

A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Language in Mass Media and Advertising

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ABSTRACT

Advertising in the modern world has occupied a different place in the households of ordinary people. It has become an important way of communication. Not only does it reach every house in the world but at the same time it influences and manipulates the decision of the ordinary people. Language plays a crucial role in advertising as it allows the advertising to be unique and influential. The paper aims to analyze the language of a few selected advertisements and discuss essential characteristics of advertising language in the mass media in order to understand how it reaches the target audience.

Key words: Advertising, Language, Target audience, Sociolinguistics

Introduction

Human life would be null and void if humans cease to communicate. The social structure, upon which the very existence of humans is dependent, itself relies on communication. Not only does communication allow people to connect and create but also allows human growth. Communication can therefore be termed as a social process essential for the culture of humans. Language therefore becomes a tool to achieve this social process of communicating with each other. Another thing that makes human different from their animal cohabiters is their use of writing as a means of communication. It has been a part of the human experience for more than 5,000 years. In fact, the first essay, which was coincidentally about speaking effectively, is estimated to be from around the year 3,000 B.C. It had originated in Egypt. It was not until much later that the ordinary population was thought to be literate. In fact, most of the ancient texts were written as instructions for communicating effectively. It further emphasized on the early civilizations' value of furthering the practice. Through time this reliance has only grown and especially in the Internet age. Now in the modern scenario, written or rhetorical communication is one of the most favored and primary means of talking to one another — be it an instant message, a Facebook post or a tweet.

Advertisements on the other hand are an amalgamation of both written and spoken words. In the recent times, it acts as a means by which consumers are informed about the availability of certain products in the market and by which customers access the products as well. Advertising is a word originated from Latin 'advert ere' that means grab attention towards. (Cohen 129)

Media stages these advertisements as it reaches a huge number of audiences and influences them directly. This influence has been found out to be socially useful, relative and free from any kind of semantic problem. According to Trosbog (1997) mentions that the concept of advertisement is a genre in which he believes the defining principle and standard is for communicative purpose for any genre which is proposed, projected and planned for the achievement.

The Theoretical Framework

Interactional Sociolinguistics is used for the theoretical framework of this study. Interactional Sociolinguistics concentrates on the language in its social context. It focuses on the language used in interaction by closely observing a speech event in a particular community. Interactional Sociolinguistics was developed by John Gumperz. It usually focuses on face-to-face interactions in which there are significant differences in the sociolinguistic resources and institutional power of the participant. It has a broad methodological base, with deep roots in ethnography, dialectology, pragmatics, Goffmanian and conversation analysis, and it generally seeks as rich a dataset on naturally occurring interaction as it can get. Collecting the data involves the audio and video recording of any situated interaction from particular events, people and groups, supplemented by as much participant observation and retrospective commentary from local participants as possible. The analysis moves across a wide range of levels of organization, starting from the phonetic to the institutional. It forms the central pillar within the linguistic ethnography and encourages researchers to drill down to the detail of social problems by making optimum use of the sensitizing frameworks available in the disciplines focusing on language.

Goffman, by analyzing face-to-face interaction, concluded that it is very important for understanding how language is situated in particular circumstances of social life. He also emphasized that face to face interaction allows us to understand how language reflects and adds meaning and structure to the circumstances.

Also the analysis of verbal language conducted by Gumperz revealed that communication helps us to understand how people may share grammatical knowledge of a language but differently contextualize what is said, in such a way that very different messages are produced and understood. The views of Goffman and Gumperz are very crucial to advertising because advertising is a good example of Interactional Sociolinguistics.

Advertising Concepts

Advertising is an instrument of marketing used by the advertisers to influence the consumers and their behaviors for purchasing the products. It is used as an element of communication by the advertisers to manipulate the opinions of the consumers and to reach the target audience. While talking about advertising, the quality of advertisements becomes a crucial point for discussion. The sales of a product can either increase to a maximum or decrease to the minimum depending on the quality of the advertisement. Not only does advertisement create social awareness but also portrays the needs and requirements of consumers. Goffman has emphasized that ultimate interest is to enhance the study of face-to-face interaction which as a natural bounded analytical so that the concepts have been presented well in the field of sociology (9). The research of advertising has its roots in the behavioral sciences such as sociology, psychology and social psychology. Therefore the central theme is the people. About 50% of the products used in Indian market have a likelihood of having a substitute. The advertiser makes sure that the quality of the product is developed continuously to meet the consumer's changing needs. Advertising messages are always considered as a communication method designed by the sender to produce certain forms of reaction or attitude from the receiver of the message. It therefore becomes very important that the message reaches the consumers in the intended way. Consumers are crucial in the process of advertising without whom the efforts of advertisements will be sum total of zero. Advertising as a form of communication must be effective in nature because a bad advert is similar to a bad use of medicine. Therefore, establishing a proper communication becomes the main aim of advertising. These aims according to Encyclopedia Britannica (2000) are as follows: (a) to reach a definite audience, to a given extent, and during a given period of time. (b) To produce awareness and knowledge about the products and services (c) And to point out the qualities of the products or services to the people the advertisers wish to influence.

Sociolinguistics and Advertisements

There are various types of advertisements and can be classified in different groups: Commercial and Non-Commercial advertisements. While commercial advertisements usually involve selling a product and the main aim remains the acquiring of money by selling the products, non-commercial advertisements focus on public services. Advertisements can be classified into six different types: consumer, financial, retailer, industrial, classified, public services. Consumer adverts target the members of the public to purchase goods and services. Retailer adverts aim that consumers buy products. Financial adverts incite the public to get their services promoted. Classified adverts are published in special pages of the newspapers and magazines. This kind of

adverts are ordered (classified) according to subject and are meant for an exclusive readership interested in the products or services. Public service adverts are created by the government or its agencies in order to inform the citizens about matters regarding their welfare. Advertisement of products is determined by the goals of the advertiser. The medium of placing advertisements is mostly selected by the advertiser. Many times when profit making becomes the overriding issue in the game; the advertiser gives priorities to advertising in a linguistic medium that appeals to a large majority of potential buyers rather than giving it in a medium that has restricted coverage.

Advertising Language

Advertising is a social process in which the advertiser tries to establish a link between the sender and the receiver. Further, this link allows the advertiser to bridge the gap between the sender and the receiver. Advertisement is therefore not merely restricted to the selling of the product rather is also concerned with maintaining the social relationship of the sender and the receiver. The body of the advert is supposed to be informative and notable keeping in mind the quality of the product. In order to make the advert more effective in the market and more influential among the consumers, the language of the advertisement is kept on the priority list. The language must be semantically and syntactically appropriate. There is a general argument in disagreeing that text and image have no relationship. Barthes (1984) opined that all images may be used to fix this chain which is polysemous and to anchor the image (39).

A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Selected Television Advertisements

The language of advertisement at times gives less importance to the rules of grammar. The reference is mostly in present tense and at times the sentence is without a definitive verb. The crucial element to be noted in an advertisement is the timelessness that it refers to. The language employed in such advertisements is simple, short in length and direct. This kind of language is used by the advertiser in order to make the adverts crispier and more attractive for the consumers.

Advertisements are taken from the Indian contexts which are mostly successful in the Indian society.

‘Fair And Lovely’ is literally a three word advertisement that has been the most successful in the business for quite a long time. The words ‘Fair’ and ‘Lovely’ directly hit the target audience and attract the consumers towards its qualities. The language is designed to provide its consumers a positive impression of the product. These advertisements, when printed in the posters and newspapers, are accompanied by bold letters and attractive fonts. Along with such attractive language, advertisements like this are accompanied by beautiful models.

One advertisement of 'Intel' quotes, 'Intel Inside, Amazing Experiences Outside'. The advertisement highlights a life beyond the corporate hustle and bustle where a man teaches a class of physically challenged children in his free time from his corporate life. The pictorial representation of a man who gives more value to the necessities of others than himself makes the audience fall for it. Words such as 'amazing' emphasize on the smooth experience of the laptop without any hassle where one can manage both his/her busy schedule to do a bit more for others. Not only do these words promote the brand but at the same time allow the consumer to ponder over the qualities of the product.

Language in advertisements is never negative in nature. Negative sentences are only used when it provides special effects for example, Cadbury's chocolate spread slogan.

"Don't keep it to yourself, spread it on"

The use of the dummy "do" in the subject position is to emphasize the point the target audience should help the advertiser to spread the news of the product. The product is so irresistible that it would be a crime not to spread the good news to others.

Birla Sun Life Insurance has a tag line that says 'Khud Ko Kar Buland' which means 'Make yourself strong'. The line is catchy and has a message for its audience. The line is written in bold letters which emphasizes on the strength of the tag line as well. Words like 'Buland' (Strong) and 'Khudko' (yourself) are intertwined in a single sentence so that the Audience can relate it to themselves. The visual appearance of the father trying to support his autistic son captures the attention of the viewers and complements the language of the tag line. By creating characters of a middle class background the advertisement focuses on the lives of the everyday struggling middle class men and women who try hard to thrive despite the harsh realities. This kind of advertisement tries to relate to its consumers on emotional grounds.

Conclusion

In order to sell products and achieve a steady growth in the business, brands require advertisements that are more effective and are able to reach every nook and corner of the country. The easiest way for an advertisement therefore is to use language that is well designed and appealing to the consumer's emotions. Also in order to make the advertisement more attractive, the advertisers use extra linguistic factors such as illustrations and context of situation. All these together determine the effectiveness and significance of the advertisement. Advertisements are a good example of interactional sociolinguistics as they enhance the

communication skill between the sender and the receiver making it a two way process in which both sender and receiver is benefitted by the advert.

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