



LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF TELEVISION ADVERTISING: AN INNOVATIVE READING

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ABSTRACT

Advertising has become the part and parcel of present day life. Advertisers are careful in using various aspects of language which enables the creators of advertisements use existing or newly coined words with innovative meaning, puns, figurative language and to mix them with individual styles and types of texts. This paper tries to read television commercials through literary devices.

Key words : Advertising, language, literary devices

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INTRODUCTION

Advertising has become the part and parcel of present day life. From everywhere around us, commercials of diverse types attack our privacy. In spite of it, there is an attracting power, which is able to manipulate the consumers, an invisible voice of advertisements which advocate, encourage, ask questions, announces and deeply embeds into people's minds. Nowadays, the increasing number of advertisements makes people view them from a different perspective. Advertisers are careful in using the linguistic techniques with the aim to unique and maximize the effect at full blast. Advertising language is fascinating and this paper discovers principles, strategies and anatomy of creative writing and grammatical structures. It provides the analysis of language of advertising from linguistic point of view and specifies linguistic means in advertising texts. The paper has given importance not only to the linguistic features but how these

linguistic features contribute to enhance the semantic aspects in advertisements.

Language and Advertising

English language enables the creators of advertisements to use existing or newly coined words with innovative meaning, puns, figurative language and to mix them with individual styles and types of texts. Advertising unifies language, pictures and music. It contain information, invokes emotions and imagination. It can capture all five senses and besides this, advertising has social and practical aims. Language is primarily meant for communication. Language whether it is in literature, in advertising or in day to day life communicates ideas, feelings, and emotions. Communication becomes possible and successful through several components. This includes the addresser (speaker), the addressee (listener) and between these two participants, the coded message (information) is transmitted through the communication channel

In communication, 'content' is the situation in which the speaker and the listener are placed; 'code' becomes the particular language through which the meaning is conveyed and 'channel' is the means of delivering the message, that might be verbal or non verbal. In the case of advertising, the 'addresser' is the copy writer and the 'addressee' is the viewer. The meaning transmitted is about the product; the 'code' is language; the 'channel' consists of print, visual, audio or internet and the 'context' is the viewer's total situation that is whether he has the product already or he can afford it. This shows that advertising is a kind of communication with its own principles. The addresser is a producer or a company that persuades the addressee, a consumer, to buy a product. The code or the language has to be known by all participants of a communication. The information communicated by the advertisement does not discuss everything about the product. It is incomplete because there is no space enough to describe the product in detail. The information contains what the producer thinks the consumer needs to know. It always contains the name of the product and how it can benefit the consumer.

A successful advertisement is a combination of verbal and non verbal qualities. Verbal language is concerned with words or a play of words. Non verbal (wordless) message can be sent or received through any channel- visual, sound, smell, touch, taste, through gestures, body language, facial expressions, hair style etc. The use of non verbal communication is called paralanguage which is an inevitable part of advertising. The bright colors on the television screen, cute or surprised expressions on the characters' faces, a romantic music at the back ground of beauty soap or a perfume etc. add to the effectiveness of advertisements which make it a work of art. This paper analyses both the verbal and non verbal means of communication in advertising. To begin with verbal communication, different types of sentences and their role in advertising are being discussed here.

Sentence Structure in Advertising

In English language, sentences are primarily divided in to four: assertive or declarative,

imperative, interrogative and exclamatory. Declarative sentences are statements normally use to state the quality of the particular product. Well composed statements will give a deep impression on viewers. Since advertisements are time limited, each second has its own value. So the advertisers select words and phrases which are catchy and combine them to make sentences in order to provide information of the particular product. In the case of beauty soaps and fairness products, the advertiser's concentration is on how many vitamins and minerals are included in that product. Such advertisements assert without any doubt the 'unbeatable' quality of their product. For example, 'we lead, others copy' - canon.(Web)

Imperative sentences are short, encouraging and forceful. They are used to arouse audience's interest to buy the product. Advices, requests, commend and others come under the category of imperative sentences. They appear in conversation among different characters in advertisements. The dialogues may be between friends, between brothers and sisters, husband and wife, daughter in- law etc. Such sentences help in achieving the plot of the advertisement to reach its aim. Imperative sentences also appear as slogans of several products. For example, 'just do it' – Nike Shoes, 'Take Toshiba, take the world' -Toshiba (Web.)

It is no doubt to say that advertisements using interrogative sentences (questions) are effective than declarative and imperative sentences. It evokes a sense of personal communication in the viewer. The viewer co-operates with the visual having his own individual situation in mind. Although the copy writers cannot expect the audience to answer the questions themselves silently, they use the technique of 'presupposition'. Presupposition is speculating something before hand at the beginning of a line of argument or course action. Presuppositions are present in communication and have special functions in advertising. For example, 'why do leading beauty experts and models use and recommend Dhathri Hair care oil?'(Web). This makes the viewers believe that beauty experts and models use and

recommend this product. So there is no doubt about the quality of the product.

Advertisements use presupposition rather than assertion because it is much easier to deny an assertion than presupposition. Angela Goddard writes that presupposition is, '....all about reading between lines since this is, as it suggests a hidden process, it is very interesting to advertisers, as we can be taking in all sorts of assumptions without consciously paying attention to them'(Goddard, 125). In advertisements, a question is asked as a kind of problem and then the product offers an answer- a solution for the problem. Another type of question used in advertisements is rhetorical question. For example, 'Do you feel intolerable pain on your back when you bend and take anything from the floor?' the answer from the audience will be 'yes, of course' and they wait for the solution. The last category sentence type which plentifully used in advertisements is exclamatory sentences. Exclamatory questions and marks are common in printed and visual advertisements. The heroine's expressions like, 'Wow! What a change!' makes the viewer open his mouth in wonder. He may or may not buy the product. But seeing the advertisement at least four times a day, an average audience may come to think about the whiteness (enhanced by the heroine's exclamation) and this leads to buy the product.

Literary Devices in Advertisements

A literary text conveys its meaning through many literary devices. A literary text becomes a work of art when it deviates from the common path of communication with the help of various elements. Literary devices generally come under three categories- rhetorical devices, poetic elements and dramatic elements. Metaphor, simile, personification, hyperbole, symbols, imagery, rhyme, rhythm, musicality, plot, characterization etc. come under the umbrella term, 'literary devices'. A close analysis undoubtedly shows that successful advertisements use these devices in a number of ways, in order to catch the audience's attention and persuade them to buy the products. Literature is both denotative and connotative. Every linguistic expression has a literal meaning. It is the primary meaning and is denotative. But at the same

time, it carries a hidden connotative layer which arouses the aesthetic sense of the readers. Likewise, advertising too has these two layers; denotative and connotative. It denotes the quality of the product and connotes why the consumers should buy it. This connotation makes the audience brood over the product finally. Vester Gaard and Schroder believe that in advertising language, the most frequent word for 'acquisition' of a product is 'get' and not 'buy' because, 'buy' has some unpleasant connotations like 'money'.

Metaphor and Simile: - From Oxford Advanced Learning Dictionary, metaphor is a word or phrase used in a imaginative way to describe two things in order to show that the two things have some qualities to make the description more powerful. According to Layoff and Johnson, metaphor is a statement or picture which causes a receiver to experience one thing in terms of another. In advertising, a metaphor usually creates a comparison between the product or service and some other quality the advertiser wishes to be associated with the product or service advertised. For example, 'one touch, one light, effortless touch and she realized freedom was something you feel' (Web). This advertisement on Revlon face powder indicates that the freedom is actually the powder because when we use the powder, we will feel free. Two types of metaphors that we see in advertising are visual and verbal. Verbal metaphors are present in the product's name or slogan. Visual metaphors not only relate to words but depict relationships between a product and service with visual elements. Advertisement of a perfume (Yardley) or beauty soap (Lux or Vivel) shows the gorgeous model or film stars on a flower beds covered up by flowers top to bottom. This shows that the product provides the qualities of flowers that will give our skin softness and fragrance and will cover as the way as it covers the model in the visual.

Simile is defined as a direct, expressed comparison between two things essentially unlike each other, but resembling each other in at least one way. Usually similes are marked by the use of words, 'Like', 'as', 'then', 'as if', 'as...as' and 'so... as'. Similes are inevitable in bringing out hidden meanings in literature. It serves the same purpose in

advertising. For example, 'Stop Staring at me like I'm some piece of meat' (MC Donald's Big Mac).(Web)

Personification: - It is term used mainly in literature to name the figure of speech which involves directly speaking of an inanimate, object or an abstract concept as if it were a living entity often one with specifically human attributes. These attributes include sensations, emotions, desires physical gestures and expressions. In literature, poets or writers addressing inanimate objects, speaks to them like to human beings and defining their qualities come under personification. There are lots of examples in advertising dealing with personification. Sandwich having legs and hands in the 'Halls' advertisement starring Deepika Padukone, shirts having eyes and mouth and speaking each other in 'Surf Excel's' advertisement, lots of chocolates rolling one after another in 'M & M's' advertisements are some examples. Personification can be seen in many advertising slogans too. For example, 'obeys when spoken to (unlike most bikes) New 2006 Ford Fiesta'.(Web) In this commercial, personification appears when the 'car obeys'.

Hyperbole :- Hyperbole is defined as a way of describing something in order to make it sound bigger, smaller, better, worse etc. then it is really is. In advertising, the use of exaggerated statements put emphasis on the particular features of the products or services and sometimes achieves humorous effect. For example, 'it's time to rewrite history' is the tagline of a cosmetic product that invokes exaggeration. Here hyperbole is used to tell about the incredible beauty of the product. 'Samsung presents the world best' (Samsung). This advertising slogan claims that their product is the best in the world. It shows the confidence and heroic spirit of this brand of product. Thus it gives the audience a very profound impression. Apart from this, hyperbole can also be used visually. Exaggeration is an inevitable aspect of every commercial. To attract audience's attention, advertisers use many exaggerated themes and images which may mislead the viewers and at the same time are highly enjoyable. The overflow of vitamins and minerals, picturised as vitamin A, vitamin C the like into energy drinks like Horlicks and

Complan are highly exaggerated. Apple, Orange, Grapes and Bananas, falling into a small bottle making it the tasty mixed fruit jam in the advertisement of Kissan Jam creates the impression of originality. All ayurvedic elements, coming together and combining to make beauty soap, a hair oil or shampoo are also examples of hyperbole. Monster shaped things in different colors are unavoidable elements in the advertisements of toilet cleaners and tooth pastes. Such commercials tell us to be cautious of even minor things in life by changing the invisible bacteria into a giant. This surely attracts audience's attention and children even think that such images are real and existing.

Antithesis and alliteration: - Antithesis is a figure of speech which uses same or similar structure to express opposite ideas so as to achieve the effects of emphasizing the meaning and the contrast. It has the harmonious combination of sound, rhythm, rhyme, balanced syllables etc. The combination of pleasant senses of vision and hearing often stimulates the good feelings of readers and arouses consumers' buying desire. For example, 'Talks inside. Shouts outside-New 2006 fiesta'- ford 'image in a mini phone with maximum style and design'- Samsung. This gives a clear description about Samsung mini phone, that its ability is maximum. Alliteration can be defined as literary technique in which successive words begin with the same consonant sound or letter. It is widely used in advertising slogans; for example, 'Performance; Prestige Passion for innovation and Passion for Perfection' (Russian standard Vodka). Names of many products are alliterative which make it easier for the hearers to remember. Examples are Kit Kat, Tit Tac, Coca Cola, etc.

Allusion: - Allusion is usually an implicit reference perhaps to another work of literature or art, to a person or an event. It is often a kind of appeal to a viewer to share some experience with the advertiser. An allusion may enrich the work by associated and give it depth. A recent commercial on coconut powder named 'coconad' takes us to the old days when Kerala was under the rule of Maharajas. The popular advertisement on Indulekha Bringa Hair Oil is an allusion to the great tradition of Kerala Ayurveda. It takes us back to nature which is

the store house of natural elements for hair growth. A recent advertisement on JK cement reminds us of the fable of the 'Hare and the Tortoise' in which the slow tortoise became the winner due to the over confidence of the Hare. Through the allusion to this fable, the advertiser stresses the permanence and durability of the product.

Symbols and Images: - symbols and images play an important role in literature. These are the responsible factors for the timelessness of a work of art. Advertisers consider symbols and images for the promotion of their product and hope for the permanence of these in the minds of audience. In order to achieve this aim, advertisers select symbols and images carefully, that may appear simple and direct outside. But a deeper analysis shows the hidden layers of meaning behind them. The Vodafone advertising image of 'Zoo zoos' is an example for how much a company can utilize its image in different manner. Zoo zoos are white colored animated beings with cute expressions. They are always active, but mute. Through actions, they convey the ideas of the advertiser. The theme of the advertisement changes frequently, but the zoo zoos remains same. Zoo zoos are much popular that whenever the viewers see the images of zoo zoos, they are reminded of 'Vodafone'. Symbolism used in the logos of different products or services are really interesting. The bird's logo in Twitter shows the Tweeting sound. The bird is looking up in the icon reflecting optimistic attitude. The 'F' in the logo of Flipkart is designed as a shopping kart and the two Dots are two Wheels. This shows the purpose of the company. The arrow from A to Z in Amazon.com shows that it carries items ranging from A to Z.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to make an analysis of linguistic features in television commercials. It is not only restricted to syntactic level but also gives importance to show how several linguistic features operate at semantic level too. Several examples shown above undoubtedly prove that language has a powerful influence in the fields of advertising and marketing. The chapter also analyzed the visual content and design in advertising and its impact on the consumer. The language of advertising is usually

an unnoticed aspect even though it persuades us unbelievably. This paper has made an explicate reading of commercials through the magic of language.

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