

ADVERTISING LANGUAGE: WORDS THAT TRIGGER FEELINGS

Ramona Agneta NEDEA (CIORANU)

Some people have the tendency of giving it a cold shoulder, imposing a certain distance towards it, pretending that, even if for some it might 'work', for them it does not. I strongly believe that advertising language should not be treated as a step sister or as ordinary discourse; there are marketing strategies and also many other proofs to confirm that advertising influences a large group of individuals in a surprisingly direct way.

Even if advertising has a passing character, a short life, its effect lasts longer. The traces advertising leaves behind get together in forming messages about the culture they come from. These messages reflect the values of the leading social groups that produced their texts, but this self-reflection can even go that far as to become normal for everybody.

The purpose of this paper is to analyze advertising language as the form of discourse that, appealing to feelings, contributes in a significant manner to the way we build our own identity.

In order to become functional, ads need to use the common resources of the language in ways that can influence our decisions and can have a special significance for us. Consequently, there are two aspects to be analyzed and those are *the message itself* and *the way the message is conveyed*.

What is advertising?

Advertising, a form of commercial mass communication designed to promote the sale of a product or service, or a message on behalf of an institution, organization, or candidate for political office, may be seen as the best product that media gave birth. I do not believe this idea is too daring since the definition of the term 'media' in Webster's Dictionary names media as "*a vehicle (as a radio or television program or newspaper) used to carry advertising.*"

But what is advertising? A simple answer would be a means for promoting goods or services. Nowadays we see advertising as an image for glamour, prestige, class, all these being promised to the consumer in the exchange of buying a particular product. Advertising makes us perceive the products in a playful way or on the contrary by exploiting our fears.

We usually take advertisements for granted because they are so pervasive, but many people, advertisers themselves, claim that they are one of the most important influences in our lives. Advertising fills our newspapers and is spread all over the urban environment. It is a highly organized institution, involving many artists, writers and film directors. Advertisements advance and perpetuate the ideas and values which are indispensable to a particular economy system. Advertisements want us to buy things, use them, throw them away and buy replacements in a cycle of continuous consumption.

Some advertisements are inaccurate, misleading or just plainly irritating. On the other hand, many of us must have had the opportunity to say "That's a really good

advertisement!" as they can also be well designed, skilfully produced, attractive, entertaining and funny at the same time. Nevertheless, we should not forget their economic function which is the main issue and not the message that lies behind their superficial gloss.

We have been told that the primary function of advertising is to introduce a wide range of goods to consumers and thus to support the free market economy, but this is not for sure the only function it has. Advertising seems to be more and more involved in the manipulation of social values and attitudes, and apparently less concerned with communicating the essential information about goods and services. Some critics even suggested that advertising operates in the same way as myths in primitive societies, providing people with simple stories and explanations, reinforcing accepted modes of behaviour and acting as an anxiety-reducing mechanism resolving contradictions in a complex or confusing society.

Advertising, just like many other subjects, has gathered favourable and unfavourable opinions. There are people who criticize advertising, arguing that it creates false wants and encourages the consumption of goods incompatible with the urgent human needs. Advertising is seen as an irrational system appealing to our emotions which have nothing to do with the goods on offer, suggesting that the only way to obtain social success and happiness is through private acquisition. On the other hand, those who defend advertising say that it is economically necessary and that it has brought many benefits to society. It contributes to society's wellbeing and raises people's standard of living by encouraging the sales of mass-produced goods and thus stimulating production and creating employment and prosperity.

Drawing Attention

The term "advertising" comes from the Latin "advertere" and means to direct someone's attention to something.

It is obvious that advertisers want their texts to catch the reader's attention. The precise purpose of copy-writers is to make readers observe their message in order to react spontaneously or to develop a favourable attitude towards the product or service described by the ad. More and more, written commercials have to compete with a series of other texts within our culture. Consequently, copy-writers need to find ways to grasp the readers' attention from the printed page.

Shocking images and taboos

A recent strategy of drawing attention is the reproduction of sensational or shocking images. For example Benetton clothing company used in advertising campaigns a series of shocking images reproducing real life and death scenes such as a new born, his body still covered with maternal blood or a dying man. Of course they produced rumours and public disapproval but they only worked in their benefit drawing even more attention on the company and its products.



Such shocking images, also called by advertisers “non-ads” function as a double advertisement considering people’s reaction. Regarding the dominant ideology of a culture, it is quite relevant everything that is not accepted because it shocks and everything that is considered acceptable and supposes a certain degree of risk or daring (boldness). Such ads have as main objective to shock the reader, many of them having well-founded reasons such as charity organizations or non-profit organizations in their continuous fight for raising funds.

In the same register of “shocking”, I would include “taboo”. Taboo, the idea of the “forbidden zone”, of something that cannot be mentioned, shown or uttered, can be applied to social groups and to personal experiences as well.

Advertising is many times a social attitude thermometer, because if we really want it to work and bring results, it has to meet (match, touch) market mentality and attitudes. But it would be a mistake to believe that advertising is a simple reflection of our way of being. Advertising, as public discourse, is one of the tools we make use of to build the world around us, showing the way people are, who is important and why, what should make us worry and why, and so on. In conclusion, many times advertising uses its own creation or world projection as target.

Text, intertext, stereotypy

So far we have mainly focused on images. But advertising is a lot more than image. It is a well-known fact that the reader does not watch the images separately from the text coming together with them; nor does he read the text without watching the pictures. Such as an image can offer suggestions, a written text can be the vehicle of a message by the way it appears. The text together with the image form a unity and, analysing this unity, we might say that writing is a form of creating images. We may also say that it has its own paralinguage according to the clothes the copy-writer chose for it (font, size, space, bold letters, punctuation, etc.).

Going a bit further in analysing the text, we should also mention that the intertext can be an important component of an advertising message, through the fact that the original text that the second makes reference to has already communicated a message that can be further used and developed. This way, the second text can be understood in the context of the first one that has already left traces - and this can work as an advantage.

The efficiency of the intertext becomes obvious only if the readers are able to remember the original commercial and connect the context and the references. Anyhow, whether they do it or not is not really important, since in the last situation the new commercial will only be more enigmatic and this is always useful. People will have to ask other people about the meaning and the main objective of advertising is fulfilled by raising questions and discussions around the subject.

Even if advertising is a relatively recent form of discourse, compared to literature for example, it has enough experience to have a history and just as modern writers can build their stories using traditional models, copy-writers can use older versions of commercials to support new ones. The best part about connecting a new commercial to an old one is that a slogan or the song of a commercial lasts longer than we would like to.

- Let’s make things better – Philips.
- Life’s Good - LG
- Like no other - Sony
- Everything we do is driven by you - Ford
- The car in front is a Toyota - Toyota.
- Connecting people - Nokia
- Hello Moto - Motorola

- I am what I am - Reebok
- Just Do it - Nike, Inc
- Impossible is Nothing - Adidas
- Because you are worth it - L'Oreal Cosmetics
- Keep Walking - Johnny Walker
- The King of Good Times - United Breweries
- Coffee at its Best - Nescafe
- Always Coca-Cola - Coca-Cola
- Have a break, have a KITKAT! - Kitkat.

For example if a company established old people as target group, by using a slogan they can recognize, it will make them feel special, for being part of a group of people that remember old times.

Inter-textuality has no boundaries; it does not necessarily imply a certain slogan for a specific product. It can extend to popular sayings, known traditional literary texts, idioms, film lines, etc.

Involving the Reader

The reader or the audience represents the main target of the advertisers. The verdict whether an advertisement is good or bad is in all cases given by the reader and his direct reaction to it. Getting the reader involved is one of the best ways of ensuring the advertisement's success, and one of the best strategies of involving the readers is aiming at their weak points through a well-formulated question at the beginning of a commercial.

The appeal is mostly emotional, making the reader worry about different issues: Do I have the right hair colour? Do I look ok? Do I have enough money saved? Who will take care of me when I grow old? How can I protect my child/children?

Another strategy of involving the reader is the power of comparison. By asking the reader to provide the comparative reference, he becomes a part of the advertisement. Advertisers avoid making comparisons between their product and a rival one. For example a shampoo producer will not say explicitly that his shampoo is better than the others on the market. He will not say X is better than Y or X washes your hair better than Y. He will definitely not use a comparative reference. But this does not prevent him from saying that X is better. And here comes the role of the reader. He will automatically try to find a comparative reference "better than the older version" or "better than the other competitive products", etc.

A third way of involving the reader is using "hot" themes. By hot themes I mean connecting the product to what is important for people in that particular period. For example when people are concerned about pollution, expressions like "a cleaner solution", "a better environment", "the pure choice", "natural" receive at least a sympathetic welcome from the target audience. Positive connotations always encourage the buyer to believe he is doing the right thing, the right choice that he fits into the big picture of the world created by the huge industry of advertising.

Text, Context and Discourse

While analyzing ads as cultural discourse, we should also mention the notions of "discourse analysis" and "discourse" alone. Discourse reaches out further than language itself. When we think of discourse in the wider context of communication, we can extend its analysis to include non-linguistic semiotic systems (systems for signalling meaning), those of non-verbal and non-vocal communication which accompany or replace speech or writing. Non-verbal discourse modes include painting, sculpture, photography, design, music and film. Even when texts are essentially verbal, talk is interwoven with gesture, facial

expression, movement, posture to such an extent that it cannot be properly understood without reference to these “extras”.

Discourse may be employed to refer not only to linguistic uses but also to other types of non-verbal communication, and even to any form of semiotic activity, visual images included.

Speaking of discourse analysis, although the main focus is on language, it is not concerned with language alone. It also examines the context of communication: who is communicating with whom and why, in what kind of society and situation; through what medium, how different types and acts of communication evolved, and their relationship to each other. When music and pictures combine with language to alter or add to its meanings, then discourse analysis must consider these modes of communication, too.

This kind of approach can be justified by the fact that neither specific acts of communication nor the internal mechanisms of language can be well understood in any other way. Discourse analysis views language and context in a holistic manner.

As there is always a dispute between different schools of linguists over the terms “text”, “context” and “discourse”, it seems better to closely approach them and be more specific regarding their use.

Text means linguistic forms, temporarily and artificially separated from the context for the purposes of analysis.

Context includes substance (the physical material which carries or relays the text), music, pictures, paralanguage (meaningful behaviour accompanying language), co-text, intertext, participants and function (what the text is intended to do by the senders and addressers, or perceived to do by the receivers and addressees).

Discourse is text and context together interacting in a way which is perceived as meaningful and unified by the participants who are part of the context and observers of it as well.

The task of discourse analysis is to describe both this phenomenon in general and particular instances of it and to say how participants distinguish one type of discourse from another. Maybe this could be one of the reasons why discourse analysis is sometimes accused of being too large and rather messy, since it cannot bring to analysis the precision of approaches that isolate one facet of communication from others. The study of language must take context into account because language is always in context and there are no acts of communication without participants, intertext, situations, paralanguage and substance. By refusing to ignore context, discourse analysis becomes like a road with no end, yet this is a necessary condition of its subject. Discourse, and especially discourse as complex as advertising, always holds out more to be analyzed or to be said.

If we were to analyze the components of an ad perhaps it would contain participants, substance, pictures, music, society, function, language and paralanguage. There are studies of advertising which separate out different components, concentrating on one or a few and ignore the others. For example, there are studies of the language of advertising which have little or nothing to say about its pictures and music or the people who create it, but there are also studies which describe the pictures of advertising without paying any attention to language.

Each element comes into existence through the interaction of the others. A society is its senders, receivers, discourses and situations. A participant is identified by his or her language, paralanguage, position in society.

Although contemporary advertising is relatively young, it already has a considerable tradition. Each new ad is encountered against a background of thousands of earlier ads. The effect of reading in the context of tradition is well known especially in the study of literary discourse. But although there have been ads at least since classical times, advertising in the

era of colour magazines, television and the Internet is a new phenomenon, both in nature, quantity and effect.

Besides the existence of some basic rules about the way texts function, different cultures bring different attitudes and values to a text. If advertising does not consider these differences or tries to eliminate them, difficulties or lack of success will most likely appear. Such an example would be the Volvo campaign from the 90s when they tried to sell in the same way throughout all Europe. Lacking response, the campaign was ceased shortly after and Volvo went back to promoting the car safety in Switzerland and Great Britain, its performances in Germany and so on.

But maybe the best example of cultural variation lies in verbal translation. Translators know that the essence of a good advertising is never only about translating words, but in giving the right connotation, and the right connotation differs from one culture to another. This means to adapt the copy to the culture of the target audience.

One of the functions of the advertising discourse is that of signalling a problem that can be solved by using a certain product.

The big world picture created through advertising is entirely determined by who advertisers think will do the shopping or just take the decision of buying and by what those people believe about themselves to need in order to spend money on the product. If advertisers believed a bigger income were in the pocket of sick people, lonely parents, disabled, lesbians, our commercials would tell complete different stories.

According to their themes or attitudes and feelings they are meant to appeal to, we might try to list the most common.

1. Happy families
2. Rich luxurious lifestyle
3. Dreams and fantasy
4. Successful romance and love
5. Important people, celebrities or experts
6. Glamorous places
7. Success in career or job
8. Art, culture and history
9. Nature and natural world
10. Beautiful women
11. Self-importance and pride
12. Comedy and humour
13. Childhood

Conclusions

Many people strongly deny that they are influenced by advertising and regard them as lies, huge exaggerations, or as idiot triviality. It is probably true to say that most people are consciously skeptical of advertising, however they might find it difficult to resist the more general social image or message presented along with the commercial. For example, we can make friends by drinking a certain type of wine, or the right kind of beer, get a boyfriend or girlfriend by using the right shampoo, become a super-mother adored by her husband and children and envied by her neighbours by using some special ingredients to cook or a certain type of detergent. It is interesting to notice the ability of the advertising media to shape and sometimes change a person's behaviour, opinions or attitudes and also the effects of advertising on society as a whole.

Many critics of modern consumer culture say that the real impact of advertising is on the cultural climate of society. For example the language and the values of advertising took up a variety of communication forms in modern society. The so called "sales talk" and

genuine communication has penetrated such media as the commercial cinema, TV programmes and also popular literature. In many fictional stories, prose adopts the tricks and style of advertising copy and imagery. Whether it describes a product or a romantic affair, the prose is bland, superficial and relies upon the use of romantic images and clichés. Values such as love, friendship, pleasure, happiness, sexual attraction are considered to be the magic ingredients of the advertising recipe and are often confused or transferred to the possession of things. Advertising also makes use of hypnotic and daunting language, of images and suggestive commands and at the same time of false familiarity. This means that the media inhibit or confuse conceptual thought by encouraging us to live in a world of hypnotic definitions, thus denying any effective cognitive evaluation on our part.

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