



Research Article

Antje Lobin*

A multimodal view on *Made in France* – the indication of origin in French food advertising

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Abstract: In saturated markets with interchangeable products information on a product's geographical origin come increasingly to the fore. This holds particularly true for the food industry. Such a focus on origin also has an impact on genuinely persuasive brand communication. The present article will first provide some theoretical and conceptual clarifications concerning the term *semiotic modality* as well as typography as a semiotic resource, before outlining the possibilities for indicating origin in advertising communication. In addition to branding elements in the narrower sense (brand name; trademark/brand image; packaging/product design), the origin of a product can be emphasized by the use of labels and certification marks. Subsequently, on the basis of different case examples from France, where so-called economic patriotism has a strong tradition, I will illustrate the multimodal mechanisms of the indication of origin as a quality signal and sales argument. Here it becomes clear to what extent the emphasis on origin is a gradual phenomenon, which must also be seen in the light of semiotic criticism.

Keywords: advertisement; branding; origin; product packaging

1 Introduction

In today's era of increasing market saturation, in which the scope for differentiating products is diminishing and consumers often find it difficult to assess a product's real quality (Leitow 2005: 23), information on a product's geographical origin comes increasingly to the fore. Becker (2002: 10) describes the function of information on a product's origin as follows:

Eine geographische Herkunftsangabe ist primär eine Verständigungsnorm über den Ursprung bzw. die Herkunft eines Produktes. Darüber hinaus kann diese Angabe auch den Charakter einer Marke bekommen, wenn mit der geographischen Herkunft für die Verbraucher bestimmte qualitätsbestimmende Produkteigenschaften verbunden sind. Eine Marke ist in diesem Zusammenhang nichts anderes als ein Qualitätssignal in der Kommunikation zwischen Anbieter und Nachfrager.

[‘A geographical indication of origin is primarily a standard of understanding about the origin or provenance of a product. In addition, this indication may also take on the character of a brand, if the geographical origin is associated with certain quality-determining product characteristics for consumers. A brand in this context is nothing more than a quality indicator in the communication between supplier and consumer.’] (Becker 2002: 10)

In France, so-called economic patriotism has a strong tradition. Historically, Jean-Baptiste Colbert and his famous factories can be seen as a forerunner of *Made in France* (Bezat 2015: 11).¹ More recently, one of the strongest

¹ “Colbert devoted endless energy to the reorganization of industry and commerce. He believed that in order to increase French power it would be essential to increase France's share of international trade and in particular to reduce the commercial hegemony of the Dutch. [...] Colbert encouraged foreign workers to bring their trade skills to France. He gave privileges to a number of private industries and founded state manufactures.” (<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jean-Baptiste-Colbert>).

*Corresponding author: Antje Lobin, Romance Studies, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, Mainz, Germany, E-mail: alobin@uni-mainz.de

advocates of national production has been the former Minister for the Economy, Arnaud Montebourg, who has become the leader of what he called *la bataille du made in France* [‘the battle of made in France’] (Montebourg 2013) since 2011 (Bezat 2015: 14).² Information about a product’s origin is also one of the 17 *Sustainable Development Goals* formulated by the United Nations. Goal 12 aims to ensure sustainable and responsible consumption and production patterns, including the implementation of guidelines for credible consumer information.³

For the food industry, it was noted as early as the beginning of the new millennium that consumers increasingly consider the origin of a product as a determining factor in their purchase decision (Becker 2002: 21). The importance of the origin as a sales argument in the purchasing situation is also conveyed to consumers by emphasizing it in advertising and in the media (Becker 2002: 22).⁴ A statement made by the French politician and founder of the French certification mark *Origine France Garantie*, Yves Jégo, is particularly true with regard to the food industry: “Le XX^e siècle a été celui des marques, le XXI^e siècle sera celui de l’origine” [‘The 20th century was the century of brands, the 21st century will be that of origin’] (quoted in Bezat 2015: 64).⁵ The close connection between food and its regional origin is also underlined by Deramond (2024):

Les aliments sont intrinsèquement liés aux régions qui les ont vu naître, par le sol qui les nourrit et par les habitudes et traditions qui font qu’on les produit. Un aliment peut devenir le symbole d’une région et participer à la construction de son image de marque. (Deramond 2024: 78)

[‘Food is intrinsically linked to the regions where it originates, through the soil that nurtures it and the customs and traditions that lead to its production. A food can become the symbol of a region, helping to build its brand image.’]

To determine the importance customers attach to the indication of origin and the influence it has on their purchase decision, the *Fédération Indépendante du Made in France* (FIMIF) and the market research and consulting company IPSOS conducted a survey, which was carried out online between 15 and 22 September 2020 on 1,000 people forming a representative national sample of the population aged 16–75 residing in France. The factors age, gender and region were taken into account (FIMIF 2021: 9). A central question was to find out which mentions are associated with a French origin. The following indications were available for selection: *Fabriqué en France* [‘Made in France’], *Créé en France* [‘Created in France’], *Conçu en France* [‘Designed in France’], *Imprimé en France* [‘Printed in France’], *Conditionné en France* [‘Packaged in France’], *Entreprise Française* [‘French company’], *Maison Française* [‘French house’], the French flag and the bar code starting with 3. Results show that the indication *Made in France* (in the French or English version) is associated with a French origin by 80 % of the respondents. The other percentages are in decreasing order: 26 % for the French flag, 24 % for *Créé en France*, 21 % for *Entreprise Française* and 18 % for *Conçu en France*. 14 % of the respondents associate the bar code starting with 3 with a French origin. The indication *Maison Française* marks a French origin for 13 %, *Imprimé en France* for 11 % and *Conditionné en France* for 8 % of the participants. In this context, it is noteworthy that for about a quarter of French people, the indication *Créé en France* and even the French tricolor flag on a product are interpreted as indicating its geographical origin (FIMIF 2021: 3). The study also found that 95 % of the people in France would like the geographical origin to be indicated on all products (FIMIF 2021: 5) and that 83 % take the country of manufacture or geographic origin of a product into account before making a purchase (FIMIF 2021: 18). The geographic origin plays a prominent role in the purchase of food products (92 %) (FIMIF 2021: 18). Such attention to the origin of products also has implications for genuinely persuasive advertising. In advertising communication, the

² Cf. also the article by Kapferer (2011): “France: Pourquoi penser marque?”

³ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>; <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal12>.

⁴ Not only the advertising text, but also the purchase and use of a product can be considered a communicative act in which utility value and symbolic value of goods merge. The symbolic value varies from one product group to another and even within a product category, depending, for example, on current trends in society. The trend towards origin, as observed in the food sector, has certainly led to an increase in the symbolic value of goods in this field, in addition to trends towards health and organic food (Stöckl 2012: 245).

⁵ Luther (2022: 98) also sees the continuous expansion of legal obligations regarding the designation of origin as an indication for the increasing relevance of the origin of food.

geographical origin is emphasized in various ways through the linguistic and visual code, thus providing a fruitful field of investigation for multimodality research.⁶

Based on the observation that the origin of products is becoming increasingly important, the question arises as to the occurrence, the shapes and the mechanisms of this quality signal and sales argument in advertising communication. Different advertising formats (advertisement, spot, packaging, etc.) must be taken into account, as must different categories of goods (see the *Nice Classification of goods and services* applied for the registration of trade marks) as well as the synchronic and diachronic perspective. In this context, the present article is intended as a pilot study and starting point for a more comprehensive research project. The overarching goal is to inventory the linking patterns of the individual modalities on a broad empirical basis and to uncover the principles of inter-semiotic creation of meaning in order to contribute to a theoretical foundation for the indication of origin. The data for such a project will be compiled through field research and internet research as well as through the *Institut National de la Propriété Industrielle*.⁷

Firstly, I will provide some theoretical and conceptual clarifications, especially of the term *semiotic modality* and of typography as a semiotic resource. Subsequently, I will outline the possibilities for indicating origin in advertising communication before presenting selected examples. Based on a sample of 50 products containing different types of indication of origin that was compiled in a field research in August 2023 in a *Casino* supermarket in France the aim is to illustrate the range covering cases of clear French origin to more questionable cases.

2 Theoretical and conceptual definitions

2.1 The concept of *semiotic modalities*

Among the numerous definitions of multimodality, in which the defining characteristic is always the mutual linkage of multiple semiotic modalities in a text (e.g. Iedema 2003; Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001, 2020; Stöckl 2011: 47), the synthetic compilation of the characteristics distinguished by Hennecke (2012: 372) is referred to here.⁸ Based on this, multimodal texts have the following characteristics:

- Verbal, non-verbal and other signs complement or determine each other mutually.
- Each semiotic system is specifically and equally involved in constituting the meaning of the text.
- The verbal and non-verbal parts of the text are often only understandable in the context of the overall text.
- Meaning is created as part of a dynamic process of attribution and reconstruction by the interacting parties who draw on their specific cultural semiotic and general knowledge in a concrete, complex communicative situation.

The question of which semiotic modalities exist and how they can be distinguished from one another cannot be answered easily (Stöckl 2016: 6). In his characterization of semiotic modalities, Stöckl (2016: 6) emphasizes that the respective sensory modality and perceptual channel is relevant for a semiotic modality, whereby signs are processed. At the same time, this classification is not sufficiently selective. Stöckl (2016: 6) argues:

⁶ For multimodality in French advertisements across different industries, see the comprehensive study by Rentel (2005).

⁷ <https://www.inpi.fr/>.

⁸ The interactions between different semiotic modalities can be examined from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Klug and Stöckl (2015) provide an overview of the disciplines and methods of multimodality research (verbal-visual semiotics; text and discourse linguistics; approaches to multimodal individual phenomena such as multimodal metaphor analysis and typography; visual-verbal rhetoric; empirical production/reception research and cultural comparison). For multimodal text and discourse linguistics in the sense of a culture-oriented linguistic discipline, see Klug (2016), for verbal-visual semiotics, see Nöth (2016). Verbal-visual semiotics encompasses various schools of thought. Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco were key representatives of visual semiotics based on the model of verbal semiotics, and both also focused on advertising messages. The work of Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020 [1996]) is situated within the tradition of British-Australian socio-semiotics, whose particular concern is to examine the verbal in its multimedia contexts (Nöth 2016: 192).

So ist gesprochene Sprache auditiv, geschriebene hingegen visuell – soll man Sprache deshalb als zwei Modalitäten (Rede und Schrift) auffassen, obwohl ihnen beiden die gleiche Lexik und Grammatik zugrunde liegt? Oder: Bild und Schrift sind klar getrennte Modalitäten, rangieren aber beide als visuelle Zeichentypen. [‘For example, spoken language is auditory, whereas written language is visual – should language therefore be understood as two modalities (speech and writing), although they are both based on the same lexis and grammar? Or: image and writing are clearly separate modalities, but both are classified as visual sign types.’].

In this sense, the term *semiotic modality* must be regarded as a broader concept that includes aspects of semiotic coding and mediality. Stöckl (2016: 7) therefore proposes a multidimensional model that distinguishes the following aspects: sensual perceptibility of signs (psychological), structured coding of signs (semiotic) and technical realization of signs (medial). In semiotic terms, the key aspect in the classification of semiotic modalities appears to be how signs are affiliated to a code. This is a culturally established and conventionalized inventory of signs that is internally structured and provides rules for the assignment of form and content of the signs as well as for their combinability. Social semiotics emphasizes that semiotic modalities each have specific semiotic resources (e.g. language: system of verb tenses, types of sentences, speech acts vs. music: melody, harmony, rhythm, dynamics; Stöckl 2016: 8). The term *social semiotics* was introduced to linguistics by Halliday (1978). In contrast to structuralist semiotics, social semiotic theories stress the dynamic process and action character of sign production and interpretation. In this regard Halliday (1978: 34) states: “When we talk about ‘uses of language’, we are concerned with the meaning potential that is associated with particular situation types; and we are likely to be especially interested in those which are of some social and cultural significance [...]” Halliday’s approaches were continued by Kress and Hodge (1988), who also opened up the perspective to semiotic resources other than language. According to Bezemer and Jewitt:

The issue of mode and multiple modes became, perhaps inevitably, foregrounded in the 1990s. With the focus now on the co-operation of modes rather than the study of modes in isolation the term ‘multimodality’ became a key term. It provided an alternative to terms such as ‘verbal’ and ‘non-verbal’, which position the verbal as the unmarked, dominant resource for making meaning, and the non-verbal as the marked, auxiliary resource. (Bezemer and Jewitt 2009: 2)

Key semiotic modalities can be realized in multiple ways through different media. For example, language can be spoken or written, images can be photographed or painted, and music can be played or notated. The structure and use of semiotic modalities are significantly influenced by the medium, and the perception and coding of signs are only made available through media. They also leave traces in the types of texts and communicative forms of expression (Stöckl 2016: 8). In summary, Stöckl describes the multidimensional nature of the concept of *semiotic modality* as follows:

Jede Zeichenmodalität ist an einen Kanal der Sinneswahrnehmung gebunden. Sie muss materiell-medial realisiert werden und in einer raumzeitlichen und sozialen Situation verwendet werden. Semiotische Modalitäten verfügen über eine interne Strukturierung, die Bedeutungen, Kombinationsmöglichkeiten und Gebrauchsfunktionen ihrer Zeicheninventare regelt. [‘Semiotic modalities are tied to a channel of sensory perception. They must be realized materially and medially and are used in a spatial-temporal and social situation. Semiotic modalities have an internal structure that defines meanings, possible combinations and functions of use of their sign inventories.’] (Stöckl 2016: 9)

According to Stöckl (2016: 6), *language, image, music* and *sound* are the basic modalities in the everyday usage of signs. He argues that a simple and coherent typology of multimodal texts can be established by combining the basic modalities, which can be used productively for the semiotic analysis of advertising texts: print text, audio text, audiovisual text.⁹ Each of these three types has its own semiotic resources (Stöckl 2012: 248):

- print texts
- language (writing)

⁹ As Stöckl (2016: 9–18) shows, these sign modalities can be compared in terms of different semiotic parameters (e.g. degree of semiotization, semiotic complexions, reference making, communication functions) and arranged according to the dimensions of syntax (form), semantics (content) and pragmatics (function).

- image
- typography/text graphics
- audio texts
 - language (speech)
 - music
 - noise
- audiovisual texts
 - language (speech and writing)
 - image (static and dynamic)
 - sound (music and noise)
 - typography

While print texts function according to a spatial logic, audio and audiovisual texts follow a temporal logic. Stöckl sees one of the primary tasks of semiotic advertising text analysis in:

das vom Rezipienten zeitlich-sequenziell bzw. räumlich-ganzheitlich wahrgenommene Zeichenkonglomerat zu entflechten, um dem Analytiker eine möglichst präzise Vorstellung davon zu geben, welche Zeichen in welchen Kombinationen vorliegen und welche Botschaften daraus plausibel rekonstruiert werden können. (Stöckl 2012: 248)

[‘disentangling the conglomeration of signs perceived by the recipient in a temporal sequential or spatial holistic way in order to give the analyst as precise an idea as possible of which signs are present in which combinations and which messages can be plausibly reconstructed from them.’]

In the field of advertising print texts, a wide range of design options for linking language and images can be used. Nevertheless, Stöckl (2009: 9) adds: “At the same time I believe that underneath the diversity on the surface there are more or less conventionalized patterns of language-image-links”. He therefore suggests a system of 13 different types, according to which the individual codes are linked and produce intermodally coherent meaning. For ease of orientation the 13 types are classified into five groups: 1. Processes of Vision (disappoint visual stereotypes; offer visual exploratory terrain; toy with perception; ornament); 2. Semantic Management (make concepts available; suggest evidence/proof; mix knowledge frames/scripts; construct visual models); 3. Semantic Games (allude to knowledge; symbolize; mystify and euphemize); 4. Writing as an Image (focus pictorial properties of writing); 5. Transgression of Norms (provoke and shock). For the function *Semantic Games (symbolize)* we cite the case of a billboard advertising warm cheese dishes of the brand *Président* as a brief example.¹⁰ The picture shows a young woman with a dark blue turtleneck sweater, red glasses and white pearl earrings. The ad text reads *Le chef c’est moi, le fromage c’est Président*. [‘I’m the chef, the cheese is President.’]. According to the agency, this firstly expresses the fact that each person has individual preferences for the preparation of this kind of dishes. However, on a second level, through lexical substitution the guiding principle of absolutism *L’État, c’est moi* [‘I am the state’] is evoked. The latter is attributed to Louis XIV, King of France and Navarre, who is said to have uttered it before parliament on April 13, 1655. The reference to France is created by the interplay between the conventionalized national colors in the clothing and the echo of the historical quote.¹¹

2.2 Typography as a semiotic resource

2.2.1 Definition and research areas of linguistic typography

Since the beginning of the new millennium, an increasing interest in the visuality of writing can be observed in numerous disciplines, e.g. in text and media linguistics as well as in advertising language research

¹⁰ <https://www.lacremefrench.com/project/agence-conseil-communication-publicite-president/>.

¹¹ I also refer here to Forceville’s pioneering work on pictorial metaphors (1996) based on printed advertisements in papers and magazines and billboards.

(Spitzmüller 2016: 99).¹² The term *typography* (from the Greek τύπος ‘letter, sign’ and γράφειν ‘to scratch, to write’) can be clearly identified morphologically and etymologically, but has different readings. There is consensus that typography should not be limited to the design of the written characters (Stöckl 2004: 12). In this regard, Van Leeuwen (2006: 144) states: “Typography [...] is no longer just about letter forms. It is multimodal, integrated with other semiotic means of expression such as colour, texture, three-dimensionality, and movement.”

According to Spitzmüller (2016: 103), contemporary research in linguistic typography, which remains a desideratum in the sense of a comprehensive research program, has three main areas of focus: 1) the stylistics of the form of a text; 2) its organizational and structural function; 3) fundamental approaches that seek to locate the text form within communication theory.

First, the stylistic potential of a text form was recognized early on by linguistic stylistics as a discipline that deals with formal effects of communicative acts. In the 1980s, German linguistics advocated the establishment of the new sub-discipline of graphostylistics (following the established phonostylistics). Attempts to explain typographic design in terms of style and function, however, are based exclusively on texts with an expressive and very salient text form, such as advertising texts (so-called *expressive typography bias*, Spitzmüller 2016: 115). A broader perspective has emerged under the influence of the concept of multimodality developed in social semiotics, as well as a general sharpening of the linguistic view of the materiality and locality of communication (Spitzmüller 2016: 104–105).

The second area of focus concerns how texts are structured by typographical means and how this can affect their reception. In the field of research on the localization within communication theory, the fundamental question is to what extent the form of the text can be said to have its own functionality (Spitzmüller 2016: 108). Whether writing and typography are autonomous modalities is a question that has been answered differently (Stöckl 2008: 15–16). Stöckl (2004: 16) refers to typography as a “periphere Modalität” [‘periphere modality’] because, on the one hand, it is dependent on the semiotic modality of language, but on the other hand, it represents an independent system of expression. To illustrate the relationship between *language* and *typography*, Stöckl (2004: 13) draws on an analogy between the two forms of language realization – speaking and writing. Metaphorically, typography is then referred to as the prosody or intonation of writing. Typographical and prosodic elements have the following similarities: both are never neutral or meaningless. They also constitute aspects of the materiality of language that are inextricably linked to the functioning of the language system. Furthermore, both are characterized by a holistic formal character in their reception.

In the third field of research, attention is increasingly being paid not only to the systemic localization of typography, but also, and more recently, to how those involved in communication perceive, evaluate and attempt to use the text form communicatively (Spitzmüller 2016: 108). Here, a shift in focus towards processes of reception and attribution can be observed (Spitzmüller 2016: 109).

In conclusion, Spitzmüller emphasizes the extent to which different research approaches and perspectives must be intertwined in order to achieve interdisciplinary and holistic linguistic typography research:

[Sie] haben ihre Grenzen dort, wo die soziale Interaktion beginnt. Sie können zumeist nur eine Lesart bieten, nämlich die der Analysierenden selbst [...] Sie stellen zumeist die Produzentenperspektive in den Vordergrund, was einige Konsequenzen hat, die man bedenken muss (der Prozess der Rezeption und interaktiven Kontextualisierung wird marginalisiert [...]). [...] Linguistische Typographieforschung ist daher idealerweise ein Unternehmen mit zumindest drei Säulen: (1.) Produkt- und Produktionsanalyse, (2.) Rezeptionsanalyse und (3.) metapragmatische (Diskurs-)Analyse [...]. Wenn diese drei Zugänge zur Textgestaltung und Textgestalt kombiniert werden [...], dann kann die Linguistik zur interdisziplinären Typographieforschung Fundiertes beitragen und ihrerseits von der Beschäftigung mit ‘Sprache als Schriftbild’ erheblich profitieren.

[‘[They] reach their limits where social interaction begins. They usually offer only one interpretation, that of the analysts themselves [...] They usually emphasize the producer’s perspective, which has consequences that must be considered (the process of reception and interactive contextualization is marginalized [...]). [...] Linguistic typography research therefore ideally involves at least three pillars: (1) product and production analysis, (2) reception analysis, and (3) metapragmatic (discourse) analysis [...]. If these three aspects of text design and text form are combined [...], then linguistics can make a significant contribution to interdisciplinary typography research and, in turn, benefit considerably from the study of ‘language as typographical image.’] (Spitzmüller 2016: 115)

¹² For reasons of the enduring marginalization of writing and its graphic design properties, see Stöckl (2004: 8–10).

2.2.2 Typographic structures

In linguistic terms, typography is the “body of the text” (Stöckl 2004: 15), in the sense that writing, layout and graphical material are the prerequisites for a written text. It can also be seen as the “designable shell” of the text, which, among other things, depends on the intention of the text producer (Stöckl 2004: 15). For the wide range of typographic resources, Stöckl (2004: 22–23) proposes a typology with four categories, to which specific design dimensions are assigned: microtypography, mesotypography, macrotypography and paratypography. Microtypography includes the font design and the typographic features (including color). Mesotypography refers to the layout of the writing on the page and the use of writing in the text. Macrotypography refers to the organization of text and text parts for structuring, distributing information and accentuation. Finally, paratypography includes the materiality of the document design, e.g. the paper quality.

In advertising, typographic structures are primarily associated with three principles of effect (Stöckl 2008: 16–17). First of all, individual fonts can convey certain connotations by being used in a different context from the one in which they are frequently used. For example, English handwriting conveys elegance. In addition to the connotation of a font’s origin, certain typographic forms can also be interpreted metaphorically, by associating graphic properties of characters with abstract concepts based on common sense and practical everyday experience, e.g. thickness and size with weight and therefore significance. A second principle of typographic effect is that typography is used to depict and then semiotically function like an image, for example, when the *A* in *France* is shown in the shape of the Eiffel Tower.¹³ The third way in which typography can be used is to create meaning by structuring the text visually and highlighting certain information. There is a wide range of typographic tools (color, font, size) that can be used for structuring and accentuation. Stöckl (2008: 17) notes that additional structuring aids such as bullet points, heading hierarchies or footnotes are rather atypical for advertising. However, concerning product packagings which are at the center of this article, the asterisk plays an important role, especially when it comes to indicating the ingredients of products (cf. Section 4).

Advertising is subject to the rule that it must attract attention and be communicatively effective. Consequently, in contrast to other types of text, there is a fundamentally unrestricted freedom in dealing with typography (Stöckl 2008: 14). Nevertheless, Stöckl (2008: 33) demands that it must be possible “über die allgemeingültige und sehr generelle Funktionalität von Typografie hinaus, die Ziele werblichen typografischen Gestaltens zu fassen” [‘to grasp the goals of advertising typographic design beyond the universal and very general functionality of typography’]. The inventory of typographic forms in advertising requires that it is recorded in which part of the advertising text they are used. For example, the pictorial quality of typography usually increases in slogans and logos that contain brand or product names (Stöckl 2008: 19).

3 Indication of origin in advertising

In advertising, there are many different ways of indicating geographical origin. In this context we distinguish between branding in the narrow sense and accompanying labels and certification marks, which are explained in the following sections.¹⁴

3.1 Branding elements in the narrow sense

The elements of branding that distinguish a brand from competing brands include the brand name, the trademark/brand image, and the packaging/product design (Langner 2003: 5). These three elements can also be used to

¹³ <https://data.inpi.fr/marques/FR3422733?q=france#FR3422733>.

¹⁴ The slogan is a central element in advertising communication. The extent to which this textual element is used to establish a link to origin would have to be investigated in a separate study. For example, the brand *La Vache qui rit* advertised for a long time with the following slogan: *100 % des Français ont mangé, mangent ou mangeront de la Vache qui rit* [‘100 % of French people have eaten, are eating or will eat *The Laughing Cow*’].

emphasize the origin of a product. A name can make use of regional language elements, toponyms and deictics to indicate locality, as in the names *Confibreizh* (Brittany), *Douce France*, *Cochon d'Aquitaine*, *Saveurs d'ici* (Zilg 2013: 398). Brand logos, which Danesi (2019: 187) defines as “pictorial counterparts of brand names”, are of particular importance. A distinction can be made between text logos and image logos, which can be further subdivided into concrete and abstract logos. Concrete logos can take on different forms and may be related to the brand name, the product category, or the positioning of the brand (Esch 2018: 328–330; Forceville 2020: 142). In general, logos are required to be consistent and unchanging. This, however, needs to be reconciled with potential efforts to modernize. As Forceville (2020: 142) states: “No element in the logo (form, colors, internal structure of elements) allows, at a given moment in time, for variation. That being said, it turns out that the visual design of logos requires updating every now and then because the old design is considered to have become somehow outdated.”

Taking the French biscuit brand *St Michel* as an example, it becomes clear to what extent modernization efforts can affect a logo's design. The company's website states:

Le logo St Michel a évolué depuis sa création, mais la poule, icône incontestée de la marque a toujours été présente. Elle représente les bons ingrédients de la campagne utilisés par St Michel. Aujourd'hui [depuis 2009] elle sort du logo et est tournée vers le futur pour illustrer toute sa modernité.

[‘The St Michel logo has evolved since its creation, but the hen, the brand's undisputed icon, has always been present. It represents the good ingredients from the countryside used by St Michel. Now [since 2009] it's out of the logo and looking to the future to illustrate its modernity.’]¹⁵

The aforementioned emphasis on the company's French origin is also reflected in the design of the logo. In 2019, the French tricolor was integrated into the logo. *St Michel's* French origin is also mentioned in the company's mission statement on its website:

En France, la gourmandise est un trait de caractère commun, que l'on partage et qui rend fiers les français. La gourmandise à la française, c'est une gourmandise qui va de soi, une belle valeur qu'on cultive et qu'on transmet. Car en France on est gourmand, mais pas n'importe comment ! [...] Chez St Michel, nous sommes des gourmands ayant à cœur de partager le savoir-bien-faire à la française et c'est ÇA la raison du bon.

[‘In France, gourmandise is a shared trait that makes the French proud. French-style gourmandise is something we take for granted, a fine value we cultivate and pass on. Because in France we're gourmand, but not just any old way! [...] At St Michel's, we're gourmands with a passion for sharing French savoir-faire, and THAT's what good food is all about.’]¹⁶

The third of the central branding elements according to Langner (2003) is product packaging. It is becoming increasingly important, but has long been ignored in linguistic research. In an early study, Hardt-Mautner classified it accordingly as an “exotic-looking text type” (1992: 98). Product packaging can also be analyzed using the concept of the *communication form*, which comes from German media linguistics and is used to categorize all medial-material, temporal-spatial and situational aspects of communication (Stöckl 2016: 8). In this context, Holly (2011: 155) speaks of “medial, historisch und kulturell verankerten kommunikativen Dispositive[n], die sich auf der Basis verfügbarer technischer Möglichkeiten und sozialer Bedürfnisse allmählich herausbilden und weiterentwickeln.” [‘medially, historically and culturally anchored communicative dispositives, which gradually emerge and evolve on the basis of available technological possibilities and social needs.’]

Insofar as the packaging is part of the product and a vehicle for its consumption and, as a semiotic artifact, simultaneously has several spatially separated text surfaces, it is both an object and an advertising medium. In addition to its utility, it is expected to have an aesthetic and communicative value (Stöckl 2012: 258–259). Wiezorek (2004: 1235) describes how packaging is situated between branding elements and advertising media as follows:

¹⁵ <https://www.stmichel.com/int/fr/notre-histoire>.

¹⁶ It should be noted that the lexeme *gourmandise* highlighted in the quote is itself linked to the indication of origin on the product packaging and used in a word play: *biscuits français d'origine gourmande* [‘French biscuits of gourmand origine’]. See Umborg (2020) for a study on the multimodal use of phrasemes in advertising.

Für viele Marketingmanager steht die Verpackung nicht im Fokus der Betrachtung. Dies wäre vermutlich aber anders, wenn das Bewusstsein darüber vorhanden wäre, dass jede Verpackung ein zentraler *Werbeträger* ist, da sie vom Kaufakt, über die Verwendung des Produktes bis schließlich zur Entsorgung ständig präsent ist. Ihre Funktion ähnelt somit der eines Werbespots für die Marke.

[‘For many marketing managers, packaging is not the focus of attention. However, this would probably be different if they were aware that packaging is a central *advertising medium*, as it is constantly present from the act of purchase, through the use of the product to its disposal. Its function is therefore similar to that of an advertising spot for the brand.’]

The majority of product packaging, though not all (cf. Sections 4.2 and 4.4), consist of three-dimensional containers, giving package designers up to six different faces on which to inscribe text and images. Top and bottom are typically determined by the position of the opening, whereas front and back are determined by inscription (text and images) (Sebba 2023: 233). One key feature is that product packages cannot be read sequentially, as there is no defined start or end point (Sebba 2023: 236). With regard to the distribution of information, Van Leeuwen states:

On the back of packages [...], we often find instructions for use, and/or more or less detailed descriptions or specifications of the content of the packages, or lists of ingredients. [...] the back is [...] more functional than the front, [...] concerned with the use rather than the identity of the object. [...] the sides may function as subsidiaries to either face or support, either meaning or function, either identity or operability [...]. (Van Leeuwen 2005: 211–212)

Finally, with regard to branding, it should be mentioned which processes of change it is currently subject to. Heilbrunn (2015: 143) writes: “the perspective on branding has [...] developed, from an approach that considers it simply as a sign for differentiation and identification purposes, into a holistic concept in which the brand is considered a narrative tool whose function is to produce and transmit meaning.”

3.2 Labels and certification marks

In advertising, the origin of a product can be indicated not only by standard branding elements but also by the use of labels or certification marks. For example, labels such as *Fabriqué en France*, *Produit en France* or *Made in France* can be used on product packaging or in advertisements. Other examples are *Origine France Garantie* and *Agri-Éthique*. In their design, they function like brand logos.¹⁷ As far as the legal framework is concerned, the labels *Fabriqué en France*, *Produit en France* or *Made in France* are subject to EU-wide provisions regarding non-preferential origin.¹⁸ In addition, there are other industry-specific or general options for highlighting a product’s origin. These initiatives are non-mandatory and, in most cases, they are subject to compliance with certain specifications. For example, the certification label *Origine France Garantie* serves to certify that the place where the product acquires its essential characteristics is located in France and that at least 50 % of the purchase price of the product is earned in France. Since 1 April 2020, in France the following European rule has been in effect for the food sector: If the origin of a food product is indicated on the label and this origin differs from the origin of the primary ingredient, the origin of the ingredient in question must be indicated.¹⁹

¹⁷ <https://www.originefrancegarantie.fr/>; <https://www.agriethique.fr/>.

¹⁸ <https://www.economie.gouv.fr/particuliers/produit-made-in-france>; https://taxation-customs.ec.europa.eu/customs-4/international-affairs/origin-goods/non-preferential-origin_fr.

¹⁹ The primary ingredient is defined as the ingredient that makes up 50 % or more of the food product, or the ingredient(s) that the consumer usually associates with the name of that food. <https://www.economie.gouv.fr/particuliers/reglementation-origine-geographique-produits-alimentaires>.

4 A multimodal analysis of French origin indicators on food packaging

In the following, I present four examples of product packaging to illustrate the variety of ways in which verbal and visual code, which, according to Hennecke (2012: 372), together contribute to the constitution of meaning, are intertwined. The examples are taken from the data collection presented in the introduction. From a formal point of view, the “classic” six-sided product packaging should be taken into account, as should another format such as the two-sided bag. Firstly, the components of the verbal, typographical and pictorial code that refer to French origin are analyzed for the individual packaging to determine which linguistic, typographical and pictorial elements are used to communicate it. Secondly, it will be shown to what extent the French origin is emphasized through pictorial and typographical elements, which then has to be relativized by the linguistic code. The important question of how representative the packaging discussed here is of the French food market and how it would fit into a more comprehensive typology could only be answered on the basis of a larger database.

As for visual expression of origin, the French tricolor is of particular importance (cf. the study by the *Fédération Indépendante du Made in France* (FIMIF 2021) in which more than a quarter of respondents classified the French flag as an indication of French origin). Dinnie explains the reasons for this, including the inherent problems:

[...] flags [...] are probably the most potent visual expression of national identity. Their recognition levels result in designs of a country's flag being used as a visual shorthand by products that wish to highlight their country of origin (COO). One problem that can arise from this is that any brand from a given country is free to use a design of the flag in its packaging or other forms of marketing communications, and this makes it difficult if not impossible for nations to ensure that only high-quality products and brands use the flag in their branding. (Dinnie 2022: 113–114)

In addition to the actual flag, the national colors are used in a multifaceted way and in a variety of shapes on product packaging.²⁰ This interacts with the verbal code in such a way that a gradual degree of specificity with regard to geographical origin is obtained.

4.1 Example 1: *Feuilletée* by *Croustipate*

The first example is a puff pastry (French: *feuilletée*) manufactured by *Croustipate*. The packaging features three differently designed long sides. The product has two certifications, *Origine France Garantie* and *Agri-Éthique*, each of which is displayed on the product with its own logo.

On the first long side (cf. Figure 1), the French origin is indicated by a national flag, which is placed under the *Croustipate* brand mark, but also by the clothing of a baker whose apron string is featuring the national colors.²¹



Figure 1: First long side of the product packaging of the brand *Croustipate*.

²⁰ The use of national colors can even have a playful element, as is seen on the product packaging of the *Les récoltes bio* organic line from the French producer of baby food *Blédina*. The brand mark features a chicken with an egg in it, colored in blue, white and red. The tricolor is often combined with the hexagon, which resembles the shape of France. On the packaging of *Jardin Bio étic* potato chips, which is marked with the certification label *Origine France Garantie*, a tricolor hexagon is personified in a ludic manner and given a face and a wink.

²¹ In this regard we refer to the billboard advertising for the *Le Président* brand presented in chapter 2 with a young woman dressed in the national colors.

The national reference is also established typographically by using a white font (*feuilletée française; beurre et farine*) on a blue and red background. On the verbal level, the choronym *France* and the derived adjective *français* occur, together with the adjective *locale*, which indicates the origin of the product.

- *pétrie en France* [‘kneaded in France’]
- *feuilletée française* [‘French puff pastry’]
- *farine locale et équitable* [‘local and fair-trade flour’]

On the second long side of the packaging (cf. Figure 2 and details in Figure 3), the French origin is visually expressed by two hearts in the French tricolor, the baker’s tricolor apron straps, and the French hexagon. The verbal level comprises the choronym *France*, the deonymous adjective *français*, the adjective *locale* to indicate origin, and possessive determiners:

- *du bon beurre origine France* [‘good butter from France’]
- *une recette pétrie en France (dans le Jura) avec amour!* [‘a recipe kneaded with love in France (in the Jura)!’]
- *Croustipate soutient les agriculteurs français en leur garantissant une juste rémunération.* [‘Croustipate supports French farmers by guaranteeing them fair remuneration.’]
- *100 % blé français.* [‘100 % French wheat.’]
- *tous nos sites de production français sont alimentés en électricité verte.* [‘all our French production sites are supplied with green electricity.’]
- *de la farine de blé équitable issue de notre filière locale [...].* [‘fair trade wheat flour from our local industry [...].’]

On the third long side of the packaging (cf. Figure 4), there is a list of the ingredients, also emphasizing the French origin:

- *Farine de blé française* (54 %), eau, beurre concentré origine France (19 %) [...]* [‘French wheat flour* (54 %), water, concentrated butter from France (19 %)’]
- **Ingrédient issu du commerce équitable français Agri-Éthique.* [‘French Agri-Éthique fair trade ingredient.’]

The top and bottom sides (cf. Figure 5) contain the product description *feuilletée* with the addition of the adjective *française*, indicating its origin, in white letters on a blue and red background.



Figure 2: Second long side of the product packaging of the brand *Croustipate*.



Figure 3: Elements on the second long side of the product packaging of the brand *Croustipate* in detail.



Figure 4: Third long side of the product packaging of the brand *Croustipate*.



Figure 5: Top and bottom sides of the product packaging of the brand *Croustipate*.

4.2 Example 2: *L'Authentique Petit Ourson Guimauve*

The second example is that of the chocolate candy *L'Authentique Petit Ourson Guimauve*, manufactured by *Cémoi* company. The packaging is designed consistently to highlight the origin of the product (cf. Figure 6 and details in Figure 7).²² At the visual level, the upper and lower edges of the bag are marked by a blue, white and red sealing. The upper right quadrant contains an emblem in which a bear, an image of the product itself, is holding a national flag. Additionally, there is a text block in blue and white typography, with a French tricolor on the left side. Halfway down the packaging, a striped tricolor band can be seen, which is decorated with a milk bottle with a tricolored bow. In the lower middle section of the packaging, a rooster in the French tricolor is placed, the national symbol of France. The verbal level takes the same direction. The illustrated bear is given a French origin by use of the first person singular: *Je suis créé et fabriqué en France*. ['I'm designed and made in France.'] The adjective *français*, which refers to the milk contained in the product, is emphasized by the percentage (100%). Finally, the Gallic rooster indicates the French origin again, stressed by the caption: *fabriqué en France*. On the back (cf.



Figure 6: Front of the *L'Authentique Petit Ourson Guimauve* packaging.

²² The *Cémoi* company logo is placed in the center of the upper part of the packaging. Since the French tricolor is part of the brand mark, it is not considered a design element of the packaging as such.



Figure 7: Elements of the front of the *L'Authentique Petit Ourson Guimauve* packaging in detail.

Figure 8), selected visual and verbal elements from the front of the package are repeated in the upper right quadrant. On the visual level, this is the milk bottle with a tricolored bow combined with the French flag, as well as the typographic text block in blue and white, with a tricolor on the left side. The verbal level is more complex. In an imaginary dialog between the bear, as an image of the product, and the consumer, to whom it is addressed directly, a monocausal connection between the product's French origin and its quality is made: *Voici le secret de ma gourmandise ... Le saviez-vous? Je suis créé et fabriqué en France!* ['Here's the secret of my deliciousness ... Did you know? I'm designed and made in France!'].

4.3 Example 3: *Nuggets de poulet Crousti* by Père Dodu

In addition to examples as the two discussed above, which are very dense and, above all, congruent in terms of semiotics, two examples are now considered in which verbal and pictorial code point less explicitly in the same direction.

The chicken-based product *nuggets de poulet* is part of the *Crousti* product line of the brand *Père Dodu*. The company writes about the history of the brand: "Père Dodu est né en 1965, après qu'un volailler breton ait eu l'idée



Figure 8: Elements on the back of the *L'Authentique Petit Ourson Guimauve* packaging in detail.

de lancer des rôtis de dindonneau aux formes arrondies, formes qui lui ont inspiré le nom de ‘Père Dodu.’” [‘Père Dodu was born in 1965, after a Breton poultry farmer had the idea of launching turkey [fr. *dindonneau*] roasts with rounded shapes, shapes which inspired the name ‘Père Dodu.’].²³ Its French origin is pictorially expressed on the front and back of the packaging, in particular by the tricolor flag, which is placed prominently at the bottom center. The brand logo *Père Dodu s’engage pour le bon*. [‘Père Dodu is committed to doing good.’] is typographically presented in the French colors blue, white and red. At the verbal level, the indication *Préparé en France* [‘prepared in France’] is intended to emphasize the French origin of the product (Figure 9).

The logo is repeated (with minimal differences) on one of the two narrow sides of the packaging (cf. Figure 10), this time forming a unit with a text block in white lettering on a blue background. The French origin is expressed here in a locative adverbial phrase including a choronym and a possessive determiner: *Dans nos ateliers en France, Père Dodu sélectionne, prépare des viandes de qualité, et crée de délicieuses recettes en limitant les additifs [...]*. [‘In our factories in France, Père Dodu selects and prepares quality meats, and creates delicious recipes while limiting additives [...]].

The ingredients of the product are listed on the opposite narrow side. Here it becomes clear that in fact only the preparation of the product is done in France. The processed meat does not come exclusively from France, but



Figure 9: Front of the *Père Dodu* packaging.

²³ <https://www.peredodu.fr/notre-histoire/>.

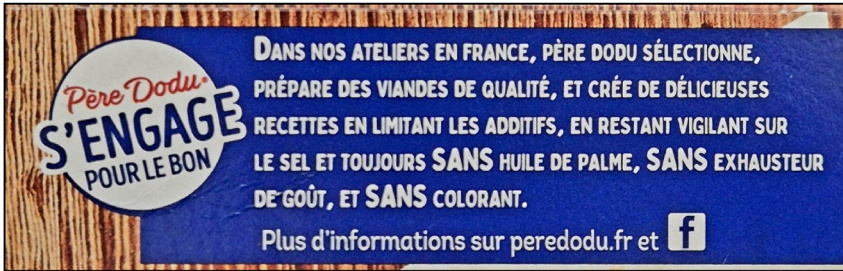


Figure 10: Side of the *Père Dodu* packaging in detail.

from other European Union countries: *Préparé en France à partir de viande de poulet sélectionné en UE*. [‘Prepared in France from chicken meat selected in the EU.’].

4.4 Example 4: *Girasoli Tomate Mozzarella* by *Lustucru*

As we have just seen, there may be a contradiction between a pictorial code that clearly conveys a French origin and a linguistic code that at least relativizes this. For this constellation we now come to a second example, the pasta dish *Girasoli Tomate Mozzarella* by the brand *Lustucru* (Figure 11). The main ingredients of the product are illustrated on the front of the packaging: tomatoes, mozzarella, basil. The French flag is placed in a central position along with the text *Made in France!* The exclamation mark serves to emphasize this. At the bottom of the packaging, however, there is an asterisk indicating that these three central ingredients do not come from France, but from other EU countries: *Fabriqué en France. Tomates origine UE, Mozzarella origine UE, Basilic origine UE* [‘Made in France. Tomatoes from EU, Mozzarella from EU, Basil from EU’].²⁴ The back of the packaging (Figure 12) features a hexagon with a blue heart. However, the formulation *des ingrédients sélectionnés et cuisinés en France* [‘ingredients selected and cooked in France’] joins the ones like *Designed in France*, *Printed in France*, *Packaged in France*, which are often considered to guarantee a French origin and are therefore potentially misleading (cf. the study of the *Fédération Indépendante du Made in France* (2021) presented in the introduction).



Figure 11: Front of the *Lustucru* packaging.

²⁴ According to Krämer (2003: 160), the footnote as a visual element opens up the possibility of complex writing, metaphorically speaking: of a polyphony in the text. This is rarely found in spoken language.

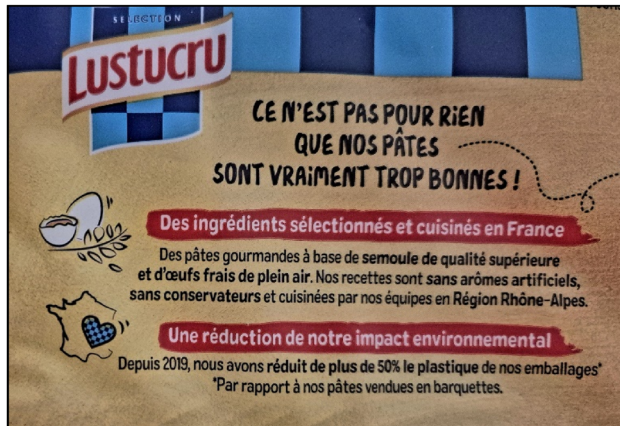


Figure 12: Back of the *Lustucru* packaging in detail.

- *Des ingrédients sélectionnés et cuisinés en France.* [‘Ingredients selected and cooked in France.’] *Nos recettes sont sans arômes artificiels, sans conservateurs et cuisinées par nos équipes en Région Rhône-Alpes.* [‘Our recipes contain no artificial flavorings, no preservatives and are cooked by our teams in the Rhône-Alpes region.’]

5 Closing remarks

According to Stöckl (2012: 245), few communicative practices have come to dominate mass media and public space, the so-called center of the semiosphere, as much as advertising has, with its functional, culturally legible communicative acts that are deliberately designed as signs. As complex units of communication, advertising messages are characterized in a particular way by the interweaving of different semiotic systems. In advertising, the indication of origin plays an increasing role and can be articulated via the brand name, the trademark/brand image and the packaging/product design as well as via accompanying labels and certification marks. In the present article we focused on product packaging. On the verbal level, the French origin is mainly conveyed by use of the choronym *France* (and the deonymous adjective *français*), as well as by possessive determiners and the adjective *local*. For visual expression of origin, the French tricolor is of particular importance. The tricolor is used as a decorative element (e.g. in clothing) and also in microtypographic design. With regard to typography it should be noted that only those aspects that are actually related to the indication of origin were taken into account. In this context, the typographic feature of color plays a special role. Moreover, typefaces can create associations in many different ways. However, in order to arrive at findings that are also intersubjectively comprehensible beyond the individual assessment, a separate investigation is necessary. In principle, it could be observed that in some cases the verbal, typographical and pictorial codes are congruent in terms of semiotics, whereas in others the different codes point less explicitly in the same direction.

In order to be able to examine the relationship between language and images with regard to indications of origin empirically and systematically and thus develop a coherent model (Stöckl 2011: 66), it is first necessary to build a comprehensive corpus. What is important in a second step is that, in the sense of a linguistics that aims to contribute to societal issues, observations such as those presented here should go beyond mere description and touch on the field of language or semiotic criticism. Language criticism is understood as a special practice of metalinguistic reflection. As Felder et al. (2017: 13) explain, it is considered an umbrella term that “covers a continuum ranging from neutral to decidedly evaluative metalinguistic utterances reflecting about language use and language norms.” An important function of language criticism is to improve the communication skills of the members of a language community, which benefits society as a whole. Language criticism essentially has an educational function, in the sense that it should sensitize people and enable them, for example, to expose forms of

manipulative or ideology-based communication. It also has an integrative function. Ensuring comprehensibility increases social participation, which is a cornerstone of democratic societies. In relation to the topic dealt with here, the aim is to ensure that the indication of origin can be decoded properly. While the use of the label *Fabriqué en France* [‘Made in France’] is regulated by law, a multitude of other verbal and pictorial techniques are used in order to convey or merely suggest French origin. On the one hand, this undermines the ecosystem of *Made in France* (FIMIF 2021: 4, 8), on the other hand, it leads to confusion and skepticism among consumers regarding the actual French origin of a product (FIMIF 2021: 37). And this is contrary to transparent and comprehensible consumer information as called for in the *Sustainable Development Goals*.

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