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TEXTUAL AND LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF ADVERTISING DISCOURSE.
AN EXPLORATION INTO THE LANGUAGE OF COMMERCIAL ADVERTISING IN WOMEN'S MAGAZINES

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Introduction

This book is the result of my research work in view to complete my doctoral thesis in the field of philology, thesis which was supervised by Professor Ioana Murar, PhD, from the University of Craiova, and was publicly defended in December 2010.

Advertising discourse is a mark of the consumer society, ubiquitous in our contemporary space, and impossible to neglect as a subject of study by communication disciplines. My investigation of this topic is motivated by my fascination with its possibilities of expression and its ability to influence people's behaviour and convictions on the one hand; and on the other hand, by the fact that relatively little research has been conducted in this field in Romania.

My research is directed towards the language of commercial advertisements, intending to make a theoretical review of the main concepts, which can be subsequently used in a practical corpus analysis. The corpus is represented by commercial advertisements in English and their adapted variants in Romanian in a women's magazine (British and Romanian editions), numbering 16 consecutive issues (May 2009 – August 2010). In addition, there are also the advertisements in several other British, American and Canadian magazines which were used to illustrate theoretical concepts.

The concepts presented in the theoretical part are not intended to be exhaustive, but they are flexible and can be easily extended or restricted for more specialised discussions. Similarly, the ensuing corpus analysis represents one way of looking at things, but it can be taken as a model for similar or extensive research in the same area.

Following the description of major linguistic concepts in relation to the language of advertising, the analysis of advertising discourse in this book evolves in two directions: Firstly, through an analysis of issues raised by the "translation" of advertisements from English into Romanian, the field of applied linguistics has been touched upon. Secondly, by discussing some ideological issues derived from the way language is used in relation to the categories of sex and gender in commercial advertisements in contemporary British women's magazines, one can say that our research subscribes to the ideas of critical linguistics.

In this approach to advertising discourse, there will be no attempt to redefine linguistic theories, or to bring them to attention for their own sake. Moreover, we will not try to capture the linguistic traits of a certain type of advertisements into straight lines, as the domain is too broad and too dynamic to allow that.

Nevertheless, what can be done is to pinpoint how different structures can function, and starting from that, identify their effects in the way we perceive advertising discourse; if something worked properly why it did so, and if it did not work properly, which are the mechanisms that may be used to improve things, or which justify change.

The book is organised in four chapters, starting with the introduction of the general concepts upon which the book is built, and continuing with the theoretical description of the linguistic features of advertising; then it goes through the presentation of the particular categories of sex and gender as represented in the language of commercial advertisements in contemporary women's magazines; it ends with establishing the main theoretical concepts related to the translation of advertising texts, followed by a practical corpus analysis, in an approach supported by the theoretical review previously outlined.

In **chapter one**, entitled *General Characteristics*, advertising is defined from a communicative and cultural perspective; the type of advertising discourse which will be studied is delimited, including a description of other components besides language (in this case visuals), and the structure of ads is outlined; the linguistic analysis of advertising discourse is established from a functional point of view. The terms being discussed are: *discourse*, *discourse analysis*, *text*, *advertising, advertisement*, *advertising as discourse*, *paralanguage*, *critical linguistics / critical discourse analysis*, *applied linguistics*. At the end, a few landmarks in the history of advertising in the U.K. and Romania are enumerated, as background in the existence of an economic and cultural phenomenon.

In the **second chapter**, *Linguistic Features of Advertising*, different linguistic aspects of advertising are discussed, with stress on commercial advertisements. The examples brought to support the theoretical concepts are not taken only from women's magazines, as many of these are general and can be applied more broadly.

We cannot draw clear-cut lines regarding the features of an advertising text, because this kind of discourse will always try to take us by surprise, to come up with something different from all the rest in order to capture our attention and to avoid its dismissal as trite. Advertising language, along with poetry (although the latter has different functions) is the most flexible and creative compared to other types (legal, administrative or scientific language).

The presentation of the theoretical concepts which were found relevant in relation to advertising language will begin with an account of linguistic functions. The various classifications only represent an analytic convenience, and the discussion will be limited to the concepts identified by Roman Jacobson, as well as those of Andrew Ingraham and Michael Halliday: the referential, poetic, emotive, conative, phatic and metalingual functions; metafunctions (ideational, interpersonal, textual), microfunctions (psychological, phatic, recording, identifying, reasoning, communicative, pleasure function); different competences associated with each of the metafunctions (grammatical competence, communicative competence, creative competence, textual competence).

Regarding the lexico-grammatical features, the structure or the form of words which occur in advertising will be analysed. This is a very broad area, as advertising thrives on coining new words and making use of original combinations. According to the advertised product, it can resort to words from any kind of semantic field; it also uses innovative language in order to trigger aesthetic pleasure, to surprise people and keep them interested. Nevertheless, there is a series of recurrent patterns that mark this type of discourse as persuasive and help the public to recognize and process it as such.

In order to identify such patterns, account will be taken of the general division of morphology into the two fields (1) *inflectional morphology* (i.e. the study of inflections, or inflectional affixes that signal grammatical relationships, such as, plural, possessive, tense, etc.); (2) *lexical* or *derivational morphology*, (i.e. the study of word formation, focusing on the types of affixes involved in word formation, also, compounding, i.e. the linguistic units composed of two or more elements, each of which could function independently in other circumstances: nominal compounds, adjectival compounds, verbal compounds), conversion, abbreviation, clipping, acronyms, blends, back-formation etc. The organization of some lexical units under the form of syntactic patterns like collocations, phrases and idioms will also

be analysed. The section dealing with lexical features is based on the examination of the ads in one issue of a magazine (*Glamour (British Edition) No 112 July 2010*).

More precisely, we will describe the *word classes* (traditionally called *parts of speech*) which occur in advertising texts, such as: nouns, with their semantic domain, the structure of noun phrases, premodification and postmodification; types of adjectives; pronouns (personal, indefinite, demonstrative, reflexive); possessive, demonstrative, indefinite adjectives; the form of verbs, variations in mood, verb tenses, modal verbs; adverbs; words with a negative meaning; numerals.

The subchapter will also attempt to conduct a lexico-semantic analysis of the word classes that occur in advertising texts (the various semantic fields, the lexical sense relationships between terms etc.).

The last part of this subchapter will deal with a description of sentences. Firstly, the main features of sentences will be presented, taking into account such concepts as sentence structure, coordination, ellipsis, block language, non-clausal material, and slogan. Secondly, a distinction will be made between sentence types according to their structure, but concentrating on semantic functions.

The following subchapter intends to offer a rhetorical perspective on the means employed in advertising language. The role of rhetorical figures in advertising discourse will be presented first and secondly, the role of humour as a means of persuasion will be discussed, concentrating on an analysis of puns as a prominent materialization of humour in advertisements.

The first section does not intend to offer a glossary of definitions for figures of speech, as there are hundreds of them and also, there are other ample works that are exclusively dedicated to that purpose. The intention is to offer a general perspective on their role in advertising discourse. In order to achieve that, two taxonomies have been selected, one described by Daniela Rovenţa-Frumuşani, the other made by Edward F. McQuarrie and David Glen Mick. In essence, the former articulates the role of rhetoric in the ideology of advertising as a discourse of present times, whereas the latter directs the analysis of rhetorical figures in terms of their effectiveness in the conscience of consumers.

Rovenţa-Frumuşani identifies three levels at which rhetoric figures function in the advertising message: the *semantic level*, the

logical-syntactic level, and the *sound level*. Some of the examples of advertisements provided by the author to illustrate each of these have been replaced, or others have been translated, as most of them were taken from French and Romanian ads.

Then a second taxonomy of rhetorical figures will be introduced, which, in a way, materializes the ideological features of advertising discourse identified earlier. Edward F. McQuarrie and David Glen Mick first present this taxonomy in their article *Figures of Rhetoric in Advertising Language* (1996), then they examine the effects of its application in two other studies: *Verbal Rhetoric versus Message Repetition Under Heavy Processing Load and Incidental Exposure to Advertising* (2006) and *A laboratory study of the effect of verbal rhetoric versus repetition when consumers are not directed to process advertising* (2009). The authors classify figures of rhetoric at three levels: (1) figurative text and non-figurative text; (2) according to modes of figuration: schemes and tropes; (3) according to rhetorical operations: repetition, reversal, substitution and destabilization.

In the following section of the chapter dealing with rhetorical aspects, a presentation of verbal humour in advertising discourse will be made, more precisely in advertisements for cosmetics, in the light of an analysis of puns. The role of humour in advertisements will be discussed, and how puns contribute to its realization, owing a great part of our vision to the chapter dedicated to puns in Keiko Tanaka's book, *Advertising Language: A Pragmatic Approach to Advertisements in Britain and Japan* (1994). A series of factors influencing the efficiency of humour in advertising will be enumerated, and some opinions which are favourable to the use of humour in advertisements will be reviewed. Then the concepts of ambiguity and relevance theory will be presented, through which the analysis of puns can be approached, followed by an account of the four kinds of puns identified in ads: nonsense puns, puns relating to context, puns with sexual innuendo and puns with two communicative meanings.

The next subchapter will deal with the presentation of semantic and pragmatic concepts that are necessary in order to understand the way in which we interpret advertising discourse.

We will begin with a review of main terms from the field of semantics, including elements like: the connotation of words, collocation, stylistic variation, the reflection of conceptual senses, sense

relations, rhyme, the expansion of the semantic space, metaphorical transference.

The section will continue with an account of speech act theory. We will present terms such as: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts; Searle's taxonomy of speech acts (representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, declarations); direct and indirect speech acts, the indirection strategy; the felicity conditions; the maxims of the cooperative principle, floutings etc. These theoretical concepts will be followed by a case analysis in which Grice's cooperative principle is applied in relation to an advertisement, illustrating the consequences of violating its maxims.

At the end, we will make a short presentation of presuppositions, a term used in both semantics and pragmatics, distinguishing between sentence presuppositions and pragmatic presuppositions, following their application in advertisements. Implicatures and inferences will also be analyzed as originating with speakers and listeners in the process of conveying and deciphering meaning in advertisements. This part will continue with a demonstration of how cohesion and coherence account for an advertisement's textuality.

The **third chapter** deals with the categories of sex and gender, which are among the most analysed and controversial in contemporary advertising discourse. After the theoretical presentation of these concepts, we will pursue their linguistic materialisation in the corpus of commercial advertisements which are analysed in the last chapter, and also the cultural ideas emerging from such uses.

The categories of sex and gender will be defined, as well as gender differences and stereotypes. Our research will not deal with issues of queer theory, laying stress on the dichotomy masculine/feminine.

We will continue with an account of the way in which language reveals stereotypes, particularly through presuppositions, and outlining elements which are perceived to mark feminine versus masculine ways of speaking: tag questions, standard versus non-standard grammatical forms, hedges versus assertive and strong forms, indirect versus direct speech acts, hierarchical relationships versus reciprocal relationships and exchanging roles.

Next, we will revise the changes triggered in language by gender issues, which manifested themselves at the level of the vocabulary, grammar and discourse patterns; this section will also present an example

of advertisement in which sexism manifests itself, together with the reasons behind that situation and possible ways for a change.

A general description of women's magazines content will also be made, as it determines the type of advertisements that will be displayed in that medium.

The reasons determining the use of sex in advertisements are also an issue, as opinions vary with respect to its effectiveness.

We also need to consider the attitude of the British in relation to sex matters, as there is a cultural factor behind its use in ads. Next, we will examine different views on the extent to which sexuality is exploited in ads in the particular case of the British environment.

Taboos (sex and other types) will be considered in advertisements, with the way they function linguistically. Here, two cases of advertisements will be analysed from a pragmatic point of view, advertisements which are differentiated between according to the type of product whose image is enhanced by a taboo: a "taboo ad" (an ad for a product which has a taboo quality) and a "non-taboo ad" (an ad for a product which has no taboo quality, but whose image is enhanced by means of a taboo).

This chapter will be concluded with a general account of the way in which men and women have been represented in advertisements, with the "beauty myth" as a central theme in modern popular culture constructs. These aspects are necessary to establish in order to further follow their linguistic materialization in advertisements. At the end, we will provide an analysis of an ad in which the "beauty myth" has imprinted the way discourse is built around the stereotyped image of women.

The **fourth chapter** brings together a series of theoretical issues which bear relevance to the translation of the advertising material, followed by a practical analysis of selected texts.

In the first section, the role of culture in the translation of ads will be discussed, by outlining concepts such as: covert/overt translation; cultural filters; translators as intercultural experts; High Context Culture versus Low Context Culture; English as a global lingua franca; the need to integrate the category of gender into translation studies.

We will continue by taking into consideration the type of the advertising text, as its message derives from the overlapping with paralanguage. Here, elements like vocative texts will be examined, the

form of the advertising text contributing to the sense of the message and multimodality.

Regarding the strategies used in the translation of ads, we will revise: Peter Newmark's methods of translation with stress on communicative translation; the correlative theory of translation; the function of the translated text; the translation of ads as "copy adaptation", "adaptation" or "constrained translation"; the unit of translation; chunking up, down and sideways; proper names; multilingualism; the influence of English upon Romanian and "Romglish" ("romgleza"); "necessary" loan words and "luxury" Anglicisms. In the same section, we will analyse in detail a series of advertising texts with their possible translations in order to illustrate the application of the chunking up, chunking down and chunking sideways operations.

The last part of our research will deal with the **corpus analysis** of British advertisements and their corresponding adaptations into Romanian.

The choice of texts is unitary, in the sense that they were taken from 16 consecutive issues of a monthly magazine called *Glamour* (May 2009 – August 2010), a magazine which is edited in both English (British edition) and Romanian. By advertising the same products and having the same parallel target public, namely women aged between 18 and 44 in the U.K. and Romania, the pairs of advertisements are also relevant. Another point to be taken into account is that we have not included for our analysis advertisements in Romanian which, although they may have been translated from English, did not have their corresponding variants included in the corpus of British magazines. Although the presence of the advertisements in question is not restricted to this magazine, as they are spread throughout the written press during an advertising campaign, the analysis has been limited to the named publications in order to keep the criteria of unity and relevance of my corpus.

Advertising lies at the heart of capitalism, mirroring a country's economic development. It is a dynamic phenomenon, with its positive and negative sides; it has its critics and defenders, with one thing beyond any doubt: it is something we cannot do without. It interacts with our lives permanently, and consequently, it leaves its mark upon us.

In Romania, due to historical conditions, it has had a discontinuous development. Broadly, it has the same structures and