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Negotiating solidarity with potential donors: a study of the images in fundraising letters by not-for-profit organizations

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Abstract

Letters mailed by not-for-profit organizations in their fundraising campaigns derive their persuasive appeal from a complex interplay of verbal text, typographic features and images, combined in a visual design by means of layout. Drawing on an analysis of photographs from a corpus of fundraising letters and using the visual grammar developed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), this study highlights the significant role played by images in orienting potential donors attitudinally towards the text that follows, thus contributing to the persuasive appeal of fundraising letters. More specifically, the study investigates how photographs might contribute to overcoming futility thinking from potential donors. The study also contributes to a richer account of the persuasive appeal of fundraising letters than is currently available in the fields of linguistics and psychology through an integrated methodology that draws on the fields of multimodal analysis and decision-making research.

Keywords: Appraisal, Compassion fatigue, Decision-making, Evaluative images, Fundraising letters, Futility thinking, Multimodality, NGOs, Persuasive appeal, Visual meaning potential

Introduction

Fundraising letters mailed to potential donors by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other not-for-profit organizations aim at convincing their readers of the worthiness of the cause they should support, and influence readers to contribute a donation. As such, they are persuasive in nature (Connor and Gladkov 2004). However, '[i]t seems that there is a gap between knowledge and action; between what people know about suffering and how they act and react [...] how people respond to messages about suffering, what elicits certain responses and what blocks or works on people's hearts, minds and pockets' (Orgad and Vella 2012: 1). In this study, I analyse the photographs from a corpus of fundraising letters with the aim of highlighting the ways in which they might orient the reader attitudinally towards the text that accompanies the image(s), predisposing the reader to make a donation and contributing to the persuasive appeal of the letters.

Literature on charity giving and futility thinking

NGOs' communications aim at eliciting care and compassion, and cultivating solidarity, usually through financial transaction (Orgad 2013: 298). Affective feelings such as compassion and sympathy are often seen as crucial for initiating helping and have been shown to be integral to charitable giving (Västfjäll et al. 2014). Our capacity to feel sympathy for people in need appears limited though, and compassion fatigue can lead to inaction when dealing with large-scale human crises involving individuals afflicted with chronic conditions of poverty such as hunger, malnutrition and disease (Västfjäll et al. 2014).

According to philosopher Peter Singer (2009), most of us engage in 'futility thinking' whereby we reason that it is not worth giving money to the needy because there are so many and it will have no impact. Västfjäll et al. (2014) demonstrate indeed that positive affective feelings and donations to endangered persons start to decline as early as with the second individual pictured. This fading of compassion was reversed and the level of donations increased when children appeared in the same photograph and were described as belonging to the same family, showing that feelings are greatest for single individuals, or groups perceived as single units.

Large losses of life that are represented simply as numbers or statistics lack imagery and feeling, failing in the process to motivate us to take action and help others, whereas an image of a single identified victim (be it a person or an animal)¹ may strike us more powerfully than numbers, and elicit compassion, according to Slovic (2007). These findings are supported by Small et al.'s (2007) experiment, which demonstrates that people are more willing to assist an identifiable victim than an unidentified or statistical victim. This identifiability effect is attributed to stronger affective reactions towards an identifiable target.

Furthermore, we are willing to contribute significantly more money when considering a single identified victim (identified by name and by a picture) than when considering a non-identified single victim, or an identified or unidentified group of victims (Kogut and Ritov 2005). This is because we are likely to experience more distress and compassion not only when a victim is vividly presented, but also when the victim is a single individual rather than a group, and because identifiable targets stimulate a more powerful emotional response than do statistical targets (Small et al. 2007: 144). According to Epstein (1994), although deliberation is no doubt crucial in decision-making, reliance on affect and emotion tends to be quicker and easier. This affective-based 'experiential system' encodes reality in images, metaphors and narratives, rapidly processing and generating an immediate response that often determines the decision outcome.

Literature on fundraising discourse

Much of the literature on fundraising discourse focuses on the efficacy of particular strategies. For example, research shows that greater outcomes may be yielded when framing appeals positively (Smith and Berger 1996). Some of the literature focuses on the content of fundraising letters, such as their rhetorical patterns (e.g., Bhatia 1998; Connor and Gladkov 2004; Upton 2002). Connor and Gladkov (2004) describe a system of persuasive appeals that is grounded in the three appeal categories of Aristotelian persuasion: 'rational appeals' that target the logical and rational side of the readers' mind to provoke them to take action, 'credibility appeals' that create a trustworthy image of

the writer, and ‘affective appeals’ that compel the audience to show empathy. Goering et al. (2011) further suggest that letters employing credibility strategies are the most productive of donations. However, little attention has so far been paid to the visual design of fundraising discourse, in particular the role of images in their persuasive appeal. I have shown in another study (Lipovsky: Eliciting solidarity in an emergency appeal: An illustrative analysis, forthcoming) how the verbal and visual features of a fundraising letter, while utilizing the meaning-making features particular to their respective semi-otic systems, work in intersemiotic complementarity to align supporters. The study highlights how a photograph appearing prominently in a fundraising letter plays a significant role in orienting the readers attitudinally towards the text that accompanies the image, predisposing them to make a donation.

In line with Martin’s (2004) refocusing on positive discourse analysis, the present study seeks to further reveal the ways in which social bonds between not-for-profit organizations and their potential donors are developed through the visual design of their fundraising letters. Specifically, I will examine the ways in which potential beneficiaries are depicted, and investigate how the design of the letters might contribute to overcoming futility thinking from potential donors. I propose to do so within a systemic functional linguistic framework by examining a small corpus of letters collected in France. While this grounds the findings on a limited set of data from a specific cultural context, the study constitutes useful foundational work to investigate not-for-profit organizations’ strategies for construing affiliation with their potential donors through their fundraising letters.

The corpus

The data derives from a set of fundraising letters collected in France from my mother’s letterbox. It totals 13 letters dated 2012–2013 by not-for-profit organizations operating in a range of activities (see Table 1): assistance to poor (elderly) people (*Les Petits Frères*

Table 1 Fundraising letters

NGOs	No. of photos	Full colour	Black & white	Blue colour
<i>Association Valentin Haüy au service des aveugles et des malvoyants</i>	1	✓		
<i>Fondation 30 millions d'amis</i>	1	✓		
<i>Fondation du souffle contre les maladies respiratoires</i>	2	✓		✓
<i>Le rire médecin</i>	7	✓		
<i>Les Petits Frères des Pauvres</i>	1		✓	
<i>Ligue contre le cancer</i>	4	✓		
<i>Petites sœurs des pauvres</i>	3		✓	
<i>Secours catholique</i>	4	✓		
<i>Solidarité laïque</i>	3	✓		
<i>SOS Villages d'enfants</i>	1	✓		
<i>UNICEF</i>	3	✓		
<i>Union nationale des aveugles et déficients visuels</i>	2	✓		
<i>World Wide Fund for Nature</i>	2		✓	
	34	27	6	1

des Pauvres, Petites sœurs des pauvres, Secours catholique); aid to orphaned or poor children (*SOS Villages d'enfants, UNICEF*); assistance to blind people (*Association Valentin Haüy au service des aveugles et des malvoyants, Union nationale des aveugles et déficients visuels*); access to education (*Solidarité laïque*); support to sick people and/or medical research (*Fondation du souffle contre les maladies respiratoires, Le rire médecin, Ligue contre le cancer*); protection of (endangered) animals (*Fondation 30 millions d'amis, World Wide Fund for Nature*). When more than one fundraising letter from the same organization was received over that period, only one was kept in the corpus.

The fundraising mails include a number of images: on the letters themselves, on the envelopes and/or on additional information leaflets. The letters themselves each include one to seven photographs (see Table 1), totalling 34 images across the corpus. Only the letters with images on them were included in the final corpus of 13 letters, and only those images are considered in the present study.

For reasons of space, I will focus on photographs found in the letters sent by *Petites sœurs des pauvres, SOS Villages d'enfants, Le rire médecin* and *Fondation 30 millions d'amis* from four of the above sectors of activities. Nonetheless, the detailed analyses of these photographs are representative of the whole corpus and constitute a useful exploration of affiliation strategies.

A systemic functional approach to images

While various approaches strive to explain how images communicate meanings, a number of studies have used the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (hereafter SFL) to explore the semiotic interplay occurring across words and images, and the ways in which this may mediate feelings that align readers into communities of attitudinal rapport, largely in (online) media and literary texts (e.g., Caple 2008, 2010; Caple and Knox 2012; Economou 2006, 2008; Knox et al. 2010; Macken-Horarik 2003a, 2003b, 2004; Martin 2001, 2006, 2008; Unsworth 2015), as well as childrens' picture books (e.g., Painter and Martin 2011; Painter et al. 2013). This study aims to extend this body of research to fundraising letters.

SFL theory views language as a semiotic system, that is, a resource for creating meanings through the linguistic choices that are made. As individuals choose to say or write one thing rather than another, they choose to mean one thing rather than another (Halliday 1994). In other words choices are meaningful in their paradigmatic context, and speakers' and writers' choices can be interpreted in view of the (meaning) resources that were available to them, but were set aside. SFL theory models language as metafunctional, that is, as simultaneously interpersonal, ideational and textual: the interpersonal metafunction whereby social relations are enacted, the ideational metafunction whereby the world around and inside us is represented, and the textual metafunction in which the interpersonal and representational elements are integrated into a meaningful whole. Visual design, according to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 15), like language and all semiotic modes, similarly fulfils three metafunctions.² Thus, interpersonally, fundraising letters and their accompanying photographs are meant to persuade an audience of potential donors to align with a not-for-profit organization's appeal and make a donation. Ideationally, they orient potential donors to an

organization's claims for the necessity to provide help. Then textually, the placement of various elements on the page and their respective salience play a role in attracting potential donors' attention to significant features of the appeal.

The model of interpersonal meanings of evaluation referred to as appraisal (Martin and White 2005) concerns the linguistic communication of affect entailing how individuals share their feelings (e.g. how happy or unhappy, or satisfied or dissatisfied they are), judgement assessing people's behaviour (their capacity, tenacity, and so on) and appreciation appraising the value of things and performances (e.g. how significant something is). The system further differentiates inscribed attitudes that are made explicitly, using attitudinal lexis, from invoked attitudes or tokens that are evoked through less explicit descriptions of one's experience. Economou (2006, 2008) extends Martin and White's linguistic framework to images by highlighting the attitudinal responses that are inscribed or evoked through the verbal (main headline) and visual elements (lead image) of feature stories, while Unsworth (2015) further illustrates the ways in which ethical and moral judgements may be communicated through images in picture books and animated films.


Findings

Following SFL's model of textual, ideational and interpersonal meanings, I will first discuss the composition of the fundraising letters and the placement of various elements on their pages together with their respective salience (textual meanings). I will then examine the ways in which potential beneficiaries are represented in the photographs (ideational meanings). Finally, I will turn my attention to the ways in which the fundraising letters and their photographs contribute to persuading their readership of potential donors to make a donation (interpersonal meanings).

The composition of fundraising letters

Textually, the placement of various elements on the page of a fundraising mail and their respective salience may play a role in attracting the reader's attention to significant features of the appeal. The design of the fundraising letters is surprisingly consistent across the corpus. The fundraising letters are not merely text-flow dominated pages, where the text and its supporting typography are dominant. Rather, they involve a complex interplay of images and verbal text as well as a range of typographic features, combined in a visual design by means of layout. All the mails also include reply coupons, with titles such as *bulletin de soutien*, *bon de solidarité* or *bon de générosité* (support slip, solidarity slip, generosity slip), underlying qualities of care and compassion amongst the readership. Ten letters include a photograph in hyper-Theme position, as illustrated in Figure 1.

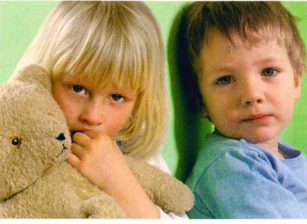
Following Martin's (2001) proposal that verbiage/image relations play an important role in aligning communities around shared values, I am going to explore the relations between the photograph and the verbal text of the letter – although limitations of space preclude an analysis of the whole text – and highlight the ways in which the photograph, acting as visual Theme, works in unison with its caption and the Theme in the verbal text of the letter to engage the reader with the plight of the children.



Pour que frères et sœurs partagent la même enfance - www.sosve.org

55355496 PVMDEA 013 3
M28 0018 301 0129694 03413 D ●▲
MADAME MICHELLE PARE
██████████
33200 BORDEAUX

SOS-PA-1013



Madame Pare, merci de tendre la main aux enfants victimes d'une famille brisée.

Paris, le 22 octobre 2013

Chère Madame,

Ils s'appellent Paul et Alice... Il a 4 ans, elle 6 ans...

Et vous êtes leur plus bel espoir, car vous pouvez nous aider à réparer ce qui a été tragiquement brisé dans leur vie d'enfant.

Des drames, tels que ceux de Paul et d'Alice, il s'en produit hélas beaucoup, un peu partout en France et peut-être près de chez vous, en Gironde.

Une famille se déchire... pendant des années, les enfants vivent dans la peur, les cris, la violence... jusqu'au jour où ils sont retirés à leurs parents par décision de justice.

Et c'est alors que le pire se produit : au moment où leur univers s'écroule, les frères et sœurs sont souvent séparés, comme privés les uns des autres à jamais !

À SOS Villages d'Enfants, nous avons un immense besoin de votre soutien pour rendre à ces frères et sœurs tous les moments qui font une vraie vie d'enfant, pour réunir les fratries et leur permettre de se reconstruire dans la sécurité, l'affection et le bonheur.

Voici comment...

Depuis près de 60 ans, nous avons créé, en France et dans le monde, des « villages d'enfants SOS » composés de maisons familiales accueillant les fratries. Chaque maison est comme un chaud cocon où les frères et sœurs peuvent retrouver une vie de famille et grandir ensemble.

Une « mère SOS » s'occupe d'eux, 24 heures sur 24, comme dans une vraie famille, jusqu'à ce qu'ils soient grands et qu'ils puissent voler de leurs propres ailes.

Depuis le lever du matin, dans la chambre décorée de souvenirs, pendant les repas en commun, le travail scolaire, les activités sportives, les jeux et les rires, jusqu'au

.../...

Figure 1 Fundraising letter, *SOS Village d'Enfants*

Martin (2001) highlights the relationship between higher order Theme and evaluation, and the ways in which a photograph in hyper-Theme position may function as an evaluative Theme, orienting readers to and naturalizing the stance from which the ensuing verbal Rheme can be read. I have shown in another study (Lipovsky: Eliciting solidarity in an emergency appeal: An illustrative analysis, forthcoming) how a photograph appearing prominently in a fundraising letter that *Oxfam Australia* emailed their supporters in the wake of the 2010 Pakistani floods plays a significant role in orienting the reader attitudinally towards the subsequent text, predisposing the potential supporter to make a donation. Similarly, by visually highlighting children Paul and Alice in

their fundraising letter (Figure 1), *SOS Village d'Enfants*, an association that allows brothers and sisters who are orphaned or have been taken away from the care of their parents to be raised together, orients the reader interpersonally to the plight of the children that they are being encouraged to support, with the text serving to comment and elaborate. The photograph thus functions as a visual hyper-Theme naturalizing the stance of the ensuing verbal text (Martin 2001: 320–324), and predisposing readers to make a donation. The visual representation of Paul and Alice in Theme position creates immediacy and direct emotional impact, making an emotive appeal to the viewer, whereas the ensuing message in the Rheme provides hard facts about the two children and details the NGO's response, providing grounds for their appeal to the reader to donate funds. In other words, the representation of two of the NGO's beneficiaries in hyper-Theme position formulates the event visually and solicits the generosity of potential donors by virtue of its emotive impact.

The verbal text of the letter further orients the reader emotionally through the use of a redundant vocative, personal pronoun 'you' and attitudinal meanings. First, the Theme-Rheme organization of a verbal text, by highlighting the writer's point of departure of the message, plays a role in foregrounding certain meanings over others (Caffarel and Rechniewski 2009). As shown in Figure 1, a caption in bold letters and enlarged font immediately appears below the image and across the page, and precedes the text of the letter:

(1) *Madame Paré, merci de tendre la main aux enfants d'une famille brisée.*
Mrs Paré, thank you for reaching out to the children of a broken family.

The reader does not need much inferencing to figure out the identifying process between the children in the image and those in the verbiage, since the caption appears right below the photograph. Moreover, the use of equal-status image and text serves to capture the reader's attention, arouse their interest and ensure their involvement (Martinec 2013). Further involvement is sought via the inclusion, at the beginning of the caption, of the recipient of the letter, identified through her last name ('Madame Paré'). The use of a redundant vocative indicates an attempt by the writer to establish a closer relationship with the reader (Egins and Slade 1997: 145). The reader is also addressed through the second-person pronoun *vous* (you), e.g.:

(2) *Et vous êtes leur plus bel espoir, car vous pouvez nous aider à réparer ce qui a été tragiquement brisé dans leur vie d'enfant.*
And you are their greatest hope, because you can help us repair what was tragically shattered in their childhood,

where *plus bel espoir* (greatest hope) and *réparer* (repair) are contrasted with *tragiquement brisé* (tragically shattered). I will further discuss the role of attitudinal values in provoking the reader's emotional involvement in the section about interpersonal meanings.

The letter then starts with further identification of the two children:

(3) *Ils s'appellent Paul et Alice... Il a 4 ans, elle a 6 ans...*

Their names are Paul and Alice... He is 4 years old, she is 6 years old....

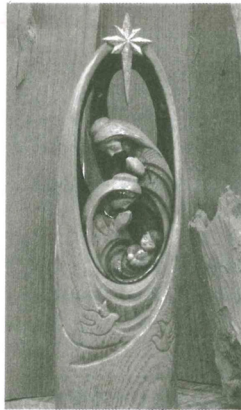
thus identifying by name these two potential beneficiaries of the donor's generosity. Paul and Alice are later described as brother and sister.

The representation of potential beneficiaries

The vast majority of the photographs (over three-fourths) present to the reader static images, as illustrated in Figure 1. This means that the photographs are less a visual medium for telling a story than they are a representation of the participant(s) in the ensuing verbiage (Knox 2009: 153). These photographs usually represent one or more beneficiaries of the association, such as an (endangered) animal (*Fondation 30 millions d'amis, World Wide Fund for Nature*), or a child (and mother) (*Ligue contre le cancer, Solidarité laïque, SOS Villages d'enfants, UNICEF*). These images contribute to orienting the reader through the participants' 'symbolic attributes,' such as a school uniform or class material in letters from organizations supporting children's right to education (*Solidarité laïque*), a guide dog in letters from organizations supporting blind or visually impaired people (*Union nationale des aveugles et déficients visuels*), or a clown's red nose (*Le rire médecin*). The raison d'être of these photographs is therefore to display to the reader of the letter one or more of the NGO's potential beneficiaries or members of staff in a symbolic process that reveals who they are (see Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 105).

One-fourth of the photographs in the corpus on the other hand can be interpreted in terms of narrative processes (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 59–72), whereby NGOs' members of staff and beneficiaries are shown engaged in activities of some kind, as indicated by 'vectors,' that is, oblique lines created by their limbs that provide a sense of action, or lines of gaze. For instance, the fundraising letter mailed by *Petites Sœurs des Pauvres*, an association that provides assistance to poor and isolated elderly people, around Christmas time, with the title *Noël!* (Christmas) in large-font red letters at the top of the page (Figure 2), shows an elderly lady bending over an object – likely to be a Christmas present – that she is unwrapping with the assistance of a nun (as indicated by the position of their hands and the gaze vector between their eyes and the object). In the same manner, the photograph in hyper-Theme position in the fundraising letter by *Le rire médecin*, an association that promotes the use of clowns in hospital paediatric wards (Figure 3), sets a clear narrative that the reader can observe at leisure. It shows a clown mimicking a sick child leaning on her mother in a hospital waiting room. The parents' gaze in the direction of the clown, as well as the parents' and the child's smiles, indicate the comforting effect of the clown's actions on them.

Significantly, these images often commit meanings that are unavailable in the verbiage, such as distinct narrative processes offering instant illustrations of the NGOs' work, plus beneficiaries' attributes (age, dress, etc.), thus sharing the semantic load with the verbiage through ideational divergence (Painter and Martin 2011). As an example, the photographs in Figures 2 and 3 hold an independent status, relative to the text of the letter, with cohesive relations of time (Christmas) and place (the hospital waiting room) linking images and verbiage to one another (Martinec 2013). Such natural and motivated cohesive relations between image and verbiage provide them with additional



Noël !

Soyons les gardiens des dons de Dieu !

"Saint Joseph a pris un soin affectueux de Marie et s'est consacré avec joie à l'éducation de Jésus le Christ.
La vocation de garder ne concerne pas seulement les chrétiens,
elle a une dimension qui précède et qui est simplement humaine, elle concerne tout le monde.

C'est le fait de garder la création tout entière, la beauté de la création ;
c'est le fait de garder les gens, d'avoir soin de tous, de chaque personne, avec amour,
spécialement des enfants, **des personnes âgées**, de celles qui sont plus fragiles
et qui souvent sont dans la périphérie de notre cœur.

Au fond, tout est confié à la garde de l'homme, et c'est une responsabilité qui nous concerne tous.
Soyez des gardiens des dons de Dieu !

Prendre soin, garder, demande bonté, demande d'être vécu avec tendresse.
Nous ne devons pas avoir peur de la bonté, de la tendresse".

Pape François, 19 mars 2013

La tendresse et la bonté ont habité le cœur et la vie de **Sainte Jeanne Jugan**.

En 1839, elle donnait son propre lit à une personne âgée pauvre,
infirmes et abandonnée, première d'une multitude d'autres.

Pour subvenir à leurs besoins, elle se mit à quêter en leur nom, recevant tout don avec gratitude.

À la suite de notre fondatrice,
Petites Sœurs des Pauvres,
nous poursuivons aujourd'hui la même démarche
en accueillant à "Ma Maison"
des personnes âgées aux ressources modestes.
Pour les accompagner et soigner jusqu'à la fin
de leur vie, votre aide financière nous est indispensable.
C'est pourquoi nous venons vers vous
avec confiance.


Merci !



Figure 2 Fundraising letter, *Petites Sœurs des Pauvres*

credibility (Martinec 2013), confirming for example *Le rire médecin's* motto shown in the top left corner of the letter: *de vrais clowns à l'hôpital* (real clowns in hospitals).

Furthermore, photographs with narrative processes often show the beneficiaries in their social context, providing to the reader of the letter details of their physical environment much more readily than through verbiage. For instance, the elderly lady in



le rire médecin
« de vrais clowns à l'hôpital »


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Tél.: 01 42 72 41 31 - Fax: 01 42 72 41 79
www.leriremedecin.asso.fr

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Dr Basket



Dr Balthazar

Flora et sa mère viennent d'arriver aux Urgences. *Plée en deux par la douleur et la peur, Flora est en larmes. Elle se plaint d'une douleur vive au ventre. Sa mère a bien du mal à dissimuler son angoisse et ne cesse de lui caresser les cheveux. Deux heures d'attente sont annoncées avant qu'un médecin ne puisse les voir. Ce jour-là comme beaucoup d'autres, il y a un monde fou aux Urgences.*

Chère Madame,

Dans ce service pas comme les autres, l'affluence est continue et les blessures les plus bénignes côtoient les accidents les plus graves. Les enfants et leurs parents se succèdent aux Urgences à un rythme difficile à suivre pour le personnel soignant, jusqu'à 100 à 120 visites par jour.

Rien n'est prévisible et l'angoisse domine la plupart du temps. L'attente, souvent longue, accroît la peur des enfants et le stress ou l'énerverment des parents, rendant plus complexe encore le travail des soignants.

Au sein de cette ambiance électrique, les clowns jouent un rôle capital pour diminuer l'anxiété et apporter la galeté, la douceur ou la fantaisie dont ce service a tant besoin.

« Leur présence dédramatise l'hôpital en restaurant les repères du monde de l'enfance, fragilisés par la violence d'un accident ou d'une maladie. » témoigne une responsable des Urgences du Centre Hospitalier Intercommunal de Créteil. Après leur venue, il règne souvent un vrai sentiment de décontraction et le temps paraît plus court.

Après une improvisation clownesque sur l'air endiablé du *Rock and Roll des Gallinacés* dans la salle d'attente bondée, Dr Basket et Pr Balthazar dédicacent en grande pompe le plâtre « tout neuf » de **Baptiste, un adolescent rebelle**. En salle de soins, les clowns changent de rythme et entament tout en douceur une berceuse pour Théo, un bébé d'à peine quelques jours. Bulles de savon et marionnettes à doigt sont alors les bienvenues pour détourner son attention d'une prise de sang.

Combinant savoir-faire et savoir-être, les clowns savent désamorcer une panique d'enfant. Isabelle Hau, médecin, raconte souvent l'histoire de **Léa, une petite fille à qui l'on posait des points de suture** : « au lieu d'utiliser un gaz hilarant (décontractant en cas de douleur), nous avons sollicité les clowns. Restés dans le couloir, les parents étaient médusés d'entendre leur enfant chanter avec eux. »

La présence des clowns va même plus loin que cela ; elle peut également faciliter l'approche proprement médicale. D'après Isabelle Hau : « L'agitation et l'angoisse des enfants accentuent les difficultés que nous rencontrons pour déterminer leur état général. Leur réaction à la vue des clowns permet parfois d'orienter notre diagnostic ; plus à l'aise, ils se laissent davantage aller à leur comportement habituel. »

|| Dans les 5 services d'urgences où le Rire Médecin intervient, 100 000 enfants sont accueillis chaque année. Aujourd'hui, ils ont plus que jamais besoin de vous.

Votre soutien sera déterminant cet hiver, période à laquelle les Urgences Pédiatriques sont régulièrement prises d'assaut. Dans ces conditions de stress et de saturation, la présence des clowns sera fondamentale pour apaiser les angoisses.


Notre défi est de taille. En effet comme beaucoup d'entre vous, Le Rire Médecin fait face à une diminution de ses ressources. Or il nous faut réunir 115 000 € pour agir auprès de **Flora, Baptiste, Théo, Léa et tous les enfants hospitalisés aux Urgences**. Un tel montant représente beaucoup mais si, parmi vous, 2 550 personnes choisissent de nous faire un don de 45 € (soit en réalité 15.30 € pour vous après déduction d'impôt), ensemble nous atteindrons cet objectif.


Je veux croire en la poursuite de notre mission auprès des enfants hospitalisés aux Urgences, et pour cela mobiliser le plus grand nombre. Je sais que vous pouvez nous y aider.

Quel que soit le montant de votre soutien, il sera essentiel pour soulager le quotidien de milliers d'enfants.

D'avance, je vous remercie de tout cœur,

Parce qu'ils comptent sur nous, nous avons besoin de vous. *





Pr Alain Fischer,
Président du Rire Médecin
Pédiatre, chef du service d'immuno-hématologie
de l'hôpital Necker Enfants Malades

PS : En cette période de fêtes de fin d'année, nous vous offrons pour vous remercier de votre engagement à nos côtés, ces 3 petites décorations de Noël que vous pourrez accrocher à votre sapin.

Le Rire Médecin - 18 rue Geoffroy l'Asnlier - 75004 Paris - Tél. 01 42 72 41 31 - www.leriremedecin.asso.fr

Figure 3 Fundraising letter, *Le rire médecin*

Figure 2 is shown in homely surroundings, seated in a big, comfortable-looking arm-chair next to a side table on which stand a lamp and a cordless phone. This setting is identified in the text of the letter as *Ma Maison* (My home), a retirement home for elderly people with little income that is situated in the reader's town. The action depicted, which also takes place in the potential donors' homes over Christmas, in surroundings that might be similar to the ones shown in the photograph, thus represents a reality close to that of the reader. There is no artifice in the picture, no aesthetic value; rather it looks very much like the kind of photograph that readers of the letter themselves might take on Christmas day. As such, the context is easily recognizable by the audience and provides an impression of authenticity.

Effectively, most photographs in the corpus represent a smaller number of participants as a way to engage potential donors with the fundraising campaigns. Although these results would need to be verified through a larger corpus, it is still significant that more than half the photographs (55 %) represent one single participant (e.g., dog in letter by *Fondation 30 millions d'amis* as illustrated in Figure 4), whereas close to one-third of the photographs (29 %) show two participants only, as illustrated in Figures 1 and 2. Among the photographs that depict two or more participants, preference is given to the representation of family units (e.g., brother and sister for *SOS Villages d'enfants* as illustrated in Figure 1; mother and child for *UNICEF*; child and parents for *Le rire médecin* as illustrated in Figure 3). Such choices in the representation of potential beneficiaries comply with research on compassion fatigue that highlights how donors' fading of compassion is reversed when shown individuals who are depicted as family units (see Kogut and Ritov 2005; Slovic 2007; Small et al. 2007; Västfjäll et al. 2014).

Moreover, over half of the fundraising letters seek to further individuate their beneficiaries through nomination. This is done informally, through the use of their first names, as in the following examples:

(4) *Comme vous pouvez le découvrir dans sa lettre que j'ai reçue et jointe à ce courrier, Mireille, à 82 ans, ne se plaint pas, elle sait que c'est dur pour tout le monde (Les Petits Frères des Pauvres)*

As you can see from the letter she sent me that I enclose with my letter to you, Mireille, aged 82, does not complain, she knows it is hard for everyone.

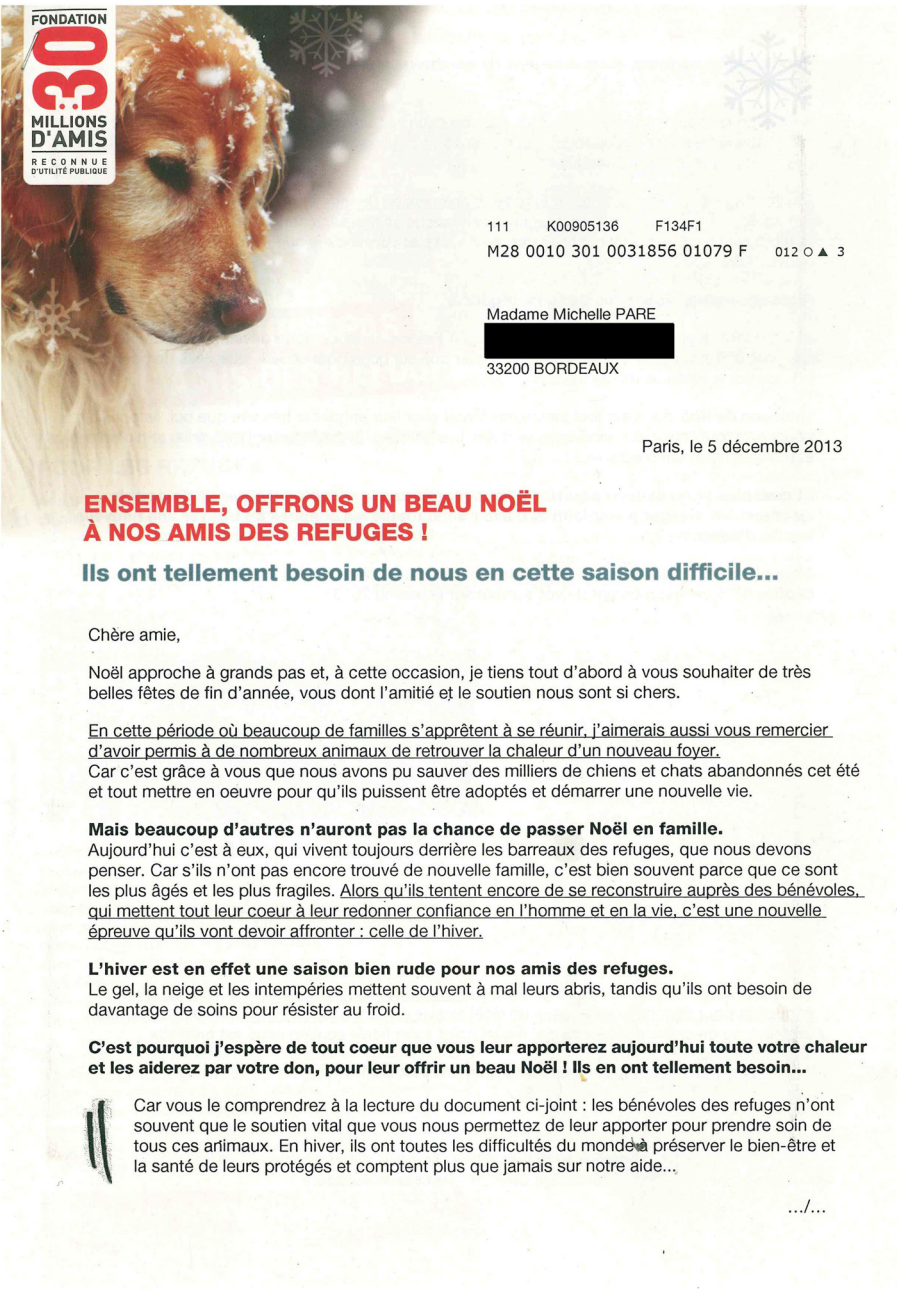
(5) *Dr Basket et Pr Balthazar dédicacent en grande pompe le plâtre « tout neuf » de Baptiste, un adolescent rebelle (Le rire médecin)*

Dr Basket and Prof. Balthazar sign with great pomp a "brand new" cast for Baptiste, a rebellious adolescent.

(6) *Qui peut imaginer le bonheur de Céline, que l'on voit ci-dessus porter dans ses bras sa fille Yasmina ? (Unicef)*

Who could imagine the happiness felt by Céline, pictured above holding her daughter Yasmina in her arms?

Relational identification whereby social actors are represented in terms of their personal or kinship relation to each other (see van Leeuwen 1996: 56–57), as in excerpts 1



FONDATION
30
MILLIONS
D'AMIS
RECONNUE
D'UTILITÉ PUBLIQUE

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M28 0010 301 0031856 01079 F 012 ○ ▲ 3

Madame Michelle PARE
[REDACTED]
33200 BORDEAUX

Paris, le 5 décembre 2013

**ENSEMBLE, OFFRONS UN BEAU NOËL
À NOS AMIS DES REFUGES !**

Ils ont tellement besoin de nous en cette saison difficile...

Chère amie,

Noël approche à grands pas et, à cette occasion, je tiens tout d'abord à vous souhaiter de très belles fêtes de fin d'année, vous dont l'amitié et le soutien nous sont si chers.

En cette période où beaucoup de familles s'apprêtent à se réunir, j'aimerais aussi vous remercier d'avoir permis à de nombreux animaux de retrouver la chaleur d'un nouveau foyer.
Car c'est grâce à vous que nous avons pu sauver des milliers de chiens et chats abandonnés cet été et tout mettre en oeuvre pour qu'ils puissent être adoptés et démarrer une nouvelle vie.

Mais beaucoup d'autres n'auront pas la chance de passer Noël en famille.
Aujourd'hui c'est à eux, qui vivent toujours derrière les barreaux des refuges, que nous devons penser. Car s'ils n'ont pas encore trouvé de nouvelle famille, c'est bien souvent parce que ce sont les plus âgés et les plus fragiles. Alors qu'ils tentent encore de se reconstruire auprès des bénévoles, qui mettent tout leur coeur à leur redonner confiance en l'homme et en la vie, c'est une nouvelle épreuve qu'ils vont devoir affronter : celle de l'hiver.

L'hiver est en effet une saison bien rude pour nos amis des refuges.
Le gel, la neige et les intempéries mettent souvent à mal leurs abris, tandis qu'ils ont besoin de davantage de soins pour résister au froid.

C'est pourquoi j'espère de tout coeur que vous leur apporterez aujourd'hui toute votre chaleur et les aiderez par votre don, pour leur offrir un beau Noël ! Ils en ont tellement besoin...

Car vous le comprendrez à la lecture du document ci-joint : les bénévoles des refuges n'ont souvent que le soutien vital que vous nous permettez de leur apporter pour prendre soin de tous ces animaux. En hiver, ils ont toutes les difficultés du monde à préserver le bien-être et la santé de leurs protégés et comptent plus que jamais sur notre aide...

.../...

Figure 4 Fundraising letter, *Fondation 30 millions d'amis*

and 6, plays an important role in pinpointing family units. Significantly, individuating beneficiaries may thwart compassion fatigue (see Kogut and Ritov 2005; Slovic 2007; Small et al. 2007; Västfjäll et al. 2014). This is confirmed by the positive result of the 'Paul and Alice campaign' (SOS Villages d'enfants France 2013).

The interaction with potential donors

Interpersonally, the photographs serve a persuading, rather than an informing, objective, with the purpose of predisposing potential donors towards the mission that the not-for-

profit organizations aim to achieve, and convincing them to make a donation. In other words, the images, with the support of the verbal text of the fundraising letters, serve to accomplish a performative objective whereby the reader is construed as being affiliated with the aims of the organizations.

Most of the photographs in the fundraising letters are rectangular or square-shaped. According to Thompson and Davenport's *Dictionary of Visual Language* (1982: 110), squares denote order. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 54) comment that 'in contemporary Western society, squares and rectangles are the elements of the mechanical, technological order, of the world of human construction'. 'Unlike circles, which are self-contained, complete in themselves, rectangular shapes can be stacked, aligned with each other in geometrical patterns: they form the modules, the building blocks with which we construct our world' (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 54). The shape of the photographs thus contributes to presenting to potential donors a sense of objectivity and credibility – one notable exception being the playful presentation of *Le rire médecin*, as shown in Figure 3.

Another characteristic of the photographs is that they usually have a naturalistic coding orientation, that is, they show clear details, with a reasonably full spectrum of colour and shading, etc. (see Royce 1998). In this sense, these images look like relatively objective and accurate representations of the reality. In terms of alignment, naturalistic photographs invite an empathic stance from the reader, and may also lend the NGOs more credibility, which in turn may generate more donations according to Goering et al. (2011). Three letters only, as shown in Table 1 and illustrated in Figure 2, show black and white pictures – although the choice of black and white might be for economical, rather than aesthetic, reasons.

The choice of colours in images may affect the reader's feelings (Painter et al. 2013), with for instance the choice of warm and vibrant colours in the letter by *Le rire médecin* (Figure 3) creating cheerful splashes of ambience and a sense of vitality, whereas the choice of cold colours and an unnaturalistic green background in the letter by *SOS Villages d'enfants* (Figure 1) mirrors the negative attitudinal meanings in the text of the letter (see earlier discussion). At the end of the continuum are the blue photographs in the letter by the *Fondation du souffle contre les maladies respiratoires*, an association that fights against respiratory diseases (see Table 1), which establish a gloomy mood, accentuated by the restriction to a single hue that gives the impression of being removed from the normality of everyday life.

In terms of involvement (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006: 136), most images require from the viewers and potential donors a strong degree of involvement with the represented beneficiaries, as most of them are presented to their gaze frontally, rather than sideways, as with the two children in Figure 1. In terms of power, all the photographs were taken at eye level (as opposed to a high or low angle), thus offering a neutral relation of power between viewer and viewed as the potential donors neither look up to nor down on the potential beneficiaries. Then in terms of social distance, a number of photographs are close-ups, particularly when representing animals and young children (see Figures 1 and 4). These close-ups allow the viewer to mentally come close to the represented beneficiaries, construing a more personal relationship. If we now turn our attention to the participants' affiliation with one another within the images, they are usually represented in close proximity, as shown by the nun and elderly lady's bodies orientation towards the Christmas present in Figure 2, or the clown leaning on the child in Figure 3. This is indeed in stark contrast to the body orientation of Paul and Alice in Figure 1, as discussed below.

In terms of visual focalisation, the potential donors have an eye contact with the NGO beneficiaries or members of staff in three-fourths of the photographs where no narrative is taking place. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 117), ‘when represented participants look at the viewer, vectors, formed by participants’ eyelines, connect the participants with the viewer. Contact is established, even if it is only on an imaginary level’. Such visual configuration creates a form of direct address that encourages the reader to engage with the represented participant, as it establishes a sense of connection with the represented participant’s gaze, demanding that the viewer enter into a pseudo-social bond. In this manner, the participants in the photographs are not unlike those in Pennock-Speck and del Saz-Rubio (2013) analysis of British charity ads, in which children often lock eyes with the viewer at certain strategic moments in the ads such as pleas for help, making requests for action more difficult to ignore for the audience. In contrast, a small number of the represented participants look down, shunning eye contact, such as the dog in Figure 4. In terms of the interpersonal semantic system of appraisal (Martin and White 2005), this involves the subsystem of affect: misery.

The feelings of the potential beneficiaries are depicted through their facial expressions and bodily stances. These may include negative affect of inscribed unhappiness, as shown on Paul and Alice’s faces in Figure 1, and insecurity evoked through the little girl clinging to her teddy bear and sucking her thumb. Further negative judgement is triggered by the black shadow on the wall that separates the brother from his sister, and their distinct body orientations that suggest a disconnection between the siblings, something that *SOS Villages d’enfants* is striving to prevent. Furthermore, the reader is alerted to the image’s intended evaluative meanings through ‘visual graduation’ (Economou 2008, 2009), as shown by the large amount of space that Paul and Alice fill within the picture frame, which makes even more salient the attitudinal values that are visually inscribed or evoked in the children’s facial expressions and bodily stances. Thus, in terms of Affect, the reader is positioned to react empathetically to the children in the photograph, not only through the attitudinal meanings that are inscribed or evoked through representational meanings (children’s faces and bodily stances showing unhappiness and insecurity), but also through interactional meanings (direct gaze, eye-level shot, close-up). In terms of judgement (Martin and White 2005), the reader might view the children’s situation as unwarranted and ethically wrong.

Attitudinal meanings may also be triggered through the photographs that present narratives. The photograph in the *Petites Sœurs des Pauvres* letter (Figure 2) is presented as factual – it is naturalistic, visually depicting ideational meanings complete with participants, processes and circumstances. However, the elderly lady is also presented in a context of material security and emotional well-being, while the body stance of the nun, bending forward from behind the armchair to lend a hand in opening the parcel, can be characterised as caring, triggering positive judgement values. In terms of the interpersonal semantic system of appraisal (Martin and White 2005), the subsystems of affect, which entail emotional responses; and of judgement, whereby people’s behaviour is assessed, are implicated. Thus, while presenting an appearance of representing material reality, the image also operates attitudinally to trigger a positive evaluation from the potential donor. This is reinforced by the verbal text, which cites acts of *tendresse* (tenderness) and *bonté* (kindness) provided by Sainte Jeanne Jugan, whose service resulted in the establishment of *Petites Sœurs des Pauvres*:

(7) *En 1839, elle donnait son propre lit à une personne âgée pauvre, infirme et abandonnée, première d'une multitude d'autres.*

In 1839, she gave her own bed to an elderly person who was poor, infirm and abandoned, the first among many others.

The attitudinal meanings in the verbiage in excerpt 7 are meant to trigger evaluations from the same subsystems of affect and judgement as in the image.

Likewise, the photograph in hyper-Theme in *Le rire médecin* letter (Figure 3) holds the potential to position the viewer to take a positive view of the programmes of the association. In contrast to the numerous instances of negative appraisal of the accompanying text that describe the 'normality' of a hospital emergency service, e.g., *la douleur et la peur* (pain and fear), *en larmes* (in tears), *angoisse* (anguish), *monde fou aux Urgences* (a lot of people in the emergency room), *rythme difficile à suivre pour le personnel soignant* (pace difficult to sustain for the medical staff), *peur des enfants* (children's fear), *le stress ou l'énerverment des parents* (parents' stress or restlessness), the participants in the photograph display emotional well-being, as shown in their smiling faces, while from the whole scene emanates a peaceful atmosphere, triggering positive judgements.

Lastly, a photograph of the author of the letter may serve to further engage readers. Six of the fundraising letters include photographs of the signatory of the letter – usually the president of the NGO, as illustrated in Figure 3. Typically, these are coloured passport-sized photographs of close-ups of the ascribed author of the letter that are positioned next to their signature. As close-up pictures, these photographs contribute to creating a sense of intimacy between writer and reader. Significantly, the author of the letter usually looks straight out at the reader, indicating that the latter is been positioned to engage with, rather than observe, the former (Painter et al. 2013: 19). Moreover, unlike the beneficiaries of the organizations, three of the authors of the letters are represented smiling, a way to seek to further establish emotive involvement and social affinity with the potential donor. Establishing a connection with the reader also contributes to creating a trustworthy image of the authors of the letters and representatives of the NGOs, which in turn increases their credibility and persuasive appeal (Goering et al. 2011).

Conclusion

In a climate in which not-for-profit organizations are becoming increasingly dependent on the success of their communication with individual donors in order to raise funds, the study of fundraising letters and their multimodal resources is significant (Orgad and Vella 2012). This study has highlighted the complementarity of multimodal analysis and psychological research in efforts to overcome potential donors' futility thinking when deciding whether to donate money in response to fundraising campaigns. Futility thinking entails beliefs whereby individuals reason that it is not worth giving money to destitute people because there are so many of them and it will have no impact (Singer 2009). Compassion and sympathy have been shown to be integral to charitable giving. Research has found that our capacity to feel sympathy for people in need starts to decline when large numbers are involved, and the fading of compassion is reversed when dealing with single individuals or families, or identified victims (Kogut and Ritov 2005; Slovic 2007; Small et al. 2007; Västfjäll et al. 2014). The present multimodal

analysis has revealed tangible ways of eliciting compassion and sympathy from the readers of fundraising letters through the letters' visual design. The perspective adopted in this study is largely qualitative and interpretive. Even though the findings are based on a small-scale study, this multimodal analysis has led to the uncovering of significant patterns in the photographs of fundraising letters and not-for-profit organizations' semiotic strategies for construing affiliation with potential donors. Multimodal analysis has also been shown to be valuable in investigating hypotheses in domains other than linguistics and in corroborating findings from other bodies of literature about fundraising.

First, the analysis has highlighted a personalization of sufferers that focuses appeals on distinct individuals (Chouliaraki 2010). Images indeed contribute to the persuasive appeal of fundraising letters through their focus on the particular, owing to their emphasis on the representation of single participants, or groups perceived as single units (such as individuals described as belonging to the same family). Moreover, far from anonymizing NGOs' beneficiaries through generic reference (e.g., use of the plural form) or aggregation into large numeric groups, a number of fundraising letters seek to individuate them through nomination (e.g., use of their first names). This is crucial, since when social actors are rendered generic, they are 'symbolically removed from the readers' world of immediate experience, treated as distant "others" rather than as people "we" have to deal with in our everyday lives' (van Leeuwen 1996: 48). Nomination also provides fundraising appeals with a touch of documentary realism, as the name of given beneficiaries implies that they actually exist (Dogra 2007: 165). Last but not least, nomination complies with research (such as Kogut and Ritov 2005) that highlights how we are willing to contribute significantly more money when considering a single identified victim (identified by name and by a picture).

Second, images contribute to the persuasive appeal of fundraising letters as they aim at construing an intimate relationship between the NGOs and their potential donors. The NGOs and their letters rely on established mechanisms to engage their readers: close-up photographs aimed at shortening the distance and creating a sense of intimacy between NGO beneficiaries and potential donors; frontal angles aimed at eliciting involvement; eye-level shots of the beneficiaries that promote a neutral relation of power between donors and beneficiaries; and a direct gaze from NGOs' spokespersons that strives to elicit emotional engagement from potential supporters.

Third, more than showing to potential donors the beneficiaries of their monies, the images play a critical role in orienting potential donors attitudinally to, and naturalising the stance from, which the ensuing verbal text of the fundraising letter can be read. In terms of 'commitment', that is, the amount of meaning potential that is committed in the process of instantiation (Painter and Martin 2011; Painter et al. 2013), the analysis has highlighted the important contribution of images to impart attitudinal meanings, in particular via facial expressions and body stance. Besides, their positioning as hyper-Themes plays a crucial role in engaging the reader emotionally (see Martin 2001).

As discussed earlier, NGOs' communications aim at cultivating solidarity, usually through financial transaction (Orgad 2013: 298), so that on the whole, their fundraising letters, beyond their individual readers, address a larger community of supporters and/or potential donors who are affiliated around similar values of care and compassion. It is this affiliation that eventually brings together the visual and verbal attitudinal meanings of fundraising letters.

Endnotes

¹See how donations poured in to rescue Hokget, a dog stranded on a ship drifting on the Pacific Ocean (Vedantam 2010).

²See Martin (2001) for a comparison of the terms used regarding the modalities of verbiage and image across authors.

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