

Discourse of Advertising: Reference to Kiswahili and English adverts in Kenyan Media

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Abstract: *This study examines the nature of the discourse of advertising. The focus is on consumer advertising, which is directed towards the promotion of some product or service to the general public. The study, aims at uncovering the basic elements of the most pervasive, influential and inescapable discourse of the advertising text. It focuses on the interaction of language, image and layout, and examines advertising persuasive strategies. In doing so, it draws on various linguistic theories particularly pragmatic, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic. In addition this study provides analyses of some adverts, using different ways of interpretations; and ends with a discussion on advertising discourse. In this connection, instances from the Kenyan media and their analyses are provided; with a view to clarifying some rhetorical categories in Kiswahili and English advertising, and showing that texts construct meaning through interaction with other types of discourse, are inseparable from the culture of the advertising text*

Keywords: discourse, adverts, pragmatics, Kiswahili, media, meaning

1. Introduction

Kiswahili language is usually a widely used lingua franca in Kenya that serves as an inter-ethnic medium of communication Mbaabu, (1985:183). Both Kiswahili and English are used extensively as a public means of communication in domains such as political rallies, social services, local trade, commerce and mass media. In advertising, Kiswahili and English are used widely both in local newspapers and mass media. Kiswahili is specifically used as language of solidarity among different ethnic groups, especially in informal interaction while English is used in both formal and informal interactions (Myers Scotton, 1993b). Internationally, Kiswahili has been included as a working language at African Union (Batibo, 2005). The focus of this paper is Kiswahili and English adverts in mass media.

Advertising is so familiar to modern readers that it may seem odd to ask what an advertisement is. Although advertising is all around us, we do not often pause to think about its nature as a form of discourse, as a system of language use whereby, on a daily basis, huge numbers of readers fleeting conversations" with the writers of countless texts (Goddard, 1998: 5). The term 'advertising' comes down to us from the Medieval Latin verb „advertere" to direct one's attention to. It is any type or form of public announcement intended to direct people's attention to the availability, qualities, and/or cost of specific commodities or services. Advertising can be seen to fall into three main categories: (1) consumer advertising, which is directed towards the promotion of some product or service to the general public; (2) trade advertising, which is directed to dealers and professionals through appropriate trade publications and media, and (3) public relations advertising, which is directed towards society by citizens or community groups, or by politicians, in order to promote some issue of social concern or political agenda. The focus of this paper is on the first category; namely, consumer advertising in Kiswahili and English language

1.1 Objective

To examine the basic elements of consumer advertising in Kiswahili and English language in Kenyan media.

1.2 Question

What are the basic elements of consumer advertising in Kiswahili and English in Kenyan media?

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Many studies of advertising separate components of adverts concentrate on one or a few and ignore the others. There are also studies which describe the pictures of advertising without paying any attention to language. Discourse, especially discourse as complex as advertising, always holds out more to be analyzed, leaves more to be said as Cook (2001: 5) points out. This study examines the nature of the discourse of advertising in Kiswahili and English language in a Kenyan setting. The focus is on the basic elements of consumer advertising, which is directed towards the promotion of some product or service to the general public.

1.4 Purpose

The study aims at uncovering the basic elements of the most pervasive, influential and inescapable discourse of advertising text. It focuses on the interaction of language, image and layout, and examines advertising persuasive strategies. In doing so, it draws on various linguistic theories. In addition, this study provides analyses of some adverts, using different ways of interpretations. In this connection, instances from the Kenyan media and their analyses are provided, with a view to clarifying some rhetorical categories in Kiswahili and English advertising, and showing that texts construct meaning through interaction with other types of discourse.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Advertising as a social Discourse

Advertising is referred to as a form of discourse in the sense that it has influenced not only the structure of language and the modality of lifestyle, but also the content of routine daily acts of communicative exchanges. The messages of advertising have permeated the entire cultural landscape. Printed advertisements fill the pages of newspapers and magazines. Commercials interrupt TV and radio programs constantly. As Beasley and Danesi (2002: 1) pointed out, "brand names, logos, trademarks, jingles, and slogans have become part and parcel of the 'mental encyclopedia' of virtually everyone who lives in a modern-day society"

Advertising has progressed beyond the use of simple techniques for announcing the availability of products or services (Wodak, 2006a, 2006b; Wodak, 2007). It has ventured into the domain of persuasion, and its rhetorical categories have become omnipresent in contemporary social discourse. Because of the growing effectiveness of its persuasion techniques, advertising has become entrenched into social discourse by virtue of its wide spread diffusion throughout society. Everywhere one turns, one is bound to find some advert message designed to persuade people to buy a product. All this leads to the inescapable conclusion that advertising has developed, into a privileged form of social discourse that has unparalleled rhetorical force. With the advent of industrialization in the 19th century, style of presentation became increasingly important in raising the persuasive efficacy of the advert text. Accordingly, advertising started to change the structure and use of language and verbal communication. Everything from clothes to beverages was being promoted through ingenious new techniques. As the 19th century came to a close American advertisers in particular were, as Dyer (1982: 32) points out, using more colloquial, personal and informal language to address the customer and also exploiting certain effective rhetorical devices to attract attention to a product. So persuasive had this new form of advertising become that, by the early decades of the 20th century, it started becoming a component of social discourse, starting to change some of the basic ways in which people communicated with each other and in which they perceived commodities and services.

From the 1920s onwards, advertising agencies sprang up all over, broadening the attempts of their predecessors to build a rhetorical bridge between the product and the consumer's consciousness (Sayer, 2006; Saussure & Schulz, 2005). The language of advertising has become the language of all, even of those who are critical of it. As Twitchell (2000: 1) puts it "language about products and services has pretty much replaced language about all other subjects". It is no exaggeration to claim that today most of our information, intellectual stimulation, and lifestyle models come from, or are related to, advertising images. Image – creation have become the primary techniques of what has come to be known as the era of persuasion in advertising. This is an era in which advertising messages have moved away from describing the product in itself to focusing on the consumer of the product, creating product imagery with which the consumer can easily identify (Woodward and Denton, 1988:

192). Adverts and commercials now offer the same kinds of promise and hope to which religions and social philosophies once held as their exclusive rights.

The modern advertiser stresses not on the product, but the benefits that may be expected to ensue from its purchase. In this regard, Beasley and Danesi (2002: 15) points out that the advertiser is becoming more and more adopt at setting foot into the same subconscious regions of psychic experience that were once explored only by philosophers, artists, and religious thinkers. However, not all advertisements make perfect sense. Not all of them promote or imply acceptance of social values that everyone would agree are what we should hope for, in an enlightened and civilized society. Some advertisements appear to degrade our images of ourselves, our language, and appear to move the emphasis of interaction in our society to even more consumerism. In this regard, Sells and Gonzalez (2002: 166) points out that there is no doubt that advertising promotes a consumer culture, and helps create and perpetuate the ideology that creates the apparent need for the products it markets (Iten, 2005; Jazczolt, 2005; Ang et al., 2007).

In a discussion of what kind of benefit an advertisement might offer to a consumer, Aitchison (1999: 49) provides the following quote from Gray Goldsmith of Lowe & Partners, New York: "I do not think you need to offer a rational benefit. I think you need to offer a benefit that a rational person can understand". Relatedly, Sells and Gonzalez (2002) argue that it is often said that advertising is irrational: but this is where the crossover between information and persuasion becomes important. An advertisement does not have to be factually informative but it cannot be factually misleading. In addition, Cook (2001: 1) points out that in a world beset by social and environmental problems, advertising can be seen as urging people to consume more by making them feel dissatisfied or inadequate, by appealing to greed, worry and ambition. On the other hand, it may be argued that many adverts are skillfully crafted and amusing, and that it is unjust to make them a scapegoat for all the sorrows of the modern world. Thus, to ask someone their opinion of advertising in general, or of particular advert, can be to embark upon an emotionally and ideologically charged discussion, revealing their political and social position.

With the above in mind, it can be argued that attitudes to advertising can be indicative of our personality, or social and ideological position. Advertisements are forms of discourse which make a powerful contribution to how we construct our identities (Ang et al., 2006; Musolff, 2005; Toncar et al., 2001; Van Mulken et al., 2005; Widdon, 2004).

2.2 Discourse of Advertising

Studies of the discourse of advertising with a linguistic focus remain relatively rare. In the sense that they constitute departures from the study of more elaborated linguistic form. Studies of the language of advertising are occasional examinations of the topic in more general works on genre analysis. Among scholarly examples of this type of treatment is Leech's (1966) study, which surveys the types of linguistic devices used by British writers and designers of display advertising. Leech is primarily concerned with

analyzing the specialized grammar of advertising. He notes the disjunctive nature of much of this language, and he details some of its salient features. Among these are the low frequency of function words such as articles, auxiliaries, and pronouns; a preference for nouns over verbs and adjectives; and heavy nominalization over predicative constructions. Working within a tradition of literary criticism, Leech also describes advertising language as a "subliterary" genre, arguing that, as in literature, the advertisement writer often relies on unexpected strategies of novel and creative exploitation of language within predictable linguistic patterns and techniques. Thus the writer's rhetorical aim (attracting and sustaining the reader's attention; making the advertisement memorable, and prompting the reader into appropriate action) is met by systematically setting off a familiar pattern against inventive use. Even today, Leech's study continues to provide a useful catalog of the defining features of this language variety. As Bruthiaux (1996: 26) argues, that it is Leech's study that is one of the first attempts to explicitly link in a full-length study the functional parameters of the advertising genre with its linguistic manifestations, or in other words, to apply the notion of systematic register variation to the language of advertising".

In a more extensive study, Geis (1982) concentrates on the linguistic devices favoured by producers of television commercials. He reviews some of the linguistic features that recur in the language of TV advertising in the United States. This includes a detailed study of comparatives similes, noun compounds, and count versus mass nouns. Geis addresses not only how advertisers use language but also how consumers are expected to interpret it. While this allows him to claim that his focus is essentially psycholinguistic in character, his study could be more appropriately described as pragmatic since what he offers is primarily a theory of communication rather than actual psycholinguistic experiments that might test the comprehensive of TV commercials. Goleman (1983) goes beyond a description of the language of advertising itself. She sets out to address psycholinguistic aspects of the interaction between the encoder and the decoder in an attempt to explain how consumers of advertising come to understand what they do. What makes her study especially noteworthy is her examination of the role played by phonology and prosody in conveying the advertiser's intentions. But like Geis, she mostly addresses issues of comprehension from a pragmatic angle. In particular, she argues that viewers need to make two distinct but complementary types of inference. One type of inference, which might have been termed linguistic, is based on the audience's knowledge of the structure and conventions of the advertising genre. The second type of inference, which might be described as pragmatic requires a willingness to abide by a Gricean Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975) in assuming, for example, that content will be favourable to the product.

Vestergaard and Schroder (1985) bring an explicit ideological agenda to their analysis of the language of advertising. Their work set out to expose "the individualized collective deceit of advertising" (p.174) and to reveal "the really insidious ideological processes which treat a phenomenon as so self-evident and natural as to exempt it completely from critical inspection and to render it

inevitable" (p. 145) Thus, while advertising can be an agent of change, it is also a means to prevent social change or even to assume that change is impossible. In another study, Toolan (1988) follows Leech (1966) in concentrating on the stylistics of conventionalized and formulaic aspects of the language of advertising in the British press.

Like Leech, Toolan sets out to uncover the recurrent structural patterns of the variety, without which, he argues, advertising language would not be recognizable as a distinct variety.

Nair (1992) examines a corpus of personal adverts drawn mostly from the Indian press. She justifies her attempt to combine the study of form with that of ideology in the classified advertising on the grounds that both overt and covert ideologies associated with particular literary forms and gender, genre and grammar intersect in especial ways in culturally specific varieties. Tanaka (1994) proposes to explain how consumers come to understand advertising messages. Using as her data a selection of display advertisements from the British and Japanese press, she argues against purely semiotic accounts of communication, which regard the polysemous nature of linguistic and nonlinguistic messages as a misfortune and an obstacle to communication. Instead she notes that the normal process of utterance interpretation involves potentially problematic reference assignment, disambiguation, and enrichment. The question, Tanaka argues, is not whether but how preexisting bodies of knowledge play a role in determining the way in which advertisements are understood. In other words, how decoders recognize encoders' intentions. To answer this question, she appeals to "relevance theory".

In a survey of British advertising in the printed press, billboards, and television, Cook (2001) expands the narrow linguistic formulations of the discourse of advertising in general. His aim is to show that texts construct meaning through interaction with other types of discourse. He examines the interface of linguistic form with visual, musical, and paralinguistic features. But the most original aspect of Cook's work is his analysis of the social implications of advertising language. He shows how texts can create, evoke, and reinforce dominant social types, especially sexual ones; and he argues that a sense of self as both an individual and participant in social activities is to be found within the form of discourse, not outside it and independently from it, in the language of advertising as in all language use (Blommaert, 2005; Bara, 2005; Cutica et al., 2008; Koller, 2005; Saussure, 2007).

3. Methodology

The data on which the researcher bases his claims were collected from local Television transmissions and over the radio advertisements. About fifty adverts were recorded from different TV and Radio stations in Kenya. The data were collected during different commercial breaks. The data were analyzed to identify the basic elements of consumer advertising in Kiswahili and English language. This is an empirical study which is basically descriptive.

4. Research Findings

4.1 Analyses of Linguistic Concepts in different Adverts

The study shows that most of Kiswahili and English adverts in Kenya display the concept of cohesion and coherence in their texts. This kind of concept is a linguistic one. According to Vestergaard and Schroeder (1985). Cohesion is a term from the work on textual structure by Halliday and Hasan (1976), given to the logical linkage between textual units, as indicated by overt formal markers of the relations between texts. Evidently, advertising language in both Kiswahili and English in Kenya tend not to use clear markers of cohesion, but is interpreted as being coherent. For example:

1a) (Kiswahili). Jifungulie equity akaunti hapo hapo bila malipo

(Open an equity account instantly with no pay).

1b) (English) Make every moment Golden fry.

1c) New aquafresh high quality white

We note that each piece of text is cohesive with the adjacent ones for a successful communication. The listeners are very creative interpreters, and even though formal properties of cohesion are typically not marked overtly they are able to understand the meaning. Thus advert (1a) simply means that 'people should open accounts with equity bank any time for free'. (1b) mean that (whenever one is cooking, the best cooking oil to use is golden fry". The examples show that the notion of coherence helps to bring out relations between texts, which may or may not be indicated by formal markers of cohesion.

Another linguistic concept is Given and New information. It is commonplace in the analysis of the meaning contribution of a linguistic unit in such as a sentence used as an advert to split the information into Given information and New information. It is possible for a sentence to be all - New, but all - Given sentences are (by definition) uninformative, and therefore have only specialized or restricted usages. Each sentence has an opportunity to present New information, or at least highlighted information. A common strategy in advertising language such as Kiswahili and English in Kenya is to use very short potential utterances as sentences, to maximize the amount of highlighted information that is being presented. For example:

2a) Popote ulipo,(Given) sikiza kituo kilicho kamili cha Radio citizen (New information)

2b) Tuskys (Given) pay less get more everyday (New information).

2c) Topex bleach (Given) kills most household germs cleans kitchen tougher on stains gentle on hands

These examples attest to the fact that linguistic concept of the given and new information is common in advertising in Kenyan setting.

The pragmatic interest in the implicit meaning dimensions of language use has been extended to include meanings which are logically entailed on the language use by the user of a particular structure. Presupposition is a kind of pragmatic inference "based more closely on the actual linguistic structure of sentences" (Levinson 1989: 167). However, in

advertising, presuppositions are an important component of the overall message. As the name implies, a presupposition is a necessary precondition for the processing of any communication. Presuppositions typically involve the existence of some object or idea. Presuppositions is therefore a crucial part of advertising as they can cause the reader to consider the existence of objects, propositions, and culturally defined behavioral properties: for example, "Have you had Kenblest your daily bread?" presupposes that you take or need "Kenblest bread daily", thereby creating and perpetuating the idea that the behaviour of taking Kenblest bread daily is part of our culture. Similarly, "umepata molo milk?"(Do you have the molo milk". This advert presupposes that there is something great about the molo milk that is left open.

4.2 Advertising from a Psycholinguistics' Perspective

Advertisers in Kenya use the persuasion techniques that are directed to the unconscious region of the human mind. There is no doubt advertising plays a definitive role in shaping some behaviour in some individuals. Adverts related to consumption of fast foods, tobacco, and alcohol use features of advert that influence the viewer's perception, stimulates curiosity in order to maintain interest and make the viewer want to use the product. For example in advertising Soko maize flour, the advertiser sings a song in Kiswahili that is meant to capture the attention of the viewer, stimulate curiosity and to make the viewer interested "Soko ugali na kupenda na roho yangu,wewe radha tamu,sijapata mwingine, nakupenda na roho yangu, nakupenda we soko" (soko ugali I love you with all my heart, you are so sweet, I have not found another like you, I love you with my heart, I love you soko' likewise in advertising mumias sugar the advertiser sings: "you are my sweetie my honour my babie my sugar let me hold you forever amen"

Evidently, the advertisers ensure that their messages are not only heard, but also that they have "sticking power"; the power to lock into the mind. Advertisers also make sure the message is memorable as is the case above. They achieve this by compressing the message in order for it to be easy for filing, composing simple songs and repeating the advertisement so as to reinforce the message and lock it into the mind.

Advertising in Kenya tries to link a product or service to a certain situation, activity, lifestyle, or type of person. Image transfer occurs when a product takes on characteristics of these associations. The idea is that when people think of these situations, they also think of the product. For example, in Kenya some products, like Soda, beer, beverages and pain killer drugs are linked with successful athletes or celebrities. For while advertising Guinness beer the image of a celebrity taking the beer is displayed then followed by the advert "Guinness get protected and win instant prizes and a trip" also Tusker beer a successful personality is displayed "Game inakuneed twende kazi". When advertising Phymyx fertilizer an image of a successful farmer is also displayed followed by the advert "Phymyx organic fertilizer enriches soil and increases yield". It is evident that Kiswahili and English advertising process in Kenya use persuasion. This affects the structure of people's beliefs, opinions, attitudes,

convictions and motivations; and, in turn, motivates people to act. These kinds of adverts drive the consumers to buying the product even when their intention is not to do so. This is because the advertiser has used a successful persuasive message that builds a strong belief in the product. Also an appropriate image for the product has been embedded into the Social consciousness of the consumer through repetition, positioning and image creation.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper adopts the view that discourse, especially discourse as complex as advertising in Kenyan setting, always holds out more to be analyzed and leaves more to be said. It has been argued that advertising must be looked at as a social discourse with rhetorical force. That is, it has influenced not only the structure of language and the modality of lifestyle, but also the content of routine daily acts of communicative exchanges. It has ventured into the domain of persuasion, and its rhetorical categories have become omnipresent in contemporary social discourse.

Because of the growing effectiveness of its persuasion techniques, advertising has become entrenched into social discourse by virtue of its widespread diffusion throughout society. Everywhere we turn, we are bound to find some advert message designed to persuade people to buy a product. What needs to be emphasized is that even though we absorb the messages transmitted by adverts and commercials, and although these may have some unconscious effects on our behaviour, we accept media images only if they suit our already established preferences. If we complain about the shallowness of our television and advertising culture, we really have no one to blame but ourselves.

The language of advertising has also had an effect on the language of ordinary communication. Advertising language reduces thoughts to formulas, phrases, jingles, slogans and so on. Accordingly, we must be aware of the subtexts that adverts and commercials generate because when the human mind is aware of the hidden codes in texts, it will be better able to fend off the undesirable effects that many texts may cause. Accordingly, interdisciplinary approach may be of great value in reaching accurate understanding of the adverts' messages. Ideas from the pragmatics and psycholinguistics can help to demystify advertising creativity. Only in this way consumers can buy products, not for the magical qualities suggested by such advertising, but by relying on critical thought.

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