

Techno-World Advertisements: Role of Linguistics

Abstract

This article examines the role of Linguistics in formulating a co-relation between 'Advertising' and the technology-oriented modern world. The focus is on the employing of various Linguistic devices with innovative techniques by the advertisers in order to make their ads persuasive and attractive. I have also discussed the prime role played by Linguistics in the context of devising the punchlines or ad-slogans that we associate ourselves with, in the modern Techno-World. This is an era in which advertising messages not just simply describe the product but concentrate on the consumer of the product, creating product imagery with which the consumer can easily identify himself. Thus, the present article is an attempt to depict how the natural order of language is modified, shaped and stylized by the advertisers according to the product of advertisement and the target group of consumer.

Keywords: Linguistic devices, Persuasive, Punchlines, Product Imagery, Target Group.

Introduction

The rapid development of today's social economy is undoubtedly fuelled by the increasing use of technology. The modern techno-world would however, be incomplete without the genre of advertisement. In order to secure a number of readers and viewers, the advertisers try to make their advertisements as effective as possible. They use various linguistic devices to catch attention and induce action, and contribute towards satisfaction. The term, 'linguistics' refers to the scientific study of human language. On the other hand, Advertising is referred to as a form of discourse in the sense that it has influenced not only the structure of language and the modality of lifestyle, but also the content of routine daily acts of communicative exchanges. The messages of advertising have permeated the entire cultural landscape. Printed advertisements fill the pages of newspapers and magazines and commercials interrupt TV and radio programmes constantly. Ads and commercials now offer the same kinds of promise and hope to which religious and social philosophies once held exclusive rights: security against the hazards of old age, better positions in life, popularity and personal prestige, social advancement, better health and happiness. Moreover, in today's world the advancement in 'advertising language' goes hand in hand with the advancement in technology.

With the advent of industrialization in the nineteenth century, style of presentation became increasingly important in raising the persuasive efficacy of the ad text. Accordingly, advertising started to change the structure and use of language and verbal communication over the century. With the close of the nineteenth century, American advertisers in particular started using more colloquial, personal and informal language to address the customer and also exploited certain effective rhetorical devices to

attract attention to a product.¹ This new form of advertisement became so persuasive that by the early decades of twentieth century, it started becoming a component of social discourse, resulting in the change of some of the basic ways in which people communicated with each other and in which they perceived commodities and services. From the 1920s onwards, advertising agencies sprang up all over, broadening the attempts of their predecessors to build a rhetorical bridge between the product and the consumer's consciousness.² Everything from clothes to beverages was being promoted through ingenious new techniques which is again synonymous today with the kind of promotion being done in the world of technology. There is no denying the fact that the language of advertising has become the language of all. It is, therefore, no exaggeration to claim that most of our information, intellectual stimulation, and lifestyle models come from or are related to, advertising images.

'Advertising language' can be defined as an organisation of text that suggest some cohesion or meaningful interpretation to the target consumers, demands description of its functional and formal aspects with reference to the semantic and pragmatic interpretations'. Therefore, I am focussing on the development of a framework for classification and analysis of the observed linguistic patterns of various advertising texts. The first step in any stylistic study is to make a wholesome and systematic description of linguistic features of the text or texts, which is usually attained from the study of graphology,³ lexis⁴ and grammar: Stylistic analysis at graphological level deals with various aspects of design in graphology such as punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, typography⁵ and the layout of the text, all of which can be utilized for communicative purposes and eye-catching effect.

The most conspicuous among these designs is the *punctuation*. The use of full stop helps to achieve emphatic effect results in many one-word sentences or sentence fragments in English ads, which is a particular writing feature in advertising. For instance : And, for a short time, you even have the luxury of paying less. So test-drive the XG350 at your *Hyundai dealership*. *Because when you get this much car for this little money, you win. According to grammatical rules, the sentence should have been as follows : "And, for a short time, you even have the luxury of paying less, so test-drive the XG350 at your Hyundai dealership, because when you get this much car for this little money, you win."* The advertiser turns the clauses into sentence fragments by applying full stops; thus shortening the sentence length, simplifying the sentence structure and making the ad more accessible.

It can be observed in the following Canon Printer ad that compared with commas,

1 G. Dyer, *Advertising as Communication*, London, Routledge, 1982.

2 Sayer, Saussure & Schulz, *African Nebula*, Issue 3, June 27,(2011)(2005)(2006).

3 Graphology: the study of handwriting, Oxford English Dictionary, 2012.

4 Lexis: the stock of words in a language, Oxford English Dictionary, 2012.

5 Typography: the style and appearance of printed matter, Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2012.

dashes (another form of punctuation) separate the parentheses⁶ and adverbials further away from the main clause, which in turn put more emphasis on them: *The i860 prints out up to 23pp m in black and up to 16pp m in colour - making it one of the fastest printers in its class.* The adverbial of consequence "making it one of the fastest printers in its class" can be separated from the main clause by a comma making the sentence look like: "The i860 prints out up to 23pp m in black and up to 16pp m in colour, making it one of the fastest printers in its class." In the ad, however, a dash is employed instead of a comma whereby the adverbial becomes more eye-catching since it is detached from the main part of the sentence. The use of 'dash' here helps to highlight the consequence, so as to emphasize the superior quality of the printer - it is one of the fastest printers in its class.

Secondly, the realm of advertising language, at the lexical level incorporates *the use of monosyllabic verbs*, favorable adjectives, comparative and superlative degrees, personal pronouns and compounds. In order to make the advertised information easily understood and remembered, advertisers usually employ simple words, especially monosyllabic verbs in their ads such as: 'make' in "make.believe.", the popular ad of the techno-giant, SONY.



Another suitable example in this connection is "*Next is What?*", the ad-slogan for the promotion of SAMSUNG mobile phones employing the two monosyllabic words 'Next' and 'What'. The design of punctuation in the form of a question mark, once again comes into play, this time leaving a rhetorical impact and a deep curiosity in the mind of the reader or viewer.



The monosyllabic verbs used by the CANON printer and the *EOS CANON* ads are: *be, print, fit, mean, pop, wed.* In English, short words are usually the most familiar and therefore the most easily understood by a wide range of readers. Moreover, most short

6 Parentheses: a word, clause, or sentence inserted as an explanation into a passage that is grammatically complete without it, Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2012.

words are of Anglo-Saxon origin, thus generating greater emotion than their Latinate equivalents. The high frequency of monosyllabic verbs used in the sample ads also helps to make the ads more persuasive.

The use of *favourable adjectives* to introduce and describe the performance and qualities of the advertised item is not a novel practice in the domain of 'Advertising Language'. As Leech (1966) observed, "Advertising language is marked by a wealth of adjective vocabulary."⁷ This observation can be well supported with the example of an ad taken from EOS Canon which reads: '*Leading edge technology...*', '*...all the features of a traditional SLR*'. In this example, the word "leading" indicates that Canon has applied the newest technology in digital camera and ensured its best quality.

In addition to favorable adjectives, advertisers tend to use *comparative and superlative degrees* to indicate the excellent quality of their product or service. However, since it is illegal for advertisers to discredit or unfairly attack other products or ads, the advertisers do not make specific comparisons between their product and others by naming or referring to their rivals. An instance of employing the comparative degree can be found in the SWISS AIRLINE ad: '*with extra room for you in our new SWISS Business Class designed to relax you even More.*' Further, from constructing claims to the comparative superiority of their products, advertisers also use superlative degree to describe the uniqueness of the products as in the EOS Canon ad: '*And when wed to over 50EF autofocus lenses, the newest entry into the EOS system pops the ultimate question.*' By using superlative degree, the ad conveys the message that the product advertised is equipped with the latest technology, hence the best of its kind without speaking ill of others. For instance the ad of the refrigerator company Kelvinator that reads: *Kelvinator, the coolest one.*



Sometimes the merging of comparative and superlative degrees are found bringing out the desired effect, as it is the case with the techno-brand SANSUI: *Better than the Best.*

Another significant linguistic device, at the lexical level, used in the arena of 'Advertising Language' are the *Personal Pronouns* like 'you' and 'we'. The use of such words not only make the language sound warm and friendly but even help to narrow the gap between the advertiser and the reader/viewer, making the ads more appealing. The best example in this regard would be the Canon Camera ad that reads: *Delighting You Always.*

7 G. Leech, *English in Advertising*, London, Longman, 1966.

Canon
Delighting You Always



The Swiss Airline ad is another apt instance of this practice: 'We want to make flying an experience of excellence...', 'You'll enjoy more leg room and our attentive Service And you'll appreciate our unique lie-flat seats offering the ultimate in sleeping comfort.' In this example, the use of Personal Pronoun 'you' makes the reader/viewer feel that he is the particular person the advertisers care about and are eager to help. Likewise 'we' denotes the responsibility on the part of the service provider. Through the use of personal pronouns, the advertisers try to convince the reader/viewer that all the technologically innovated products and service they offer are out of consideration of his particular needs and benefits.

As the ultimate purpose of advertisement is to capture the attention of the reader or the viewer, messages regarding a technological product are often found to be shortened or reduced. Short phrases or 'ad-slogans' establishing relevance with the product or the brand are also employed in plenty. The physical properties of the organisation of the text thus play the crucial role of capturing the reader's or listener's attention at once. The following examples can be cited as cases of *message reduction technique*⁸ of the organisation of the advertising text:

1. Connecting People: Advertisement of 'Nokia' mobile set.



⁸ The Linguistic Patterns of Advertising Text: A Study of Kolkata. *Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 5(Nov. 2006)2.

2. Let's Go: Advertisement of 'Alto' car.



Next in the order in the role of linguistics are those advertisements that depict a didactic or teaching like pattern through the effect of the punchlines. It is noteworthy that the technological products marketed through these advertising texts or punchlines, necessarily links the sense of 'ever desired' social power and a sense of social freedom along with the products. One such ad-text is exemplified below:



Airtel - Express yourself: A print media and an audio-visual frame of Airtel mobile connection advertisement.

Similarly, the advertisement of the mobile phone, Samsung Galaxy S III with its catchy punchline, **Designed for Humans** signifies a modern technology where everything is possible in just one click.



A phone which apparently finds the inspiration for its design from nature. Of course, what this boils down to in the ad itself is little more than showing off how it can take pretty nature-photos. Like nature the Galaxy S III is itself an ecosystem designed for humans. There is, however, something oddly biblical here; a weird parallel between the phone and nature, and how nature itself is designed for humans. Sony Vaio's spark a trend is yet another catchy punch line which actually started trend of series which had new features like colour variation, touchpad panel, increased rigidity and reduced weight and ergonomically designed keys.

The phrase 'spark a trend' portrays an aesthetic yet functional design giving the product a very contemporary feel. And nothing could better justify and make it clearer to the audience than the fact that the brand ambassador, Kareena Kapoor, who endorses it, had actually also 'sparked a trend' of size zero; well suited with the modern, slim and stylistic Sony Vaio laptops.



LG, the other techno-giant also has an attractive punch line that reads: **Life's Good.** The punch line very well connects to the consumer or to the common man as it provides a wide range of products to make one's life good. It's products ranges from TV, washing machine, kitchen and home appliances which have become a part of our necessities in our day to day life. They are not only consumer-friendly but also economical with modern features and energy saving qualities, thus 'making life good'.



Apart from the above mentioned types of advertising text patterns, another pattern which is felt worthy to mention in this connection are those ads which sport with the orthographic characters of the ad-text either by omitting or replacing one or more characters. Thus, highlighting some characters implying an additional weightage to some catch 'forms' which is made significant in the particular organisation. Supportive instances are presented as follows:

1. CONNECTIV _ _ Y

Experience the power of IT - visit the Infocom 2005 examination & get wired to tomorrow.

(This is a print media advertisement of Infocom 2005 conference and exhibition.)

2. CALCU _ _ A9 is incomplete without The Telegraph.

(This is a hoarding advertisement of the newspaper, 'The Telegraph')

3. Bengali Ad: icche moton e _ cche puron¹⁰ i.e. fulfillment of wish, according to will.

(This is a hoarding advertisement of a branded computer, 'Chirag'). In this ad the 'i' of the word 'icche' (meaning 'wish') has been replaced by 'e', the initial sound of the term 'electronics' as it is the ad of an electronic good.

In conclusion, I would like to say that 'Advertising Language' has progressed beyond the use of simple techniques for announcing the availability of products or services. It has ventured into the domain of persuasion, and its rhetorical categories have become omnipresent in contemporary social discourse. Everywhere one turns, one is bound to find some ad messages designed to persuade people to buy a product. All this leads to the inescapable conclusion that advertising has developed, since the first decades of the twentieth century, into a privileged form of social discourse that has unparalleled rhetorical force in the technologically equipped twenty first century.

In the words of Beasley and Danesi, "brand names, logos, trademarks, jingles, and slogans have become part and parcel of the 'mental encyclopedia' of virtually everyone who lives in a modern-day society."¹¹

As far as linguistic conventions are concerned, advertisers take liberties in modifying the natural order of the language depending upon the product of advertisement and the target group of consumer. In doing so, the advertisement captures the listener's or reader's attention and enable them to arrive at a certain point of understanding affecting the reference of the product. Therefore linguistics play a pivotal role between the modern technofreak consumer and the product and helps him understand the product, clarifying the reason for buying it.

9 Advertisement Hoarding in Kolkata, (Seen on 17 October, 2012).

10 Advertisement Hoarding in a busy Kolkata street, (Seen on 17 October, 2012).

11 R. Beasley and M. Danesi, *Persuasive Signs*, Berlin, New York, 2002.