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A STUDY ON LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF ADVERTISEMENT

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A Study on Linguistic Features of Advertisement

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Abstract – The reports have addressed both linguistic and extra-linguistic features and trends in advertising and emphasized language and culture-specific elements. This paper also gives ideas for future studies, since nowadays, due to international marketing and increasing globalization there are more cultural transfers to be explored, as cultures are coming in contact far more frequently.

Key words: advertising, cross-cultural analysis, content analysis

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INTRODUCTION

Reports in the previous research have addressed both linguistic and extra – linguistic features and trends in advertising and emphasized language and culture – specific elements. Due to limitless potential for data collection when analyzing advertisements, researchers have both dedicated their work to linguistic strategies in the constructed text of the advertisement and its influential capacity to persuade future customers, and to extra-linguistic strategies in the images and the role they play in the overall message. The numerous studies have dealt with different product types and focused on different aspects, such as the investigation of images in advertisements aimed at men and women, the comparison of advertising strategies of the same types of products in different cultures, the exploration of the underlying messages and ideas in advertisements, to name just a few.

Cultural comparison presents the process of finding similarities and differences in advertisements of the same type of products in different cultures (e.g. food and drinks, cosmetic products, cars, mobile phones, bank services, insurance, etc.). Both verbal and visual elements are interpreted and compared, sometimes separately, sometimes as the combination which constitutes the message. Cultural comparison leads to the identification of advertising strategies and norms, which can, further, result in better understanding of (a) aspects of advertising shared across several countries – **standardization** and (b) aspects of advertising that need to be adapted to local cultures – **customization**. Cross-cultural understanding must be imperative since it can formulate effective localized advertising that would reject the cultural values and norms of its intended audience (Ahmed 2000, 13).

Linguists have dealt with the analysis of language of advertising from the linguistic point of view and specified linguistic means and devices used in advertising texts: Leech's (1966) work on English-language advertising in 1960s Britain highlights the

extensive repertoire of linguistic choices available to copywriters when creating advertising material; Rees (1982) shows how slogans have been used; Cook (1992) focuses on parallelism, metaphor, metonymy, homophones, puns, parody and rhyme, and Myers (1994) includes alliteration, assonance, rhyme, homophones.

English advertising exploits from the high adaptability of the English language. English enables the creators of advertisements to use word puns, figurative language, and to mix individual styles and types of texts. Advertising unifies language, pictures, music; it contains information, invokes emotions and imaginations, it can capture all five senses and, besides it, it has social and practical aim. As a genre, it seems very diversified. There is often an interference of styles and registers; therefore, it is often very difficult to classify advertising stylistically. In the diploma thesis, we will show various aspects and forms of advertising discourse.

Advertising is an inevitable part of our modern capitalist consumer society whose outstanding feature is its competitive fight. "...advertising is not some external curiosity which we examine, from which we are separate and superior, but something of which we are part, and which is part of us..." (Cook 1996: 182). It is everywhere around us: in newspapers, in magazines, on billboards along the streets, on television, in radio, in means of public transport and any place the sponsor pays to distribute their message. The effects of the advertising influence us whether we like it or not.

The concept of slogan is used among authors of books about advertising in various ways. Advertising layout is divided into several parts: headline, body copy (the main part of the advertising message, often divided into subheads), signature line (a mention of a brand-name, often accompanied by a price-tag, slogan or trade-mark) and standing details (e.g. the address of the firm). In this understanding, slogan is

not identified with headline and vice versa and the term is used in narrow sense. However, Greg Myers (Myers 1997) uses the term 'slogan' in larger sense - for any catchy phrase, what a headline definitely is. In many cases, the boundaries between slogan and headline disappear. For that reason, we will accept the second idea and will use the term 'slogan' in broader sense.

The information communicated by the advertisement is not discussing everything about the product. It is incomplete because there is no space enough to describe the product into details. The information only contains what the producer thinks the consumer needs to know. It always contains the name of the product and usually the information how it can benefit the customer.

Angela Goddard emphasizes the idea of narrator and narratees. She says that the writer is the person who constructs the text in reality (in advertising texts, the real writers are the copywriters and artists who work in an advertising agency's creative department), while the narrator is the storyteller within the text.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Goddard (1998) refers to this process as **copy adaptation** and defines it as the process of "adapting the text to fit the culture of its targeted group" with the aim of conveying the message properly and efficiently, because encoding of concepts may vary from culture to culture. Medawar (1979) introduces the term **taste transfer**, which, according to him, does not imply any transfer, but is limited to the introduction of imported, high-technology and high-cost goods, usually of relatively poor value in relation to locally-available alternatives and very often unsuited to local needs.

Ahmed (2000, 13) points out that advertisements should not neglect cultural differences among nations, and that the advertising policy of standardization should be substituted by localized solutions which are more efficient in getting its communication across. Cultural factors may have a significant impact on the way the product and its advertising message would be perceived by the consumers of that culture.

One example of advertising failure, where the differences in cultural attitudes and values were ignored, was Volvo's attempt in 1990 to market a car in the same way across the whole of Europe. The campaign was soon dropped through lack of response, and Volvo went back to some previously accepted traditions and market preferences, hence focusing in the UK and Switzerland on safety, in France on status, in Sweden on value, in Germany on performance (Brierley 1995).

Even the knowledge of the textual system is cultural. In western cultures, texts operate from left to right and this way of reading represents the foundation stone for many 'before and after' sequences. However, unlike

the west, the textual ordering is totally opposite in the Middle East. This simple difference was not taken into account when a large soap powder manufacturer from the West advertised in the Middle East without making any changes to the advert, apart from a verbal translation. Therefore, for Arabic readers, the product was offering to turn their clothes from snowy white to grimy grey, which consequently resulted in the disappointing sale of the product (Goddard 1998). Cultural diversity and translation problems discourage standardization of advertising messages.

Goddard (1998), further, thinks that the area of verbal translation is the clearest way in which cultural variations can be demonstrated and mentions brand names as examples of failures when companies go international or global with their products. The reasons for this are various, sometimes the brand name has negative and connotatively coloured associations in other languages (for connotations in perfume and car names and ads, cf. Cook 1992). For example, some of the products that fail the connotation test for English speaking audiences are toilet paper *Kräpp*, lemonade *Pschitt*, creamy powder *Creap*, cereals *Crapsy fruit* and others. In addition, there are idiomatic mistranslations, as in the Pepsi slogan *Come alive with the Pepsi generation*, which was translated into Chinese as 'Pepsi will bring your ancestors back from the dead' or Kentucky Fried Chicken's *Singer licking* good translated in Chinese as 'eat your Finger of'. The sound system of a language can also play its part in the creation of meaning. For instance, sequences of syllables in one language may be different words in another, as was the case with the British car model The Vauxhall Nova, which bemused its Spanish audience, for whom 'no va' means 'won't go'.

Cutler and Javalgi (1992) conducted cross-cultural analysis of the visual components of print advertising from the U.S., France and the UK. Some of the differences were: the size of the visual, the use of black and white visuals, the size of the product in the visual, the product comparison, while the similarities found were: product portrayal, minority portrayal and elderly portrayal. Therefore, the advertising agency should pay attention to the elements in the adverts which can be standardized and uniform and the elements which have to be localized, if the proper message is to be conveyed.

Frith and Wesson (1991) examined the manifestation of cultural values in advertising of the United States and England. The study found that American magazine advertisements portrayed characters in more individualistic stances than British ones, while, on the other hand, British advertisements made social class differences more evident.

As was seen, the heterogeneity of content analysis is evident in numerous papers on advertisements. However, further research and investigation should be encouraged, because in today's world, advertising seems to have become universal, or some would say,

Americanized. In the climate of increasing globalization, it is vital to notice the social and cultural diversity of the world as rejected in advertisements. For that reason, comparison between two languages and cultures should be foremost, since in that way one can conclude which features of adverts are universal and which are language or culture – specific.

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