



A Stylistic Analysis of English Advertisements From Halliday's Context of Situation

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Received 6 May 2022; accepted 13 July 2022
 Published online 26 August 2022

Abstract

With the fast development of business and technology, advertising is becoming part of a person's everyday life. In order to know more about English advertisements and create more classical advertisements, it is important and necessary for us to analyze the stylistic features of English advertising including lexical features, grammatical features and rhetorical features. By using Halliday's context of situation and analyzing the stylistic features of the selected two advertisements and other classical advertisements, a general picture of English advertising is shown before our eyes.

Key words: Stylistic; Advertisement; Lexical level; Grammatical features

He, H. (2022). A Stylistic Analysis of English Advertisements From Halliday's Context of Situation. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 25(1), 74-78. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/12633>
 DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/12633>

1. INTRODUCTION

Advertising is quite popular among us, penetrating into everyone's daily life and being part of it. No matter in newspapers, on televisions, radios or broadcast, you will easily find out an advertisement. According to statistics, every consumer through various channels in America, comes in contact with as many as 1600 ads a day in average. The aim of advertisement or commercial is to propagate the products and persuade people into buying them. This study tries to investigate how advertisers

achieve their purposes from the perspective of Halliday's context of situation based on the detailed stylistic analysis of two ads.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CONTEXT OF SITUATION

Let's first analyze context of situation including "field of discourse", "tenor of discourse" and "mode of discourse" (Halliday, 1974) in order to get a clear picture of linguistic features of advertising.

2.1 Field of Discourse

Since field of discourse has great influence on the vocabulary and sentence patterns of the language, two factors embraced in "field of discourse": subject matter and the nature of activity can influence stylistic features. The subject matter of advertising is commodities, services, daily necessities and entertainment which made accepted by consumers in order to achieve the purpose of sales. As shown in the purposes of modern advertising, the nature of activity is to persuade consumers into buying the products or service. Advertisements are required to be eye-catching, simple and interesting to attract consumers.

2.2 Tenor of Discourse

Tenor of discourse refers to the relations among the participants in a discourse (Halliday, 1964). In advertising, the participating parts are advertisers and consumers. In order to sell products to targeting consumers, advertisers have to know the needs and preference of target consumers and tend to be familiar and friendly to them. Thus, the language style for advertising is usually intimate, friendly, and casual and close to life.

2.3 Mode of Discourse

Mode of discourse refers to the medium or mode of the language activity and it is this that determines or rather correlates with, the role played by the language

activity in the situation (Halliday, 1964, p. 91). Though advertisements can be kept through time, the large amount of information from advertisements make consumers busy and tired of browsing through all kinds of advertisements. That is to say, to stand out among various ads, the layout should be prominent and devices such as repetition, alliteration and pun are used to be different from others. Also, a prominent brand name is needed.

After analyzing the context of situation, we can get a general conclusion that with the purpose of persuading consumers into buying their products, advertisers tend to use intimate, casual and friendly language style and all possible devices to make their products or services prominent. In other words, language of advertising must try to realize the five values: information, interest, attention, memory and aestheticism and two powers: selling power and persuading power.

3. CASE ANALYSIS OF ADS FOR SPECIAL DRINK AND LUGGAGE

Let's look at the following two advertisements and analyze them according to linguistic features, grammatical features and rhetorical features. The first ad is an ad for a special drink and the second one is for a luggage.

Iced tea & RUN!?!!

Meet the Teatotaler

What's even more refreshing than a tall glass of Nestea Iced Tea Mix? A tall glass of Nestea Iced Tea Mix and light, dry Puerto Rican Rum.

Puerto Rican Rum adds a!?!! to iced tea that no other spirit can manage. It's a light, dry taste that won't take over the tea.

We've called this new drink the Teatotaler. Enjoy it at your next party—or anytime. It's a drink you can stay with all year long.

It's easy to make a pitcher: 8—02.(1 cup) Nestea iced tea mix (lemon and sugar already in it). 12—02, light, dry Puerto Rican Rum, load up with ice cubes, add water, stir, serves 8. (Wang, 2011, p. 230)

Lark Luggage

"I'm what you're trying to become: The CEO. As CEO, I delegate most responsibilities. Papers to my middle compartment, pants and pens and calculators to the portfolio section."

"I'm known on most airlines as '10 pockets', you've never traveled with a garment bag like me. I've got over-the-shoulder pockets, a detachable toiletry kit and even a pocket to help keep your ties near. And with my special hanger clamps, I've never met a hanger I couldn't lock in place."

"I'm small, but I'm feisty. See my two outside compartments? They'll expand instantly. I'll become 50% bigger to bring back those sales meeting materials you promised to read." (Wang, 2011, p. 238)

3.1 Linguistic Features of Advertisement English (Lexical Level)

3.1.1 Use of Common Words

The vocabulary used is common, understandable to the public as the ad addresses massive audiences in a language designed to be easily accessible and immediately persuasive.

According to Leech (1966), there are two lists of words with their frequency of use.

One is for adjectives:

1. new 2. good/better/best 3. free 4. fresh 5. delicious 6. full 7. sure 8. clean 9. wonderful 10. special 11. crisp 12. fine 13. big 14. great 15. real 16. easy 17. bright 18. extra 19. safe 20. rich (Leech, 1966, p. 152)

The other is for verbs:

1. make 2. get 3. give 4. have 5. see 6. buy 7. come 8. go 9. know 10. keep/look 11. need 12. love 13. use 14. free/like 15. choose 16. take 17. start/taste

The two lists show us the most commonly used words for English advertisement. We can get the conclusion that most of these words are simple, easy to read and remember and understand and very impressive. For example,

Keep a beautiful record of your World Travels.

It always tastes better when it comes from your own backyard.

In the first advertisement, we can find these adjectives such as *refreshing*, *new*, *tall*, *dry*, *easy* and *light*, verbs such as *can*, *make* and *take*. In the second one, we can easily find out adjectives such as *near*, *special*, *small*, *feisty*, verbs such as *lock*, *get*, *meet* and *see*. Common words are easy for ordinary people to understand and remember, especially in such a busy modern society. That's the reason why common words are widely chosen in Advertising English.

3.1.2 Employment of New Coinages

New coinages can attract readers' attention through the creativity and novelty of the language. Coinages give audience the impression of creative products and attract their curiosity to figure out what the word really is. For example:

DINKA PINTA MILKA DAY.

Audiences must be curious about this ad at the first sight and few people can understand it. Actually, you can divide additional words according to the pronunciation and then get the edition "Drink a pint of milk a day". No wonder that audiences are impressed by this special advertisement.

In the first advertisement, a new coinage Teatotaler which means tea+total+ler can easily catch our eyes and remember the specialty of advertisement. In the title, four punctuations "!!?!!" are created and used here to tell the audience that the taste and feeling brought by the drink is amazing and indescribable. After reading this advertisement, target audience may want to have a

try and taste the amazing iced tea with rum. Thus, this advertisement is very successful in novelty and creativity.

3.1.3 Use of Weasel Words

According to Merriam-Webster online dictionary¹, weasel words are words used in order to evade or retreat from a direct or forthright statement or position. Weasel words are used to achieve the effect of making people accept what it seems as truth, but actually not, such as the use of help and like.

Helps keep you young.

Actually it doesn't keep you young, but only helps. When hearing this advertisement, audience tends to believe that the product will keep you young.

Cleans like a white tornado. (Floor-cleaning detergent)

The word "like" gives us a false impression that this detergent really cleans very well like a white tornado.

Other expressions like virtually, virtually all, act as, act like and also miscellaneous weasels can be, up to, as much as. They have no specific meanings, but can give us the false effect by using weasel words.

In the second advertisement, there is a "help keep your ties near" in the sentence "I've got over-the-shoulder pockets, a detachable toiletry kit and even a pocket to help keep your ties near." The weasel word "help" means not really keep your ties near, but only in some degree have the effect.

3.1.4 Use of Compound Words

Compound words are usually composed by two or more words with "-"s in between. This kind of word-formation is not only widely used in journalistic English and English for Science and Technology, but also in advertising English. They have the advantage of concentrating one sentence into two or three words with little limits of grammar and word order and conveying information in a quick way. That's the reason why they're chosen in advertisements.

Such kind of compound words is modifier and can be seen in the following classical advertisements:

Do you know when you can save 35% or even 60% on out-of-state phone calls? (An ad for long-distance phone call).

If you were designing a state-of-the-art cell sorter, which features would you need? (An ad for medical instrument). (Wang, 2011, p. 5)

This kind of words has a great vitality and is very flexible, such as better-than-leather-miracle covering, creamy-mild Lux Soap, farmhouse-fresh taste, whole-house heating, fifteen happy-family menus, and rain-and-strain-resisting.

In advertisement, there're several ways of forming compound words:

- Adj.+n. short-team goal, out-of-the-ordinary class
- N.+adj. snow-white, wrinkle-free, brand-new
- V-ing+adj. sparking-clean, shining-clean
- N.+v-ed home-made, honey-coated, band-embroidered shirt

- Adv.+v-ing fast-foaming, best-selling, quick-informing

- N.+v-ing hang-fitting, record-breaking, time-saving oven

- Adj.+v-ing best-looking, fresh-tasting milk

(Guo & Zhang, 2008, p. 6)

In the second advertisement, the compound word "over-the-shoulder" in the sentence "I've got over-the-shoulder pockets" is in the formation of adv.+prep.+n.. It expresses its meaning in a simple and clear way and saves a lot of space for the advertisement.

3.1.5 Use of Personal Pronoun

Personal pronoun is used in the advertisement to increase the audiences' sense of participation, with the first personal pronoun standing for ad agents, the second pronoun for consumers and the third personal pronoun for persons which the audiences are familiar with and can understand.

In the following watch ad, these three personal pronouns are all used:

We made this watch for you to be part of your life—simply because this is the way. We always make watches. And if we may draw a conclusion, it would be this: Choose once and choose well.

In the third paragraph of the first advertisement, "We've called this new drink the Teatotaler. Enjoy it at your next party—or anytime. It's a drink you can stay with all year long.", here we have personal pronouns "we, it, you, and your".

In the second advertisement, we have personal pronouns "I, my, you and your". And with the repetition of "I", we can feel the distance between the audience and product is shortened in some way and more intimacy is shown.

3.2 Grammatical Features of Advertisement English

3.2.1 Use of Simple and Elliptical Sentences

Simple sentences are widely uses in advertisement in order to follow the principle of KISS (keep it short and sweet). Elliptical sentences are used to not only save space, but also send out the most important information.

As shown in the first advertisement, the first paragraph begins with a what-question followed by an elliptical sentence "a tall glass of Nestea Iced Tea Mix and light, dry Puerto Rican Rum." And also like sentences "Enjoy it at your next party—or anytime."

In the second advertisement, elliptical sentences such as "Papers to my middle compartment, pants and pens and calculators to the portfolio section" and "See my two outside compartments?" are used to show the information needed in a neat and economical way.

3.2.2 Use of Imperative Sentences or Its Strong Form "You"

Imperative sentences invite readers to take actions as soon as possible, even immediately. Words used here are get,

buy, use, choose, enjoy, take, have, find, come, let and so on. Been put in the situation, target audiences are easily affected by the advertisement and eager to try the product.

In the first advertisement, sentences like “Enjoy it at your next party—or anytime”, and “load up with ice cubes, add water, stir, serves 8” are imperative sentences and the first one uses the personal pronoun “your”.

3.2.3 Use of Present Tense

Present tense is widely used in advertising because of the timeliness, common use and longevity it shows to target audience.

In the first ad, except one future tense “won’t take over the tea” and one present perfect tense “We’ve called this new drink the Teatotaler”, the rest all uses present tense to present the objectivity and everlasting to target audience.

In the second ad, the tense is varied. In the second quotation, the present perfect tense is used for three times to show the achievement and the uniqueness of this luggage. In the third quotation, future present tense is used twice to show the capability of the luggage if you need to carry more things. But the main tense is based on present tense.

3.2.4 Use of Active Tense instead of Passive Tense

Active tense is more powerful and direct than passive tense and more widely used in spoken language like advertisement instead of other written materials.

In ad 1 and 2 almost all the sentences use active tense except one sentence in ad 2 “I’m known on most airlines as ‘10 pockets’” uses regular allocation to express its popularity among airlines.

Active tense always express ideas and opinions and advocate people to take actions, which is quite different with past tense to present facts and situations.

3.2.5 Frequent Use of Direct Speech

Direct speech makes language form more novelty, interesting and more persuasive.

In the following classical advertisement, we can feel the effect of direct speech:

“Through the NVQ initiative we have discovered talents and competencies We would never otherwise have known about”, says Ian McDermot of Philips Components.

NVQ is a training center to provide training for newcomers. The direct speech is the praise from a company who employ trainers from NVQ. After reading this ad, newcomers will easily believe that this training center is very famous and effective and be eager to join this training center to improve his or her basic job skills.

This can be obviously shown in the second advertisement. The entire ad uses three direct quotations from the perspective of the luggage itself to add novelty and interest into the advertisement and introduce its function clearly to the audience.

In conclusion, the use of simple and elliptical sentences, imperative sentences or its strong form “you”,

present tense, use of active tense instead of passive tense, frequent use of direct speech are prominent grammatical features of English advertisements.

3.3 Rhetorical Features of Advertisement English

Rhetoric is defined as “the art of using language effectively, whether in speaking or writing” in Encyclopedia American. It has the power of vivifying and illustrating and can make the thought more striking and effective. The employment of rhetorical features can add glamour to the ad by the association created by the artistic use of language in the audiences’ mind, thus enticing audiences to know more about the product. In this way, readability and acceptability of the ads can be enhanced.

In ads, we often find rhetoric devices such as repetition, pun, rhyme, etc. The aesthetics of the language is the first sensory attraction.

3.3.1 Use of Personification

Personification is a figure of speech in which a thing, quality, or idea is represented as a person, according to Webster’s New World Dictionary. Proper use of personification can attach human emotions to products and will them lovable, unable to be rejected by consumers.

In the second ad, the lark luggage is personified as a human being to have the language ability to introduce itself. This kind of rhetorical device is powerful in creating an intimacy between the product and the target audience and shortening the distance between them. The audience will find it interesting to have a luggage introducing itself instead of listing its functions one by one. More readers will be attracted by this ad and want to have a try on it.

3.3.2 Employment of Metaphor

According to Merriam-Webster online dictionary², metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them. For example,

Like a good neighbor, State Farm is there. (State Farm Insurance)

Here State Farm is compared to a good neighbor, with the meaning that it is near at your hand and can give you immediate service. In America, Love thy neighbor as thyself from the Bible is very popular and deep-rooted in everyone’s mind. Thus, this ad can arouse Americans’ identification.

In the first ad, “As CEO, I delegate most responsibilities”, the luggage is compared as a CEO to shoulder most of the responsibilities. A CEO is an important person in a company to manage all kinds of things in the company and represent the company. If a luggage is compared to a CEO, it means that it is very effective in managing your materials well with different areas preparing for different things. With this luggage in hand, there’ll be no need to worry about organizing your materials.

In the second ad, "I'm known on most airlines as '10 pockets', you've never traveled with a garment bag like me." By comparing itself with other kinds of garments, it is easy and successful to attract target readers to know the exact features of this one.

3.3.3 Use of Pun

Pun, according to Merriam Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature, is also called paronomasia, a humorous use of a word in such a way as to suggest different meanings or applications, or a play on words. Common as jokes and in riddles, puns maybe used seriously as in John Donne's "A Hymn to God the Father." Pun, according to *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* can also be understood as an amazing use of a word or phrase that has two meanings, or words with the same sound but different meanings. And it can be clearly shown in this famous sentence: "Seven days without water make one weak (= 1 week)." (Jiang & Zhong, 2008, pp. 82-83)

As the famous words said by Franklin, "We must all hang together, or we shall all hang desperately." Pun is also shown in the following well-known ads:

Different countries. Different languages. Different customs. One level of comfort worldwide.

This is an advertisement for an airline company. Here customs not only mean living habits of different countries, but also mean the place to check one's passport to enter into another country.

How do I save so much on my international calls? It's easy. I have a Plan.

This is an advertisement of "World Plan" magnetic card from American ATT Company. Here plan not only means a real plan to save international call, but also the plan in World Plan, the name of the magnetic card.

In the first advertisement, the title Iced tea & RUN!?!!, here "run" not only encourages target readers to taste the drink, but also stands for the name of the drink Puerto Rican Rum. In the sentence "Puerto Rican Rum adds a!?!! to iced tea that no other spirit can manage", spirit can have two meanings, with the first one a kind of drink, and the other one being that nobody ever has the thought or opinion of the existence of this special drink.

In the second advertisement, "I'm small, but I'm feisty" here feisty has two layers of meaning, i.e., one is to be active, the other is to be big enough to carry more things with the two compartments.

CONCLUSION

From the above analysis of the two advertisements from the perspectives of lexical, grammatical and rhetorical features, we can know some features and characteristics and devices advertisers use to attract target audiences. Actually, by analyzing these stylistic features of advertisement, it can not only provide us with ways and devices to create and write good advertisements so as to make more classical advertisements and attract audience to buy products, but also offer us more chances to enjoy the beauty of language. An advertisement is not made in one day. The making of one advertisement needs marketing research, statistical analysis and appliance. The more analysis of ad writing and consumer psychology, the more consumers will the ad attract.

NOTES

- 1 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/weasel%20words>
- 2 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/metaphor>

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