

STYLISTIC INTERPRETATION OF ADVERTISING DISCOURSE

Alena Štulajterová

Abstract

A position of advertising in contemporary society is evidently strong. It has become a part of our everyday life, influencing our opinions and decisions through different forms of media. One of the main objectives of copywriters is to create an advertisement which will attract reader's attention and evoke interest in buying promoted product. There are more factors that help the creators to achieve this goal, yet the power of word plays the key role. This contribution presents some productive linguistic patterns which are effectively used in advertising discourse. We particularly want to emphasize the remarkable role of stylistically significant devices in advertisements.

1 Introduction

There are as many different types of formats and contents as there are different types of products, and the problem for the advertising copywriter is always one of appropriateness and effectiveness, on the basis of how the product and the target audience is perceived, etc. Press advertisements must interrupt, attract, entertain and persuade. One of the main tasks of the study of the style in advertising discourse should be to identify linguistic and rhetorical choices in particular advertisements used in the business of "attracting without distracting" (Grygel 1991: 12). The most frequent linguistic patterns and techniques in advertising discourse include:

- breaking the rules of spelling and syntax;
- making an advertisement easy to read – use of a simple, personal and colloquial expressions, slang and a familiar vocabulary (*Pool toys. Pool boys. Malibu. Top down. New in Town? Love ya too.*);
- memorability – often enhanced when phonetic stylistic devices such as rhyme, rhythm or alliteration are used (*With taste like this he has to be a prince.*);
- an intimate, interactive addressing of the reader, with a wide use of ellipses, substitution or interrogative and imperative forms (*Disappointed by the service other airlines don't offer? ADD CLOROX. – SUBTRACT DIRT*). According to Urbanová (2006) "in these exchanges the interactive potential becomes more flexible and dynamic, rendering pragmatic meanings of intimacy, informality, spontaneity and emotiveness" (ibid.: 174).
- abundant use of superlatives and hyperbole in characterization of the product or its user (*The Secret's out. Pantene Pro-V is the world's **best** hair care system. – **The most unforgettable** women in the world wear Revlon*);
- evaluations and comparatives (only in indirect reference to rival products);
- puns, plays on words, etc.

As the images in advertising discourse are often timeless, it is the copy which provides the anchor, while the combination of image and the text provides the message. Besides linguistic devices the copywriters utilize a whole range of non-linguistic patterns and techniques in persuasive advertising. The most effective ones include:

- amusement – presented situation is itself amusing or familiar, one that readers can identify with (“*My cholesterol count dropped to 4.8 in a month. I think that’s amazing.*” – Flora pro-active);
- endorsement – analogizing between personality (event) and the product (*Only the highest standard reaches the Centre Court. And only Rolex is there to time it.* Rolex – Wimbledon);
- emotional appeal – mother-love, sex, manliness, femininity;
- authority of a specialist – e.g. a dentist persuading us about a uniqueness of particular toothpaste;
- an appeal to fear or anxiety (*If a tree falls on your car in the forest, does anyone hear it?* – On Star satellite service).

2 Headlines and slogans

In advertising discourse, apart from the text and the image, it is the general impression of the **headline** that strikes readers’ attention first. Initially, the headline must engage, be quickly understood and must lead the audience into the body of the advertisement. Therefore, it usually occupies the entire top half of the advertisement and it is written in large letters. This technique can be just as eye-catching as a dramatic photograph or illustration (Boveé & Arens 1992).

The image may be what catches our attention first; nevertheless, a catchphrase or slogan is what stays in our heads. The word **slogan** originates from the Gaelic term for *battle cry* and slogans have become a battle cry for companies (Wainwright & Hutton 1992). Slogans usually begin as successful headlines and they become standard statements through continuous use. Slogans have two basic purposes: to provide continuity to a series of advertisements in a campaign and to reduce an advertising message strategy to a brief, repeatable, and memorable positioning statement. A slogan should be like old friends – recognized instantly year after year (Boveé & Arens 1992). Effective slogans are short (*Always Coca-Cola*); simple, memorable, easy to repeat (*Go well, go Shell*); and, most importantly, they help to differentiate the product or the company from its competitors.

3 Expressive means and stylistic devices in advertising discourse

Writing a dynamic, persuasive and attractive copy also includes appropriate selection of adequate expressive means and stylistic devices (Galperin 1971). On the **phonetic level**, the main focus in the choice of **expressive means and stylistic**

devices is placed on the sound effect of a letter, a syllable, a word or a word phrase expressed through the following figures of the sound: alliteration (*Aussie 3 minute miracle makes hair more manageable – “I want sun, sea and Sauvignon Blanc”*), rhyme (*It needn't be hell with Nicotell!*) and rhythm (*All day strong. All day long*).

Analysis of the **lexical level** also reveals an ample use of various kinds of expressive means and stylistic devices. Advertising discourse usually presents the language of everyday communication. Therefore, we can find a lot of colloquial or slang words which contribute to the formation of a dynamic and informal side to the advertisement (e.g. *Stay dry. Stay fresh. Don't mess that dress!*).

Creators sometimes use idioms or proverbs which are characteristic by their lexical and grammatical stability. They have a tendency to substitute a certain element of an idiom or a proverb by a word or a group of words, thus making an utterance stylistically significant (e.g. *Early to bed and early to rise, no good unless you advertise; A few apples a day keep the lipo doctor away.*).

Quotations, particularly in a foreign language are quite effective as they evoke the atmosphere of a foreign country, its customs and culture and bring its special characteristics closer (e.g. *The French say that wine has “de la robe du bouquet, de la cuise.”*).

Among the literary figures that are frequently used in advertising discourse, one can find tropes, e.g. metaphor (*There is an entire garden in very packet of our Italian dressing*); metonymy (*We saw Shakespeare in the park, heard Beethoven by the bay, experienced the culture of Mexico*); personification (*Empty glasses are louder than empty words ...*).

On the other hand, some products can potentially give rise to a technical description, using specialist vocabulary and terminology (medical, anatomical, nutritional, and mechanical) that lend its own kind of informed authority to the promotion.

Some effective **syntactical expressive means and stylistic devices** include detached construction (*We fly via Vienna, with one of the world's most modern fleets – and that famous friendly Austrian service...*), parallel constructions (*We saw Shakespeare in the park, heard Beethoven by the Bay, experienced the culture in Mexico ...*), enumeration (*Valet parking, water bars, high heels, highway, movie stars. Film set. Have we met? Life is good in Hollywood.*), various repetition patterns (*Claiming that a product is quality built is easy. Living up to that claim is another matter. A matter of life time. A life time of hard work. At Whirlpool, we believe...*).

Although grammatical means are generally considered stylistically neutral, yet they offer the advertisement a lot of possibilities that can change its stylistic side:

1. a frequent use of incomplete sentences, with noun phrases or even single adjectives, represented orthographically as independent sentences;
2. a preference for simple predicate structures, particularly for simple present tense, and a reliance on the commonest verbs – e.g. CAN – modal

- of positive assurance that ascribes ability or possibility (Crystal & Davy 1969);
3. a tendency to use lengthy and complex noun phrases, with superlative and compound adjectives, and nouns functioning as modifiers;
 4. sentences opened with an IF- or WHEN-clause, or some other means of identifying a specific situation;
 5. an intention to achieve coherence of text through lexical cohesion (reiteration and its “elegant” variation) rather than pronominalization;
 6. a wide use of adjectives; the most popular ones include: *organic, low-fat, irresistible, best, fresh, delicious, safe, natural, etc.*

Some products can potentially give rise to a technical description (using specialist vocabulary from the spheres of telecommunication and information technologies, medicine, electronics, nutrition or anatomy) that lends its own kind of informed authority to the promotion (Jesenská 2005). On the other hand, very many advertisements now seem to avoid worn-out verbs and adjectives, while remaining non-specialist in their treatment of product.

4 Conclusion

This contribution aimed at pointing out that there are definite patterns of language use in advertising discourse which are exploited, or creatively departed from, in many ways. Unexpected strategies and creative exploitation of language in the service of product promotion is often highly valued in advertisements, to the extent that some examples of advertising discourse begin to look very like sub-literary language.

To conclude, the language of advertisements is persuasive, obtaining the power that aims to attract and to hold attention by emotional appeal that relate to our psychological, social or symbolic needs or wants. Our emotions are influenced also because advertisements use art, colour, music but mainly the language that is scientifically planned to produce the required result.

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