

PRAGMATIC APPROACH ON ADVERTISING DISCOURSE

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Abstract

The present paper is focused on analysing certain aspects concerning the advertising discourse viewed from the pragmatics point of view. We have chosen this approach because of several reasons.

Firstly, because pragmatics is that linguistic discipline interested in considering the everyday talk for which absolutely nothing could be viewed as "grammatically incorrect" (while traditional linguistics conceives discourse in terms of the dichotomy "grammatically correct – incorrect"). Many of us have uttered sequences of incorrect talk on purpose, in order to ironize certain persons or facts. It means that it is the communicative intention that really matters, and not the message uttered as such.

Secondly, because advertising is one of the most obvious samples of everyday talk, so it could be nicely and easily viewed from a pragmatic point of view.

Thirdly, because such an approach has not been done so far, and we consider it proper as it can reveal more interesting means of building the message. Such an approach could also turn the advertising discourse into a more efficient one (both for the advertiser who can sell the promoted product faster, and for the consumer, as well, who can be more satisfied with the products around him).

The present article comprises four parts: the first part is the literature review on the researched topic, the second part includes the research methodology, the third part presents the case study and the fourth part presents the results and the conclusions.

Keywords: Situation of communication, deictic elements, theories of advertising

Introduction

It is a fact that advertising surrounds us everywhere we go, whatever we do: in the mountains, in the countryside, when we watch our favorite movie or listen to our radio programme, when we simply read a newspaper, or when we use our laptop.

It is also a fact that we do not pay much attention to the commercials or advertisements we bump into as we have got too familiar with them, so that they might be considered as a part of the contemporary landscape. The image of a town with no banners in its streets is unbelievable and it could remind us of the imaginary – so that, unreal- town in `Inception`, the movie which enriched once more the fame of Leo di Caprio , as well as of Chris Nollan, the producer. The town above mentioned, designed by Ariadne – the name has not been chosen at random, I think, as it has deep mythological roots- was a surreal projection of the human mind tormented by nightmares. That very town is the single urban place with no advertising banners in its streets.

We all know that nowadays almost all the products are not simply promoted for what they actually bring (example: a shampoo will wash your hair, a motor-car will bring comfort and speed for you to face your life and business better, etc.); but they are promoted together with an extra-advantage you will get, suppose you purchase the respective product. Most often, that extra-advantage implies an improvement of the personal look.

We should also remember the experiment David Ogilvy made years ago: he asked his students to taste a glass of water telling them: `Here you have still water. How does it taste?' all of them agreed it tasted normally, namely good, the usual taste we all know: still water. Ten he gave them a second glass with water in it, telling them it was tape-water and asked them to taste it. They all felt something unpleasant in its taste. Moreover, there were students who declared that the water smelled badly, too. In fact, they had tasted the same still water, and the strange taste was due to a psychological factor: they had been told that they would be given to drink something worse. That is, the students had not actually tasted the water for the second time, they had tasted the image.(Ogilvy, 1999)

This is what a brand brings about: the image of a superior, stylish, special way of life, envied by everyone. The advertiser activates the psychological mechanism of persuading the target, inducing (the target) the impression of getting a better life by means of using (if purchasing) the promoted product.

What brands sell, is not only a specific category of products, but a style of life. Consumers usually buy in order to fulfil their needs and to impress the people around them too (Sutherland, 2011). They are induced needs which do not actually correspond to their life – we have just mentioned one

of the weak aspects of advertising, aspect for which it has been often criticized.

Literature review

Specialists have been always interested in analysing the way the advertising discourse could be created. Ogilvy was considering advertising discourse such a serious matter that he was convinced that it was even easier to write ten lousy sonnets than one good and efficient advertisement (Ogilvy, 1999).

The advertising discourse is the result of the lucky meeting of the iconic message with the textual one, so that image and text may go together and touch the soul of the consumer making him decide to buy the respective promoted product or service. The concept of **discourse cohesion** assures the compatibility between image and text within an advertisement (White, 2000).

Specialists have revealed that the advertising language should be accessible for every single consumer to be able to properly understand the message in order to react properly (namely, go and purchase the promoted product). The message should be also short: whether it is transmitted via TV or radio, it should not last more than 30 seconds (Condry, 2010). The **slogan** is supposed to have no more than 12 words, while the **body text** is necessary only under certain conditions: whether the promoted product belongs to the category of products for which the public shows a high degree of involvement (Goddard, 2002; Bonnange, Thomas, 2004).

The art of writing an efficient advertising discourse may be decisive for the consumer when he is about to choose among more similar products.

Thus, in point of technology, more producing companies follow the same steps, fact that could imply that their products are almost similar. Yet the consumer is supposed to make a choice and this choice was found to be based on psychological reasons: on that extra-advantage obtained after using the promoted product. For example, any shampoo will wash your hair (the main, basic advantage), but the trade-marks have to be different from one another. This is why the consumer is told that trade-mark X could make her/his hair cashmere smooth, while trade-mark Y will make it diamond shine. And there is also trade-mark Z which will make the consumer irresistible for her/his lover/husband. This is the extra-advantage, the so-called "feather" which will turn the balance towards one certain product, according to the inner wish of the consumer (Sutherland, Sylvester, 2010).

This is why the advertising discourse belongs sometimes to a fairy tale realm- in order to induce the sense of long-lasting happiness and welfare (Popescu, 2005). The advertisement may turn into a short fairy tale meant to induce a calm and optimistic spirit.

Therefore we should perceive the advertising discourse more like a challenge than like an absolute true statement (and not punish it in case the promoted shampoo does not make you look like a Hollywood star). Advertising discourse should be viewed like a game where we willingly enter.

This is the reason why it presents a female guarantee who is always beautiful, young, desirable, sexy and available, and in a good mood, no matter the promoted product. Actually, the female guarantee has been noticed to be used for promoting most of the products and services. (Miroiu, 1995).

We may ask ourselves why the feminine guarantee is preferred to the masculine one. Psychological research studies have revealed that woman influences the course of purchases in a couple/family more than a man does. A female guarantee will be watched both by women (as a comparison term to their own look) and by men, too (who have been always attracted by the feminine beauty) (Todoran, 2004). Situation changes when the same product (let us say, feminine cosmetics) is promoted within a market animated by certain moral norms. The female guarantee can be the same pretty, young lady, but differently dressed (namely, more decently), suppose the product is promoted within the Oriental market (White, 2000).

As far as we see, the advertising discourse, in order to be an efficient one (namely, to sell the product) should take into consideration:

- The type of target it addresses to;
- The age of the promoted product;
- The specific cultural features of the community who will get the promoted product.

Under all circumstances, the advertising discourse should try to fulfil the AIDA principle (attention, intention, desire, action), namely to draw **the attention** of the public, to raise its **interest** in finding out more details about the promoted product/service, to make the public **desire** the respective product and finally to determine the consumer to take **action** (to purchase the product, Salavastru, 2003).

Actually, a good advertisement is not necessarily an artistically written one, with a sophisticated textual message and an exquisite iconic one, but that very advert which will sell the promoted product. Reason for which it has to „speak” the language of the target, to address to those specific needs of the consumer which need to be fulfilled.

In point of needs, we should note there are several levels established so far (Maslow, 1970), and every single product/service is supposed to address to a certain level. But in order to face successfully the fierce competition nowadays, advertisers try and succeed in situating the promoted product within a higher level than the one it should actually belong to. For instance,

although the product is meant to satisfy need (thirst, let us say), the advertiser will associate the product with the necessity of being surrounded by friends, of communicating with the fellows around, of socializing. It is the strategy some soft drinks producers have successfully applied (FANTA soft drink is one example of this kind).

The advertising discourse raises the promoted product to the nobility of a lofty feeling (e.g. friendship), and thus places it within a level of superior needs.

As far as we see, the advertising discourse has been viewed from many perspectives: a social, a psychological or a marketing one. Specialists have been preoccupied by finding out the best way of making it more efficient, in the sense that an advertisement should sell at once both the product and the image of the producing company.

The present study intends to enlarge the ways of making an advertising discourse more efficient by exploring the discourse secrets offered by **pragmatics**. We considered it proper to embark upon such an investigation because such an analyses has not been accomplished so far, and because pragmatics is very suitable to the advertising discourse (which comprises both the iconic message and the textual one).

Research Methodology

We analysed mainly the textual advertising message and we investigated it from pragmatic perspective. Many pragmatic aspects are to be taken into consideration when we speak about the efficiency of the advertising discourse: **the pragmatic act** (namely, the message hidden behind the uttered words), **the context** or **the situational context of the dialogue**, the **discourse register** (which indicates the technical aspects of the information), **the type of verbal acts** (which may indicate the **illocutionary component of the message**), **the type of verbal interaction** (which highlights the relationship established between the interlocutors, namely the advertiser and his consumer) , **the levels of building a conversation**, **the discourse vectors**, **the principles of communication** (whether they are kept or broken and why) (Reboul, Moeschler, 2001).

Sometimes, **the interrogative discourse** may offer interesting interpretations whether we analyse it with pragmatic tools. "Would you like your hair diamond shine?" here is one of the hundreds of interrogative advertising statements meant not to be questions (because the emitter, namely the advertiser, does not need any answer back), but a pretext for presenting the promoted product and for raising the interest of the consumer for the respective product (White, 2000). The "answer" is given on the spot: "Buy this new shampoo!"

The sequence of conversation may be initiated by various „speakers“:

- **By the guarantee** (who stands for the target) **and speaks with someone else** about the advantages of the promoted product. It is the testimonial which allures the consumer;
- **By the guarantee** (who stands for the target) **and confesses a personal dilemma**: he/she does not know what to do to get rid of an unpleasant aspect of life (e.g. dirt in the bathroom, a good occasion for promoting cleaning products);
- **By the advertiser himself** who is ready to satisfy a dream of his interlocutor (the consumer).

All these means contribute to a stronger persuasion of the consumer, because they may create the impression of authenticity in communication.

Because of the reduced dimensions of the present paper, we analysed only two aspects: **the situation of communication** and **the deictic elements**.

The situation of communication represents that specific type of relationship which is established owing to certain work conditions. That is the relationship between doctor and his patient (Ruxandoiu, Chitoran, 1975), between the shop-assistant and client, teacher – student, and so on. In everyday life, the situation of communication implies a certain distance between the two persons and a formal context of developing their communication (Reboul, Moeschler, 2001).

Advertising has brought an element of novelty in building the situation of communication. **The formal context** has been changed into **an informal one**, and the protagonists are no longer separated by the distance of age or of their socio-professional position, but they are real friends (e.g. the bank clerk turn into a close friend with his customer as he knows before - hand the needs and dreams of his client).

The change was necessary because the advertiser felt that his public had been bored with the old type of the situation of communication. No one was really interested any longer in finding out pieces of information about banking services as long as they were supposed to be presented in the old manner : a smiling but stiff and official bank clerk shaking hands with a satisfied client. A change was needed. The present paper will deal with specific types of situations of communication in the case study.

The deictic elements offer a huge diversity of message building strategies. We will focus our attention on two types of deictic elements: the deictic elements of **time** and of **space**.

In everyday talk, each of the two categories mentioned above comprise other two sub-categories, in their turn: objective and subjective deictic elements (of time and of space).

The sequences of dialogue: "Go home!" and "Go to hell!" stand for the objective/subjective perspective upon space.

In advertising, no matter how real the space might be, how familiar and well-known could it seem to the consumer, it is always expressed by means of a **subjective deictic element of space** because it will always render an ideal image of that space.

Advertising is meant to induce the consumer a sense of welfare and happiness and comfort which can be attained only by purchasing the promoted product.

The case study of our research will emphasize interesting aspects of the Romanian advertising discourse of nowadays.

We were also interested in seeing the way the **theories of advertising** may help the advertiser build an efficient message. There are three levels of accessing the target:

- **Learn level** (which offers only information to the public, because only information is needed);
- **Like level** (which makes the public affectively consider the product as there are many similar products in the market and his choice depends on a subjective "feather");
- **Do level** (Which makes the public purchase the promoted product).

The order the levels mentioned above are combined represents the key of the theories of advertising (Bonnange, Thomas, 2010). We will focus our attention only on two such theories: **the cognitive dissonance theory** and **the theory of childish impulse** as they were more relevant for the advertisements we took into consideration.

Interesting things could be said about **the deictic elements of time**, too, regarding the way they are built inside the advertising discourse.

In everyday talk, there is a clear distinction between **the objective** deictic elements of time (example: "I have been waiting for you for *half an hour*. Where have you been?") and **the subjective** ones (example: I have not seen Mary *for centuries*.) The advertising discourse contains only subjective deictic elements of time because the advertiser presents his subjective point of view. Even when the message contains a deictic element of time which in everyday talk is considered to be **objective**, because all the people have the same perception upon it (example: *14 days*), the advertising discourse will give it a **subjective** connotation. For example: *Your teeth will be whiter in 14 days with X toothpaste*. The truth is that the teeth will not be whiter in 14 days, but the consumer will be convinced of this fact and he will use the recommended toothpaste and hope for a better result.

We have noticed, in our case study, that many cosmetics and food staff products make use of the subjective deictic elements of time.

Case Study

Interesting changes have happened in Romanian advertising discourse nowadays (we analysed quite a short span of time: 2009-2013).

We noticed that **the situation of communication** is totally modified, but for the better. Many producers chose to promote their products in this non-conformist manner as they felt they could touch more easily the heart of the target this way.

Thus, we found a changed situation of communication both for products which ask for a high degree of consumer involvement (e.g. banking services), and also for cheap products, for which the consumer will not involve himself too much (a tooth paste, a cleaning product, a bottle of juice).

In 2009, **Transylvania Bank** introduced a type of banking services guarantee totally different from what had been created in the market until that time: the fat bank clerk dressed in an office suit, but with a crown on his head, holding a magic wand in his hand and wearing a fairy like skirt. The contrast between his funny look and the serious institution and services he stands for is obvious. This apparently odd iconic image corresponds to the communicative intention of the advertiser (the emitter of the message). The bank clerk is no longer the person the client should be afraid of as he may be busy and nervous almost all the time, but a fairy-tale character, who is able to make your dreams come true. The consumer will feel comfortable and encouraged to go to such a „friendly” bank.

In 2010, **Colgate Company** created another new type of situation of communication. The relationship dentist – patient improved in the sense that the patient was made not to be afraid to go to the dentist any longer. The traditional image of the dentist cabinet was replaced, and something new was put instead: the dentist was consulting his patients in a supermarket, where everyone is willing to go.

Under such circumstances, the new informal situation of communication (doctor – patient) is based on changing **the context** (the formal, official and cold one is replaced by an informal, friendly, cosy one).

Another type of situation of communication viewed by the present paper is that one built between the producing company and the consumer. Many such companies have chosen to come closer to their clients by means of a friendly situation of communication. We have chosen an advertising campaign of promoting cleaning products in order to illustrate this aspect.

Iconic message

A group of old people is having a party. Suddenly, the phone rings and the hostess, while speaking on the phone, turns sad. Her children come back home and she feels afraid they might find all that mess in the house.

She is also ashamed of letting her children know that she spent her time with her friends as if the gesture were a shameful one.

Textual message

”Do not worry! **Pronto** will help you out in no time! Your house will be shining clean again.” The promoted product becomes a hero able to save the consumer whenever he/she is in need. The same product was presented on the background of another story: two young girls are having a party at home with their friends while their parents are away. The cleaning product turns into a saviour and helps the person in need out of the trouble (Cronin, 2004)

An affective relationship is created between the client and the producing company. When going shopping, the client will choose this product involved in an emotional story because he (the client) empathizes with the guarantee in the story.

In terms of deictic elements, we have found out that the advertising discourse is much different from everyday talk.

Advertising can create ideal, perfect spaces even where they cannot be so. We all know that an office is a place of work (and stress, and communicative tension sometimes). So that, everybody would like to finish quicker his/her work and go home, the place of comfort and good-mood.

Yet **Danone Company** turned the formal office into a new pleasant place (an ideal one, of course) by means of its product: the yoghurt. Once someone has eaten this yoghurt, he/she will not feel the stress of work any longer, and will feel like home. So, the **office** which is an obvious deictic element of space turned into a subjective one in advertising. We have to mention one more thing: the iconic message is responsible for this interesting construction of the deictic element of space.

If we move on to the **deictic elements of time**, we notice the same thing: the most obvious objective deictic elements turned into subjective ones in advertising.

Anti-ageing products have adopted this method. They all say that in a certain number of days, the look of the consumer will be improved (e.g. ”in 14 days your wrinkles will disappear”) the construction „14 days” is no doubt an objective deictic element of time as it will have the same meaning for all the speakers as we all measure time in the same way. Things are differently perceived in advertising where „14 days” does not mean the span of time of 14 days, but a hook able to capture the attention of the consumer and to make her buy the product. It does not matter whether after the 14 promised days she (the consumer) would not notice the disappearance of her wrinkles. She will keep on using the product with the hope of getting the desired advantage.

In point of the **theories of advertising** we have noticed a preference for the **theory of cognitive dissonance** and the **theory of childish impulse** concerning the products for which the consumer does not involve himself too much (cheap products).

Dove Company broke the ice with a non-conformist strategy of building the advertising message: contradicting the target. They applied the theory of cognitive dissonance when promoting their new bar of soap. Here are the steps they followed:

- a) They made sure that their products are appreciated in the market among other similar ones (so they started from the satisfaction of the target);
- b) They introduced an element of contradiction (shaking the cognitive universe of the target): “It looks like a bar of soap, it washes like one, but it is not a bar of soap” The public felt confused: why do they say it is not a bar of soap when I clearly see it is? What else can it be? They also felt confused because they had been satisfied with it until now when they felt like having been cheated;
- c) A greater satisfaction comes: the strange product turns out to belong to the same trade mark and to be even better than before: “It contains $\frac{1}{4}$ hydrating cream. It is our new Dove soap.”

We will exemplify the theory of childish impulse by means of a campaign developed by **Pepsi-Cola Company**.

There is a serious competition between Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola in all the markets they entered. In order to attract more consumers, in 2011 Pepsi-Cola Company started making use of the theory of childish impulse by creating an impressive story in which the promoted product was the main hero. They evoked the times when youngsters (the grown-ups of today) were meeting and socializing on some very unpleasant occasions: working to harvest crops. The times were hard, life was full of oppressions and the only sign of good-mood was the presence of Pepsi-Cola juice. So the bottle of juice becomes the link between two epochs, targeting both the grown-ups of today, as it reminded them of their youth, and the youngsters of today, as it made them curious about those times.

Results.Conclusions

Investigating the last five years of Romanian advertising creation we have noticed changes which could make it competitive with the Western European one. The fact is a great achievement if we take into consideration the young age of our Romanian advertising activity. These major changes refer to the following aspects:

- a) Creating a new typology of guarantees (the saviour, the friendly dentist the funny employer, the woman for ever young) which may increase the impact of the advertising message upon the consumer;
- b) Creating a new expression of time by means of fixing a correlation between the major advantage of using the promoted product and the improvement of the look of the consumer. Thus the consumer decides to use the promoted product not only for the number of days indicated in the advertisement (e.g. 14 days), but as long as he can because he is made to believe in the promised advantage;
- c) Creating new images of the well-known spaces which are not always among the most pleasant ones (e.g. the office, the dentist cabinet, the bank). The consumers are induced a state of good-mood and optimism. As advertising has a strong influence upon the general perception of life, it is very possible that any employer might think that he could turn a busy and stressed working day into a pleasant one by using that magic promoted product (product which is nothing but a bottle of juice, or some yoghurt, or some chewing gum). Or at least, he is given the impression that there is something which may change his working day into a better one;
- d) Creating new attractive stories in which the consumer might feel like being a part of it.

The present article limited its research only to a couple of pragmatic aspects. This investigation could be improved by adding further pragmatic aspects concerning the other category of products which has been left aside on purpose. This article may be used for further investigations in advertising.

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