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Déjà-vu? Verbal-visual collocations on the covers of British, German and Polish weekly magazines as a way of perpetuating and amplifying conflict

Déjà-vu? Kolokacje werbalno-wizualne na okładkach brytyjskich, niemieckich i polskich tygodników jako sposób podtrzymywania i intensyfikowania konfliktu

Abstract

The article presents the results of a multimodal analysis of the covers of British, German, and Polish opinion weeklies, aiming to identify language-image configurations that we term verbal-visual collocations. In our view, verbal-visual collocations give rise to so-called *visiotypes*, which we define as ubiquitous, one-sided, highly simplifying, standardised visual routines for perceiving reality. These are processed automatically and reflexively, often without the support of verbal cues. They significantly influence and shape the awareness of specific discourse communities. As media-staged, connotation-rich, and highly symbolic images present in the public sphere, visiotypes reflect universal patterns of thought, similar to stereotypes, and are increasingly employed on magazine covers. Since visiotypes represent specific condensed and established combinations of image and text, we utilize a modified version of the model by Stöckl (2011, 2016) and Stöckl and Pflaeging (2022) for their multimodal analysis. Keeping pace with current times, we focus on key figures in international politics: Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin. The analysis addresses questions such as which stereotypical representations and images of these politicians are (re)produced or evoked on the verbal and visual levels and what relationships between verbal and visual codes (possibly metaphorically reinforced) are employed to present the editorial stance on the cover and/or shape and reflect readers' opinions. Furthermore, one of the goals of this analysis is to examine whether the category of verbal-visual collocation appears adequate and scientifically justified.

Niniejszy artykuł prezentuje wyniki multimodalnej analizy okładek brytyjskich, niemieckich i polskich tygodników opinii mającej na celu zidentyfikowanie konfiguracji słowno-obrazowych, które określamy mianem kolokacji werbalno-wizualnych. Naszym zdaniem kolokacje werbalno-wizualne prowadzą do powstawania tzw. wizjotypów, które definiujemy jako wszechobecne, jednostronne, dalece upraszczające rzeczywistość utarte wizualne sposoby postrzegania świata. Ich percepcja odbywa się automatycznie i odruchowo, często bez wsparcia kodu werbalnego. Mają one znaczący wpływ na kształtowanie świadomości określonych społeczności dyskursywnych. Jako medialnie zainscenizowane, bogate w konotacje, wysoce symboliczne obrazy obecne w przestrzeni publicznej odzwierciedlają uniwersalne wzorce myślowe, podobne do stereotypów, i są coraz częściej stosowane na okładkach czasopism. Ponieważ wizjotypy stanowią swoiste skrócone utrwalone kombinacje obrazu i tekstu, wykorzystujemy do ich multimodalnej analizy zmodyfikowany model Stöckla (2011, 2016) oraz Stöckla/Pflaeging (2022). Podążając z duchem czasu, skupiamy się na kluczowych postaciach polityki międzynarodowej: Donaldzie Trumpie i Władimirze Putinie. Analiza koncentruje się na pytaniach, jakie stereotypowe wyobrażenia i obrazy tych polityków są (re)produkowane lub przywoływane na poziomie werbalnym i wizualnym oraz jakie relacje między kodem werbalnym i wizualnym (ewentualnie wsparte metaforycznie) wykorzystuje się w celu zaprezentowania na okładce stanowiska redakcji a zarazem kształtowania i odzwierciedlenia opinii czytelników. Jednym z celów analizy jest ponadto próba odpowiedzi na pytanie, w jakim stopniu kategoria kolokacji werbalno-wizualnej wydaje się adekwatna i uzasadniona badawczo.

Key words

Putin, Trump, magazine covers, visiotypes/visual stereotypes, verbal-visual collocations, multimodal analysis

Putin, Trump, okładki czasopism, wizjotypy/stereotypy wizualne, kolokacje werbalno-wizualne, analiza multimodalna

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Déjà-vu? Verbal-visual collocations on the covers of British, German and Polish weekly magazines as a way of perpetuating and amplifying conflict¹

1. Preliminary notes, corpus, and method

Collocations are commonly understood as “a noticeable arrangement or conjoining of linguistic elements (such as words)” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary) or as “the act or result of placing or arranging together” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). Building on this, and considering the multimodality of communication, we aim to expand the concept of collocation and propose a broader, multimodal interpretation in terms of frequent, widespread and fixed language-image co-occurrences. Encountered repeatedly, they foster a sense of familiarity and/or evoke a feeling of *déjà vu* in recipients by prompting them to associate alternate versions of such collocations, seen for the first time, with those previously experienced. However, the fundamental question arises: is the category of “verbal-visual collocation” scientifically plausible? To put it differently, does the (traditional) concept of (lexical) collocation adequately reflect current communicative and multimodal practices? Should it be expanded? Is a multimodal reinterpretation of the concept, focusing on recurring, and conventionalised verbal-visual co-occurrences, useful and justified? These questions will be addressed in the subsequent discussion.

Our research is based on a corpus comprising covers of the following (both liberal and conservative) opinion-forming weekly magazines: *Wprost*, *Gazeta Polska*, *Polityka*, *Newsweek Polska*, *Der Spiegel*, *The Economist*, and *Time*, published from 2016 to the present². We view covers as one of many forms of

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2. For copyright reasons, the covers discussed in this article are not reproduced. Instead, they are identifiable and accessible in the archives of the respective magazines. The links to these archives are listed in the Reference section.

persuasive communication and the result of multimodal practices (cf. Czachur, Opilowski, and Smykała 2022), which are part of the communicative routine of every community. All communicative (multimodal) practices are highly culturally conditioned, shaped by specific material resources, organized according to clear patterns, and embedded in specific contexts.

The analysis of covers, which are multimodal *par excellence*, persuasive, and always anchored in a specific worldview, naturally aligns with modern research into the role of rhetoric in contemporary media communication. Rhetoric is understood here as the practice of persuasive communication, i.e., the art of influencing the recipients' emotions and attitudes through semiotic resources adapted to the particular communicative situation and purpose (cf. Stöckl 2014, 377).

Modern magazine covers always represent a complex interplay of verbal (language) and visual (image) elements, which together create a material and, subsequently, a mental frame of reference for the recipient. Visualizing messages inherently, automatically and inevitably involves “rhetorical operations” (cf. Stöckl 2014, 377). For an earlier use of the term “rhetorical operations”, see McQuarrie and Mick (1996, 429), who identify rhetorical operations such as repetition, reversal, substitution, and destabilization as “[...] the immediate sources of the excessive order or disorder” that generate a deviation, ultimately producing rhetorical figures, e.g. rhyme, antithesis, metaphor or pun. In this sense, rhetorical operations serve as tools for producing both linguistic and visual rhetorical figures, viewed as “an artful deviation in form that adheres to an identifiable template” (cf. Phillips and McQuarrie 2004, 114). This approach, highly applicable to the analysis of visuals in advertisements, is also crucial for examining magazine covers, especially in light of their promotional and persuasive functions. As an argumentative genre (cf. Tseronis 2018), magazine covers function on two interconnected levels of argumentation. The first level focuses on marketing the magazine and encouraging readers to buy a specific issue, while the second level reflects the magazine's stance on the featured cover story, presenting its argument(s) in favor of or against a particular viewpoint (cf. Tseronis 2021, 378–379). This encompasses both the targeted use of rhetorical figures and their (culturally based) decoding as a cognitive task by recipients, as well as the functional-communicative impact of rhetorical patterns. According to Stöckl, covers are “ein kohäsives und kohärentes Ganzes [...], das die unterschiedlichen Modalitäten strukturell und funktional integriert”³ (2016, 3). Held describes covers as „allgegenwärtige Kontakttexte“⁴ (Held 2005, 323), which, due to their multimodal nature, engage the reader in an active and dynamic process of interpretation (ibid.). Their inherent multimodality always serves persuasion, making their analysis valuable for rhetorical studies.

3. “a cohesive and coherent whole [...] that structurally and functionally integrates different modalities” (translation ours).

4. “ubiquitous contact texts” (translation ours).

As mentioned earlier, the modified analytical model for the linguistic and semiotic integration of text and image, developed by Stöckl (2011, 2016) and its updated, detailed version by Stöckl and Pflaeging (2022)⁵, provides the methodological background for our analysis, which we apply selectively where relevant to the phenomena under discussion⁶.

2. On the concept of verbal-visual collocations⁷

As previously mentioned, to address our research questions, the category of verbal-visual collocation must be discussed in the context of other – more or less related – categories, as well as background and accompanying phenomena, particularly the original (lexical) collocations or co-occurrences. In the relevant literature on collocations, two dominant approaches to the concept of collocation prevail, as described by Targońska (2014):

1. The narrow definition, where a collocation is understood as a specific semantic word combination (in the sense of Hausmann 1984). This definition aligns with phraseological expressions in a broader sense.
2. Frequency-based definitions, where collocations are regarded as common, typical word combinations that are statistically significant.

In more recent corpus linguistics research, collocations are defined as „Mehrworteinheiten, d.h. Wortkombinationen, die statistisch auffällig sind, aus beliebig vielen Wörtern in sowohl kontinuierlicher als auch diskontinuierlicher Reihe bestehen können“⁸ (Bubenhofer 2009, 122). A specific semantic relationship does not necessarily need to be present (cf. Targońska 2014, 696).

It is important to note that collocation research, from its origin to the present, has been predominantly logocentric (focused on the dominance of language), i.e. collocations have generally been defined as usual *word* combinations or as the “cooccurrence of *lexical* items” (Firth 1957, 10 emphasis added).

Lexical collocations, as traditionally understood, exhibit features beyond the above-mentioned frequency and polylexicity, including:

- stability (the components are not freely interchangeable or modifiable),
- expectancy (one lexical item “demands” its collocation partner),

5. Numerous past and contemporary studies explore different visual persuasion strategies, highlighting the interplay between text and imagery in constructing meaning, shaping perception, and enhancing persuasive impact. Notable examples include Phillips and McQuarrie’s (2004) typology of visual rhetoric, which also informs Stöckl and Pflaeging’s model (2022), McQuarrie and Mick’s (1996, 1999) analyses of advertising discourse, as well as the research done by Tseronis (2018, 2021) and Tseronis and Forceville (2017), which explores these dynamics within mass media texts.

6. The topic discussed here was developed as part of a larger research project (see Footnote 1).

7. In the context of this paper the terms (verbal-visual) collocations and (verbal-visual) co-occurrences are used interchangeably.

8. “multi-word units, i.e., word combinations that are statistically significant and can consist of any number of words in both continuous and discontinuous sequences” (translation ours).

- conventionality (co-occurrence legitimized by usage in the same context), and finally
- (semi-)compositionality or semantic transparency, i.e., the question of whether the overall meaning of the collocation derives from the sum of its parts (cf. Księżyk 2014, 76–87).

We argue that these characteristics also apply to verbal-visual collocations. Regarding the last mentioned question of whether and to what extent the overall meaning of a collocation results from the sum of the meanings of its components (conveyed through individual modalities) (cf. Księżyk 2014, 85–86) – we draw on the aforementioned models put forward by Stöckl (2011, 2016) and Stöckl and Pflaeging (2022), which provide a detailed description of the interplay between the two sign modalities.

Admittedly, the notion of visual collocations is already present in the relevant literature. For instance, the authors of the study *Foundations for the Representation of Diversity, Evolution, Opinion and Bias* (Giunchiglia et al. 2009) distinguish between “classic” i.e. word-based collocations, visual collocations (based solely on the visual code), and multimodal collocations.

Based on the aforementioned approaches and defining features of collocations, we propose the following working definition for the examined category of verbal-visual collocations: binary i.e. verbal-visual co-occurrences characteristic of a specific text genre, theme, or discourse fragment, which occur with a statistically significant frequency within these contexts. Their components establish various intra- and intermodal relationships, fulfilling multiple functions at the levels of layout, speech act and thematic structure, multimodal integration, and intertextuality or intericonicity.

The proposed definition should reflect the multimodal perspective and allow for the nature of contemporary mass media texts.

In verbal-visual collocations, we encounter a broad range of inter- and intramodal relationships at the formal-structural and semantic-functional levels, as understood in the frameworks of Stöckl (2011, 2016) and Stöckl and Pflaeging (2022).

3. Levels of analysis of multimodal texts

In multimodal texts, such as magazine covers, various types of language-image interplay appear. These create a great, occasionally confusing abundance of relations that lack clear boundaries and can be classified and interpreted in different ways. Following this, there is no comprehensive classification of the relations in question, only open-ended, expandable lists. Our aim is therefore not to propose a finished taxonomy but to illustrate verbal-visual collocations by

selected examples and potentially to highlight the distinctive characteristics of their mass media manifestations while elucidating their role in shaping perception and awareness.

Even a cursory review of the covers of the analysed magazines reveals certain recurring (possibly slightly modified) motifs. For example, on many covers featuring President Donald J. Trump, the focus is often on his hairstyle, his outstretched index finger, dark suit, red tie, red baseball cap, or his poses, gestures, behaviours, and facial expressions. Scenes featuring him as the central figure frequently evoke associations with (nuclear) weapons, natural disasters (fire, tsunami waves) (cf. Miller 2021) or politicians like Vladimir Putin (*Der Spiegel* 10/2017 and 24/2018), Kim Jong Un (*Der Spiegel* 17/2017, *The Economist*, August 5, 2017), Xi Jinping, or Recep Erdoğan (*Der Spiegel* 24/2018) (cf. Miller 2021, 113–114). The analysed material also includes covers featuring Vladimir Putin associated with (nuclear) weapons (*The Economist*, April 24, 2021; February 24, 2022; December 2, 2023; *Polityka*, 12/2022; *Wprost*, 40/2022; *Der Spiegel*, 11/2022) or associatively connected with Hitler (*Wprost*, 38/2022) or Stalin (*Polityka*, 10/2022), respectively.

In contemporary media linguistics, simplified models describing the language-image link are preferred, such as those by Stöckl (2011, 2016) and Stöckl and Pflaeging (2022) based on the combination of functional stages in a text and modes as semiotic signs, as defined by van Leeuwen (2005, 80). On this basis, Stöckl (2016, 23–25) developed descriptive criteria that have been adapted and partially applied for analysing examples from our corpus.

These descriptive levels include:

- layout/form/composition (on both macro and micro levels, encompassing all structural components),
- speech acts/function (realized by means of visual and verbal elements),
- thematic structure/content (main themes and subthemes: thematic co-reference, positioning of the theme within a specific knowledge framework),
- multimodal integration (intermodal cohesion and coherence across various levels within the particular text),
- intertextuality and intericonicity (intentional and strategic connections between the analysed text and other external texts and images aimed at activating various orders of (collective) knowledge – meaning-making activities beyond the immediate scope of the message) (cf. Stöckl 2011, 2016; Stöckl and Pflaeging 2022; Czachur, Opiłowski, and Smykała 2022).

However, it is not our aim to describe comprehensively all the verbal-visual configurations (collocations) extracted from the corpus based on the aforementioned criteria. Instead, we aim to test the category of verbal-visual collocation as an

analytical tool and explore its functions. In this context, we will focus primarily on the last two levels of the analytical model.

4. Practical examples

The analysed corpus provides examples where verbal expressions are visually concretized. Additionally, there are covers where the relationship between the visual and verbal elements is less literal, extending to cases where one collocation partner (usually the verbal element) is omitted and can be reflexively generated in the process of interpretation whereas the other (visual) element becomes autonomous.

4.1 The visual code illustrates the verbal or the verbal code literalizes the visual

“Lies have short legs but... a long nose”. Regardless of political, ideological, or geographical contexts, Pinocchio’s long nose universally symbolizes dishonesty. Whether appearing in liberal (*Polityka* 46/2023, *Newsweek Polska* 19/2022) or conservative outlets (*Gazeta Polska* 4/2021), it is a clear visual cue that the depicted figures or organizations/institutions (e.g., Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, Angela Merkel and the EU that she metonymically represents, Donald Tusk, or key politicians from the Law and Justice [PiS] Party) are misrepresenting the facts. The message conveyed on the covers is clear even without words: both codes convey the same message. Similarly, the cover of *Polityka* (48/2018) visually represents the phrase/collocation “stracić twarz” (“to lose face”) with blurred facial features.

Another example where the visual element alone communicates the message is Putin depicted with Hitler’s iconic toothbrush moustache (*Wprost* 38/2022), a symbol instantly understood by the recipients, or with Stalin’s dense moustache, uniform, and cap (*Polityka* 10/2022). In the latter case, the collocation is further emphasized by the verbal caption: *Stalinowska wojna Putina* (“Putin’s Stalinist war”).

4.2 Collocation chains

The previously presented language-image co-occurrences serve as prime examples of verbal-visual collocations. Our focus now turns to how particular verbal-visual collocations emerge and evolve into complex collocation chains. The most prominent example is the omnipresent co-occurrence TRUMP ↔ FIRE.

On the cover of *Der Spiegel* (June 6, 2020, issue 24/2020), the motif of fire appears in triplicate (cf. Miller 2021, 111):

- verbally in the headline „Der Feuerteufel. Ein Präsident setzt sein Land in Brand“ (“The fire devil. A president sets his country on fire”), where the noun *Teufel* (*devil*) conveys additional negative connotations,
- visually in the foreground: President Trump is shown holding a lit matchstick, a graphic depiction which supports the claim that he is a (political) arsonist, igniting (in metaphorical sense) unrest and political chaos in the country,
- visually in the background: flames and anti-racism protests triggered by (Trump’s comments on) George Floyd’s death.

Both codes function on the level of elaboration, where “content from picture and text elaborate one another, that is, they mutually explain, illustrate or complement one another” (Stöckl 2009, 13).

The above-mentioned cover employs a (proto)typical verbal-visual collocation TRUMP ↔ FIRE: the verbal collocation partner (*President*) is visually concretized and linked to fire and its destructive force. Referring to Phillips and McQuarrie’s typology of visual rhetoric (2004), the underlying meaning operation(s) can be described as connection or comparison for similarity, aiming to establish a link between both collocation parts and to emphasize danger and unpredictability as the unifying aspects of the whole collocation.

Similarly, *Der Spiegel* (5/2016) depicts Donald Trump against the backdrop of a burning American flag. While his facial expression appears calm, this seeming composure starkly contrasts with the flames in the background and the slogan “WAHNSINN” (*madness/insanity*) written in bold red letters. The subheading, “Amerikas Hetzer Donald Trump” (“America’s rabble-rouser Donald Trump”), explicitly names Trump and reinforces the collocation TRUMP ↔ FIRE by characterizing Trump as an agitator or instigator who provokes violence, unrest, or protests – either emotionally and provocatively or subtly and strategically.

On the *Der Spiegel* cover (17/2018), the verbal collocation partner disappears: Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron (holding a fire extinguisher), symbolically representing the European Union (indicated by a sticker on the extinguisher), are facing the challenge of extinguishing a fireball in the shape of Donald Trump. The two-part headline, “Wer rettet den Westen? Es geht um Freiheit und Demokratie. Macron braucht Hilfe, doch Deutschland versagt” (“Who will save the West? It’s about freedom and democracy. Macron needs help, but Germany fails”) and the visual image of Trump as fireball suggest a double analogy: Donald Trump’s policy poses a serious threat to European values; European sovereignty requires defence against Donald Trump’s America (cf. Miller 2021, 110–111).

This brings to mind the concept of *verbal anchoring* as the role of textual elements (such as slogans, headlines, or captions) in guiding the interpretation of an advertisement’s visual content (cf. Phillips 2000). By providing specific

linguistic cues, verbal anchoring shapes the interpretation of visuals and directs the viewer toward a preferred or intended meaning. Importantly, Phillips (2000) hypothesizes that products that are more involving for a target audience require less verbal anchoring. To put it differently, “[a]s consumers come to expect complex images in ads they may be more willing to expend cognitive effort to interpret the ad; consequently, less verbal anchoring would be needed” (cf. Philipps 2000: 22), as is the case in the analysed collocations lacking the verbal part/representation.

Similarly, *resonance* understood as the doubleness or repetition of verbal and/or visual signs in an ad text alters the meaning of the elements and the (ad) text as a whole (cf. McQuarrie 1989). Importantly, resonance can be purely verbal, purely visual or can involve both verbal and visual elements; finally it can emerge as a visual pun, the penultimate type (i.e. linking verbal and visual elements to elicit a duality in meaning) being the most popular case in advertising (ibid.). In line with this, the above mentioned covers entail visual images and headlines that not only echo one another but also complement and reinforce each other.

Following this, the *The Economist* cover issued on May 20, 2023, features a fire extinguisher with stars and stripes, a clear reference to the American flag. Compared to the previously described relatively easily interpretable figures, this highly complex cover allows for a wide range of interpretations. The extinguisher is automatically associated with fire and can be interpreted as a distant echo of Trump’s foreign policy and its negative repercussions, even though neither of them is visually or verbally present. This aligns with Peirce’s (1998) concept of the indexical sign, where the referent is often implied rather than explicitly shown. An indexical sign has a physical, causal, or existential link to the object it represents, pointing to something through direct association rather than resemblance. In the analysed cover, both the repeated exposure to the collocation (TRUMP ↔ FIRE) and the real-world connection between a fire extinguisher and fire activate the intended interpretative response and inference processes in the audience (cf. Phillips and McQuarrie 2004: 114).

On the verbal level, only President Biden is mentioned as Trump’s political rival (headline: “How should America lead?” with the subtitle: “The Biden doctrine and its flaws”) facing the difficult task of putting out fires around the world, some of which may have been partially caused by Trump.

The article titled “Joe Biden’s global vision is too timid and pessimistic” compares President Biden’s foreign policy doctrine with that of his predecessor, Donald Trump. It particularly emphasizes that Biden’s renewed emphasis on diplomacy is a positive shift following the turbulence of the Trump years. Additionally, the article notes that while Biden is not responsible for the dysfunctions inherited from the previous administration and Trump’s *America First* policy, Biden’s

leadership must prioritize stability and openness. This is particularly relevant in efforts to defuse conflicts perceived as having been exacerbated under Trump (such as tensions with China) symbolized by the fire extinguisher featured on the magazine's cover. Due to the frequent co-occurrence of the elements TRUMP and FIRE and based on the reference to Trump's widely-read biography titled *Fire and Fury. Inside the Trump White House* by Michael Wolff (2018), the absent component (Donald Trump and the consequences of his policies) is possible to infer cognitively. The TRUMP ↔ FIRE collocation is further sustained in the leaders: "Toxic partisanship at home has corroded confidence in America's government", referring to the negative consequences of Trump's administration and the decline in trust in the U.S. government.

Similarly, the burning \$100 bill on *The Economist* cover (January 20, 2024), and especially the shape of the flame, immediately evokes Donald Trump's hairstyle. Notably, the verbal reference is restricted to the pronoun *he* ("He's winning") which refers to President Trump and the previously established collocation. The visual element provides an unequivocal hint at Trump: fire and the shape of the flame unmistakably collocate with him. The presented covers exemplify an extensive collocation chain where Trump as a collocation part is indeed omitted but remains easily inferred. In the two-dimensional framework introduced by Phillips and McQuarrie (2004), which combines visual structures with meaning operations, the examined cover demonstrates both fusion (where the two aforementioned images merge) and replacement (with the image of a burning bill suggesting the absent image of Donald Trump), along with the corresponding meaning operations of connection and comparison for similarity (Phillips and McQuarrie 2004). The physical resemblance (in terms of shape and colour) reinforces the analogy between the present image (the flame) and the absent one (Trump's hair or rather Trump himself), guiding the intended interpretation: a potential second term of Donald Trump as a threat to America's trade and economy.

In addition to the discussed covers, the corpus includes examples where the TRUMP ↔ FIRE collocation appears in modified forms. For instance, *Der Spiegel* issue 46/2016, published immediately after Trump's 2016 presidential victory, depicts the newly elected U.S. president's head as an asteroid-like fireball hurtling toward Earth (cf. Miller 2021, 110). Another cover (*The Economist*, February 4, 2017), headlined "An insurgent in the White House", shows Trump as a revolutionary throwing a burning Molotov cocktail at the White House. Along with that, his black suit, red tie, and iconic red cap bearing the slogan "Make America Great Again" create a sense of familiarity (*déjà vu*). Both the verbal and visual codes convey the same message (elaboration in the sense of Stöckl 2011, 58): Trump is fighting against his own country (cf. Miller 2021, 111–112).

Fire and Trump also collocate on the covers of *Polityka*, which announce Biden's 2020 (issue 46/2020) and Trump's 2016 election victory (issue 47/2016), respectively. Against a black background, both covers display Trump's profile with a fiery red hairstyle shaped like a rising tsunami wave. The yellow-orange hue, commonly used in warning signs due to its high perceptual clarity (cf. Tokarski 2004, 94), signals danger and evokes associations with fire and its destructive force (cf. Miller 2024).

The visual elements (the tsunami wave and fire as metaphors for Trump's incoming presidency) provide a pessimistic answer to the headline question "Kim będzie Donald Trump/Co zrobi Ameryce, światu, Polsce?" ("Who will Donald Trump be/What will he do to America, the world, Poland?") (*Polityka* 47/2016). On the analogous *Polityka* cover from November 2020, the suffix *-izm* in the subheadline "Biden wygrywa, Trumpizm pozostaje" ("Biden Wins, Trumpism Remains") is typographically emphasized in red, a colour prototypically associated with blood and fire, reinforcing associations with danger and destruction (cf. Tokarski 2004, 31). This typographic technique ensures alignment with the intended rhetorical message through verbal anchoring, thereby increasing the likelihood of understanding the desired double meaning of the headline: despite his defeat, Donald Trump remains on the political stage (as confirmed by the 2024 election), and the political style known as *Trumpism* endures (cf. Miller 2024).

The examples discussed above demonstrate that TRUMP ↔ FIRE is a universal, cross-cultural, and cross-linguistic collocation multiplied across different discursive communities.

4.3 Another collocation chain: TRUMP or PUTIN ↔ (NUCLEAR) WEAPONS

Another collocation chain permeating the analysed material is based on the recurring link between Trump or Putin and (nuclear) weapons, presenting their presidencies as dangerous and destructive, and evoking fear as the dominant emotion.

On the cover of *Der Spiegel* (issue 17/2017), Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un are depicted as children playing on a bomb-shaped spring bouncer. The nuclear bomb as a toy, combined with the headline "TODESSPIEL" ("Death Game"), transitions the phrase "playing with something" from its literal to metaphorical meaning (cf. Miller 2021, 112). Following Stöckl (2011), the informational connection between the two codes can be described as elaboration: the visual and verbal codes illustrate and specify one another.

The cover of *The Economist* (August 5, 2017) features a mushroom cloud in the shape of Donald Trump's and Kim Jong Un's heads, preceded by the headline

“It could happen” and suggesting that escalating tensions with North Korea could lead to nuclear confrontation (cf. Miller 2021, 113). Here, only the visual collocation partner appears, but the collocation TRUMP ↔ (NUCLEAR) WEAPONS is easily deducible. According to Stöckl (2011, 58), this type of connection between the two sign modalities could be classified as an extension: the visual message provides interpretive clues to the pronoun *it* in the headline, adding new content to the verbal code.

Examples such as a nuclear bomb with the American flag and Trump’s head replacing the bomb’s nose (*The Economist*, June 8, 2019) or a hand grenade bearing Trump’s face, with a fuse resembling his hairstyle (*The Economist*, March 10, 2018), also visually represent the collocation TRUMP ↔ (NUCLEAR) WEAPONS. Both images are supported by headlines emphasizing the negative consequences of Trump’s decisions. In both cases, the visual message enhances the headlines, which only generally mention threat, danger, and disruption.

A similar co-occurrence, frequent in the German, Polish, and British sub-corpora, links Putin with nuclear weapons or *war machine* defined as “the resources that a country has available for fighting a war” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries).

The analogy between nuclear weapons and Putin is realized both verbally and visually on the covers of *Polityka* (12/2022) and *The Economist* (December 2, 2023). The war machine/nuclear bomb are verbalised in the headlines: “Putin grozi atomem” (“Putin threatens with nukes”), “Is Putin winning? Inside Russia’s war machine” and visually supported by marching soldiers, weapons factories, and tanks. Here, the visual element plays an illustrative role; the overall message can also be understood without it.

On two other covers (*The Economist*, February 24, 2022, and *Der Spiegel*, issue 11/2022), the verbal collocation part appears in a reduced, pronominalized form (emphasis added): “Where will *he* stop?” and “Kann *er* noch zurück?” (“Can *he* still turn back?”). The collocation is primarily realized visually: images of Putin and weapons are merged, functioning simultaneously and complementarily as a perceptual whole. The verbal element, phrased as an attention-grabbing and, last but not least, purchase-inducing question, suggests the inevitability of the situation.

Finally, on the cover of *Wprost* (40/2022), the verbal component disappears entirely. A political cartoon depicts Putin with a noose around his neck, tied to a nuclear bomb, implying that using it would inevitably lead to his downfall.

The examples provided above support the interim conclusion that many verbal-visual collocations are cross-cultural and multilingual.

4.4 What conclusions can be drawn from the analysis?

Regarding lexical collocations, researchers generally agree that they are semiotic units composed of frequently co-occurring words, i.e., ready-made verbal expressions like “naked eye”, “brush one’s teeth”, or “wash one’s car” (cf. Giunchiglia et al. 2009). Visual or multimodal collocations, on the other hand, involve secondary elements or events that help specify or contextualize the figure’s role or activity (Giunchiglia et al. 2009). Baldry and Thibault (2005, quoted in Oddo 2013, 48) similarly describe them as “clusters of depicted items (e.g., dress, location, tools), which specify the social role of participants”.

The conducted analysis provides evidence that verbal-visual collocations exhibit recurring relationships between such secondary elements. In some covers, their use borders on stereotypes, irony, or caricature, as each image is characterized by a set of attributes that highlight a particular aspect of the figure, their role, or a relevant setting for the depicted scene. For instance, on numerous covers featuring Trump, specific elements repeatedly appear (e.g., his hairstyle, gestures, and attire). Trump’s portrayal is staged to evoke negative associations in the audience, linking him to disasters (fire, tsunamis), war (weapons), or dangerous figures like Putin. The analysed verbal-visual collocation chain TRUMP ↔ FIRE is based on negative associations inherent to the concept of (uncontrolled) FIRE⁹ and its verbal and visual representation.

5. Toward visiotypes

As shown above, the presented collocations initially feature both collocation parts. However, in many cases, one of them (usually the verbal part) is omitted as expected and self-evident. The visual element, on the other hand, becomes autonomous, transforming a verbal-visual collocation into a purely visual and, eventually, a “mental collocation”. The verbal element is reflexively inferred from the visual component. The original collocation is often modified or extended with new components (e.g., a fire extinguisher referencing TRUMP ↔ FIRE), forming a collocation chain or bundle. In this respect, verbal-visual collocations seem to allow for more modifications than lexical ones.

Undoubtedly, such “recurring linkages” (cf. Giunchiglia et al. 2009, 80) are also present on the analysed covers, where – as is the case with lexical collocations in the narrower sense – the overall meaning does not derive from the sum of its parts. Instead, a synergy effect emerges. These verbal-visual collocations gradually transform into “pictures in our head” (cf. Lippmann 1945, 3), (over)simplified, often stereotypical representations of the reality shaped by personal experiences,

9. Obviously, fire can also evoke positive associations, such as warmth, light, protection, and security.

media, (popular) culture, and societal influences. Becoming “mental collocations” where the omitted or hidden part is reflexively supplemented or generated, they act as cognitive shortcuts and help us navigate complex information. By simplifying, and generalizing, they reduce the elements of a complex reality that we might otherwise struggle to grasp, process, and categorize in its entirety.

This calls to mind the rhetorical enthymeme, an abbreviated argumentation procedure relying on shared knowledge or beliefs of the audience rather than explicitly stating all logical steps. Importantly, images can function as enthymemes because they draw on commonly held opinions – those viewers either agree with or are expected to recall (cf. Smith 2007).

With their “potential for semantic condensation,” visual images enable “a rhetorical enthymematic process in which something is condensed or omitted, leaving it to the spectator to provide the unspoken premises” (Kjeldsen 2012, 241). Engaging the audience in this way, by letting them fill in the gap, visual arguments rely on “shared cultural knowledge and common awareness of specific situations or contexts” (Kjeldsen 2015, 112), guiding viewers toward interpretations that align with particular conclusions (Kjeldsen 2012, 243). We believe that frequently employed verbal-visual collocations can over time evolve into visual stereotypes or “visiotypes”, as described by Pörksen (1997, 2000). These established and repeatedly occurring connections contribute to a “pre-contextualization” of our worldviews, influencing our perception and evaluation of current and future events, as well as related actions (cf. Oddo 2013). Thus, such collocations not only have a denotative and evaluative dimension but also encompass a deontic component, as they make certain actions appear justified, acceptable, or even necessary. They implant judgments and viewpoints that can lead to specific actions: humans have a deeply ingrained instinct to extinguish a disastrous fire or prevent its uncontrolled spread. Common sense also dictates that a furious, unpredictable, and armed individual must be disarmed or neutralized to ensure individual and collective safety.

The described phenomena involve not only a retrospective but also a future-oriented interpretation and evaluation, implying a purposeful and targeted framing of individuals, (future) events, and actions. This “projection of the future” (cf. Oddo 2013, 29) by means of (visual) stereotypes largely unfolds unconsciously, as Petersen and Schwender (2009, 10) explain: „[...] durch die Medien beförderte stereotype Vorstellungen von unbekannten Gegenständen, fremden Menschen, Völkern und Verhaltensweisen werden oft nicht durch eigene Erfahrungen korrigiert.“¹⁰

10. “[...] stereotypical perceptions of unknown objects, foreign people, nations, and behaviours promoted by the media are often not corrected through personal experiences” (translation ours).

Rather than creating interpretive openness, the analysed collocations reinforce specific interpretations and leave little room for alternative perspectives. They implant specific standards of access to (fragments of) reality (cf. Pörksen 2000, 14).

Oddo (2013, 26, emphasis added) describes this phenomenon as follows: “Those who precontextualize future discourse help control what that discourse means – *predefining sociopolitical reality and setting the course for future action in the world*”. Such structuring of past events or pre-structuring of future situations can play a decisive role in legitimizing upcoming (political) events: “Insofar as elite actors legitimize future discourse, they help set the stage for the material consequences of that discourse” (Oddo 2013, 26).

6. Conclusions

The category of verbal-visual collocation appears to be scientifically plausible, though its operationalization remains suboptimal. At present, it relies on the observation, analysis, and interpretation of researchers. However, considering the logocentrically oriented literature on collocations, the term ‘collocations’ may be misleading, as it carries its original meaning and evokes the notion of traditional *verbal* collocations. In light of this, it seems that perhaps a more appropriate term for the phenomenon described would be ‘co-occurrence’. In this paper we use these terms synonymously.

Given the characteristics of verbal-visual collocations described above, including their ethical (deontic) dimension and strong connotative potential, their role in media communication cannot be underestimated. On their path to becoming visiotypes, they act as “semi-finished products” of mass media communication, recalled or retrieved by the participants from their memory without critically questioning the context.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that the presented verbal-visual collocations are often based on metaphors while also incorporating metonymic references such as Hitler’s or Stalin’s iconic moustache, Trump’s red baseball cap, or his distinctive hairstyle. Additionally, they include instances of non-metaphoric connections, as seen in depictions of Donald Trump with a lit match (*Der Spiegel* 24/2020) or positioned in front of a burning American flag (*Der Spiegel* 5/2016). This, in our view, justifies the use of the term *verbal-visual collocations* in a way that extends beyond *visual metaphor*, particularly since these collocations occasionally involve the verbal component that plays a crucial role in meaning construction, distinguishing them from purely visual metaphors.

Last but not least: it will be both a fascinating and educational experience to observe the media coverage of Donald Trump’s election victory and second term.

Will he continue to appear frequently on the front pages? How will he be portrayed? Despite predominantly negative depictions, numerous serious allegations, and accusations, the American public has chosen him as the 47th President of the United States. What does this signify? There are multiple, partly contradictory answers to this question. However, one point seems beyond doubt: It becomes evident that the predominantly (if not entirely) negative portrayal of Donald J. Trump as illustrated by the examples presented above and an unrelentingly one-sided perspective in the media coverage of his previous presidency contribute to the division within American society and have proven to be a tool for perpetuating and amplifying conflict between his supporters and opponents. Different audiences were confronted with alternative or contradictory information from media sources that catered to their respective ideological biases, exacerbating divisions and creating a more polarized environment where compromise and dialogue became increasingly difficult.

On the other hand, Trump's contentious relationship with the media, particularly his attempts to discredit outlets critical of him as "fake news", has deepened public disunity. Moreover, the results of the American presidential election demonstrate that trust in traditional news sources has declined, while alternative media, including social media platforms, gained greater influence. In recent Romanian elections, as we know, social media has played a significant role in shaping political campaigns, a paramount example of which is the unexpected success of Călin Georgescu in the first round of the presidential race in 2024.

The above mentioned rhetorical devices (metaphors and metonymies) frequently serve as the link between the verbal and the visual, although this connection would need to be explored further in another study. Moreover, this paper should primarily be viewed as an initial exploration of a scarcely researched field, which has been little studied by linguists. The conclusions drawn here are thus to be regarded as hypotheses and suggestions.

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