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Play Upon Words and Images in Advertising

It is a well-known statement that advertising plays a great role in promotion and, therefore, in business. The commercial nature of advertising is reflected in its definition suggested by the Definitions Committee of the American Marketing Association: "Advertising is any paid-for form of non-personal representation of the fact about goods, services and ideas to a group" (Edwards 1981, p. 3).

Advertising is one of the four elements of the promotion mix, which, in its turn, is included in the marketing mix. Kotler and Armstrong single out the following categories of promotional activities: advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, and public relations (see Kotler/Armstrong 1987).

At the same time, one should always bear in mind that advertising is a complex phenomenon: It greatly influences not only business but also people's worldview and language norm. This accounts for why advertising is considered to be not only part of business communication but also of mass media. Much attention is now being paid to the role of advertising in the life of present-day society, to its influence and effects on people's consciousness (and sub-consciousness).

Professional manuals and publications on the subject suggest two main approaches to the study of advertising: pragmatic approach (which studies and analyses commercial effects of advertising) and cultural approach (which focuses more precisely on the social aspects of advertising). At present, many specialists in advertising claim that the most promising and fruitful approach to advertising is the so-called 'integrated' approach that allows the combination of the information about business processes and tendencies with the data of sociological and linguistic studies.

Wells/Bernett/Moriarty (2000) outline the following functions of advertising: economic, marketing, communicative, and social. Although the scholars support the pragmatic approach to advertising, they find it necessary to sin-

gle out its communicative and social functions alongside with the economic and marketing ones.

To be a success, an ad should not only inform potential customers about goods and services but also persuade and influence them. Obviously, admen should possess knowledge not only about business processes but also about the nature of various psychological and linguistic devices on which the impact of ads on the audience is based.

Knowledge about psychological and linguistic techniques helps to increase the commercial effectiveness of advertising. Very often the success of an ad depends on skilful and creative use of language units.

In most cases, it is the visual content and design of an ad that makes the initial impact and causes us to take note of it. But in order to get people to identify the product, remember its name (or at least make them feel that it is familiar), and persuade them that it is worth buying, ads rely almost totally on the use of language (Crystal 1994, p. 390).

In this connection, two questions are bound to arise: How can expressive language devices help ad-makers to produce the desirable effect on the audience, and how does the language of advertising messages influence language norm? These questions are closely interconnected.

Advertising messages are, as a rule, very laconic and highly expressive. It is quite understandable that very precise work is to be done before an advertisement is presented to the audience. When millions of dollars of business depends on the success of a single advertisement, then it is natural that the person making an ad should weigh the words and the ways in which they are arranged in a text as carefully as a poet does. Sometimes advertisers are called "today's pop-cultural poets" (Nilsen/Nilsen 1978). This reflects the belief that creation, translation, and adaptation of advertising messages require very thorough preparatory work. From this point of view, the character of advertising can be defined as international. Practically in every advertising text, one can find examples of the creative use of language devices – rhyme, alliteration, paronymic attraction, etc. These devices add much expressivity to the text and increase its memorability. Thus, for instance:

*Try Internet free for three months.
Suddenly, it's easy.
For free three month trial, call free on ...*

Or:

Beware. This software types exactly what you say.

Another example:

*Don't get bored before you board. Free gifts & special promotions
are waiting for you 24 hours a day.
Tobacco, Spirits and Perfumes
The only one stop shop.
AIR SUPPLIES*

Not infrequently, the impact of advertising is based on the unconventional use of language units. Leech singles out the following types of linguistic violations: orthographic, grammatical, lexical, semantic, and contextual (Leech 1966). All these types of linguistic violations are widely used in advertising texts. For example:

*Don't have a weekend ...
Have a weekender
Holiday Inn
Weekender Plus*

The expressivity of the following text is based on grammatical violation:

*Just imagine that militia will find out it ...
Dunkin' Donats*

Neologisms are to be mentioned among the most widely used lexical violations, since they help to establish symbolic connections between the product and its name and emotive urges of the potential consumer.

On the one hand, linguistic violations are highly valuable when used in commercially oriented messages. On the other, we should think about how to make an ad expressive and, at the same time, maintain language norm.

Another very important statement to be considered is that the meaning of each text is not only the sum total of its constituent components: It is the purport of the text which always comes first. When creating and translating advertising texts, one should always take into account not only textual and linguistic factors but also cultural and contextual issues; therefore, in order to influence the audience in the most effective way, ad-makers should pay due attention to culture specific language units and to the background knowledge of the recipients. The basis of any successful communication is a shared code (i.e., shared knowledge of realia) that the participants of communication possess. In other words, to be able to understand and appreciate the ad-makers' play upon words and images and to decode the message properly, the readers/listeners (i.e., potential customers) should have certain background knowledge. This is of special importance for ad-makers, since advertising involves "one-way" communication and does not allow copywriters and translators of advertising messages to suggest any explanations or foot-notes. Therefore, when creating or translating advertising texts, copywriters should pay special attention to the social characteristics of the target audience. In the book "The Language of Advertising", Goddard (1998) gives some examples of failures of advertising campaigns that did not take into account cultural variations. She writes that if advertisers do not take cultural differences into account or if they try to break them down, they should expect difficulty or even complete failure.

As well as other expressive language devices (such as those mentioned above – alliteration, rhyme, unconventional spelling, etc.), socioculturally bound language units, when used properly, allow to make an ad not only more colourful and expressive but also memorable and effective. For example:

No woman is an island, unless she wants to be

Want to connect with our new high-speed Internet service powered by AT&T?

Stay in touch. (47 e-mails since breakfast.)

Stay on top of things. (100 shares at 22.)

Stay in love. (Miss you, too.)

With so much on your mind, it helps to have Marriott, Renaissance and AT&T do a little thinking for you.

Like making all those connections easier and 50 times faster.

All from the comfort of your room.

So, you'll have time to think about the one thing you never consider: you.

For more information and reservations visit marriott.com or call your travel agent.

Thinking of you.

Renaissance. Marriott. AT&T.

The phrase used in the headline of this text advertising the AT&T company is an allusion to the phrase "No man is an island, entire of itself", which comes from the poem by John Donne "Meditation XVII". Knowledge about this phrase, which means that no-one can live in complete independence of others, helps to decode the advertising message properly and to see that AT&T offers a wonderful opportunity to "stay in touch", "stay in love" (if you want to). Obviously, the text cannot be understood properly by those who do not possess the required background knowledge.

This concerns not only the creative use of words and sayings – not infrequently ad-makers tend to mention famous people and use their public images to prove the quality of the advertised products and services. For instance:

The world closed to all outsiders. For ten days, correspondent Peter Arnett was the lone reporter in war-torn Baghdad, earning him the title "the quintessential war correspondent" from The New York Times.

Now this Pulitzer-winning journalist, the most famous and visible in the world, has returned to CNN bringing with him 35 years of journalistic excellence.

Correspondent Peter Arnett. Another reason why CNN International is the world's news leader.

The name of a famous journalist is used in this text to prove the competence and popularity of CNN channel. Again, to be properly apprehended, this text requires a certain amount of background knowledge.

The role of culture-imposed rules in advertising could hardly be overestimated: Disregard of possible cultural implications may cost a company money and reputation. More than that, as it has been pointed out, advertising – being a constituent element of mass communications – influences people's behaviour and worldview. Unfortunately, the scope and the topic of this article do not allow concentration on this highly important question – how and to what extent advertising influences people's worldview and language norm. Fortunately, this aspect of advertising is now in the focus of attention and is being discussed jointly by linguists, journalists, and admen. There are still many questions to be answered and many problems to be solved (especially that concerning language norm). Some answers are given by advertising itself. In conclusion, I would like to quote a text advertising Wild World Fund:

If we all do a little, we can do a lot.

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