfast of champions,’ because ‘breakfast of champions’ is a nickname for the cereal and it is arguing that Wheaties superior to other cereals. Anaphora is the effective use of repetition to emphasize
a point. One example of anaphora is the U.S. Army’s slogan ‘Be all that you can be.’ ‘Be all that you can be’ is an anaphora because it creates a mirror effect with the repetition of the word ‘be.’ ‘Melts in your mouth, not in your hands,’ M&M’s catchphrase, illustrates a third type of figurative language: antithesis. Antithesis is showing contrast or opposition through the use of parallelism, just like M&M’s showed contrast between melting in the hands and the mouth.

Now that six slogans have been identified as a certain type of figurative language, one final slogan remains. The famous phrase coined by America’s milk processors: ‘got milk?’ Seeing as how ‘got milk?’ is a question, it could easily be argued that the figurative language in this phrase is rhetorical question. While this is very true, there is another type of figurative language that is evident in ‘got milk.’ The term ‘got milk’ is an incomplete thought, grammatically incorrect and the figurative language that best represents this is inverted word order because the verb comes before the subject or object. Figurative language can be seen all around. From hyperbole and rhetorical questions to anaphora and inverted word order, life is full of figurative language; it just needs to be discovered.