

English Advertisements in a Multilingual Setting-A Linguistic Perspective

Barnali Chetia

Abstract—Advertising is a form of communication intended to persuade an audience (viewers, readers or listeners) to purchase or take/ refrain from taking some action upon products, ideas, or services. It includes the name of a product or service and how that product or service could benefit the consumer and it aims to persuade a target market to purchase or to consume that particular brand or product. The present paper attempts a study of the communicative linguistic parameters found in English language advertisements in India and how their use relates to the socio-cultural context of advertising in the multilingual setting of India.

Keywords— language, communication, persuasion, applied linguistics.

I. INTRODUCTION

MODERN advertising developed with the rise of mass production in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Different types of media are used to deliver these messages, including traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, television, radio, outdoor/ direct mail; or new media such as Websites and text messages.

The advertising messages are usually paid for by sponsors and viewed via various media. Advertising can also serve to communicate an idea to a large number of people in an attempt to convince them to take or to refrain from taking a certain action. An advertisement can be defined as a vital marketing tool as well as a powerful communication force.

Commercial advertisers often seek to generate increased consumption of their products or services through branding, which involves the repetition of an image or product name in an effort to associate related qualities with the brand in the minds of consumers. Non-commercial advertisers who spend money to advertise items other than a consumer product or service include political parties, interest groups, religious organizations, and governmental agencies. Advertising, in its non-commercial guise, is a powerful educational tool capable of reaching and motivating large audiences. The advertising techniques which are used to promote commercial goods and services can be used to inform, educate and motivate the public about non-commercial issues, such as HIV/AIDS, political ideology, energy conservation, gender discrimination, child abuse, sanitation, infant mortality, deforestation and many more. This kind of advertising is called public-service advertising. Another recent development in the sphere of

advertising is the trend of interactive and 'embedded' ads, which are done via product placement, having consumers vote through text messages and utilizing social networking services such as Facebook etc.

II. THE LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE- AN OVERVIEW

From a linguistic perspective, much of the language that occurs in advertising is characteristic of what might be called as the 'advertising register'. In advertising register, certain types of expressions are frequently used, such as use of compounds (finger-lickin' good), extensive use of verbs (Do the dew), coinages (Xerox); imperatives used to make suggestions such as "Try it, and you'll like it"; rhetorical queries (How do you feel? I feel like Toohey's); adjectivalizations (buttery taste), etc.

Leech (1966:27), in his classic treatise, had dealt with the language of advertising and had enumerated a number of linguistic patterns and techniques that characterized them. He had pointed out that the language of advertising exhibited unorthodoxies of spelling and syntax, and semantic oddities in advertisements are common to attract attention. He also highlighted that advertisements employ a simple, personal, colloquial style and a familiar vocabulary to sustain attention. Similarly, he also observed that phonological devices of rhyme and alliteration and sheer repetition are utilized to enhance memorability and the amusement value of advertisements.

The language of advertising is characterised by several linguistic features. A significant tool is the use of first and second Personal Pronouns. Pronouns of the first and second person such as 'we', 'I', and 'you' outnumber the other pronouns in advertisements. It is because Personal Pronouns like 'we', 'I', and 'you' help create a friend-like intimate atmosphere to move and persuade the audience.

This can be seen from the following example:

"Ford: The choice is yours. The honor is ours."

This headline is from 'Ford Motors', where the manufacturer placed itself in a very humble position thereby making the readers feel that they are respectable and higher in status.

The other significant linguistic features seen in advertisements are use of emotive or evaluative adjectives or adjectival phrases, use of technical terms and scientific-sounding words, use of negative words, use of inclusive words, use of compound words, and use of coined words.

Rhetoric is not simply a matter of how thoughts are presented but is itself an influence on ways of thinking, which deserves serious attention. Attending to rhetoric can assist us in deconstructing almost all kinds of discourse, especially advertising language. Rhetorical devices such as metaphor, simile, exaggeration, etc. are frequently used consciously in advertising. This can be seen from the following example of the use of a metaphor:

"A woman expresses herself in many languages, Vimal is one of them". (Vimal Saaree ad)

It is clearly evident that the metaphor used above compares two different things by speaking of one in terms of the other. Unlike a simile or analogy, metaphor asserts that one thing is another thing and not just that one is like another.

It is also seen that one cannot ignore the role of semiotics in advertisements. Copy writers employ signs/ signification in a shorthand form in advertisements. Advertising agencies apply referent systems for visual and musical signifiers and then compress and sequence them together in a structure which is recognizable. Referent systems designate widely shared systems of knowledge and clusters of meaning. For the advertisement to work, the consumer has to validate the sign – attaching a signified to the signifier. This is supported by tools like narration, music, the relationship of each image to others in the commercial, and the consumer's own knowledge of the referent system from which the signifier is drawn.

Today, Indian advertising has the enormous job of speaking to one of the world's most diverse populations. English is the only common language throughout all of India. Television, radio, and newspapers rely on more than two dozen languages, thus limiting the communicative reach of many advertisements to certain geographic regions or some sectors of society. In northern India, Hindi is widely used in advertisements, but in southern India the regional languages are widely used. Some advertisements combine Hindi and English and formulate a mixed language known as Hinglish. Hinglish has crept its way into advertisements, TV shows, and Bollywood movies as well as the corridors of corporate and political power in India. A popular movie is titled "Jab We Met" ("When We Met"), while a shampoo commercial on TV features a popular Bollywood actress Priyanka Chopra calling out, "Come on girls, waqt hai shine karneka!" ("It's time to shine") –this is an apt example of code-mixing. Over the years, Hinglish has been effectively used in Indian advertising in advertising taglines, like Pepsi's 1998 slogan Yeh Dil Maange More! (This heart demands for more!). Even "English-language" newspapers in India pepper their text with words borrowed from Hindi.

The present work observes some significant aspects of the use of linguistic features in English advertising texts in the context of the multilingual and multicultural setting of India. For example, advertisements of a global fast food brand 'McDonalds' for an Indian audience celebrates the comingling of the old with the new. The advertising agency that handles the account for the fast food major does not send pattern ads for the Indian context. Rather it adapts the

advertisements to the unique Indian multi-cultural and multilingual context in an attempt to speak to the Indian consumers.

Further the 'McDonald's' tagline 'I'm Loving It' is an iconic statement, which has captured the imagination of the masses for years. In this sentence ('I'm loving it'), the grammatical aspect, i.e. the progressive aspect, is incompatible with the lexical aspect of the verb, i.e. the stative aspect. And from a grammatical point of view it is significant since it introduced and established a hitherto incorrect/ ungrammatical form of usage and the same has now become common-place and accepted usage.

Given below are some examples of data for the analysis of the patterns of creative use of language in advertising.

A. Personification

(LEE – Apparel)

(LEE – The jeans that built America)

Personification is a figure of speech in which an inanimate object or abstraction is given human qualities or abilities. In the tagline "The jeans that built America," the inanimate object "jeans" is equated to a human abstraction who/ which has the capability of building a country (an identity that is synonymous to America).

B. Parallelism

(Soft drink Seven-up)

(Seven-up – Fresh up with Seven-up)

Parallelism involves creation of novel forms involving repetition of a linguistic form. In the above mentioned tagline "Fresh up with Seven-up," 'Fresh up' and 'Seven-up' include a repetition of the preposition 'up' in two different phrases: a Verb Phrase and a Noun Phrase.

Thus, it is crucial to analyse how advertising texts, through the use of linguistic features and figures of speech, synchronize language and images to create favourable meanings and perceptions. It is also important to analyse the implications in other areas viz.– use in language pedagogy/ teaching effective communication skills/ persuasion.

III. ENGLISH ADVERTISEMENTS IN THE MULTILINGUAL (INDIAN) CONTEXT

Multilingualism is now a legitimate reality in the world. India does not have any national language. The official language of the Republic of India is Hindi, and its subsidiary official language is English. The individual states can legislate their own official languages, depending on their linguistic demographics. For example, the state of Tamil Nadu has Tamil as its sole official language, while the state of Jammu and Kashmir has Kashmiri, Urdu, and Dogri as its official languages. The Indian census of 1961 recognised 1,652 different languages in India (including languages not native to the subcontinent). According to the 1991 census, 22 'languages' had more than a million native speakers, 50 had more than 1,00,000, and 114 had more than 10,000 native speakers. The remaining accounted for a total of 5,66,000

native speakers (out of a total of 838 million Indians in 1991). According to the most recent census of 2001, 29 'languages' have more than a million native speakers, 60 have more than 1,00,000, and 122 have more than 10,000 native speakers.

The Government of India has given 22 'languages of the 8th Schedule' the status of official language. The number of languages given this status has increased through the political process. In India, a regional language has its geographical bounds defined within the state. Along with Hindi as an official language and 22 others as official regional languages, each state can choose its own regional language for use in local government affairs and in education among the languages spoken in its territory. It is seen that although there are so many languages in India, quite a number of people do not know any other Indian language than their own. English is the most widely spoken second language, followed by Hindi. In a multilingual speech community a whole range of languages, or repertoire, is available to speakers, who choose to use some of them in their linguistic interaction to perform particular social roles. Repertoire applies at two different levels to both the community and the individual. And it is seen that a speaker does not usually control the whole range of the codes of a community's repertoire continuum but only a number of these. As English is one of the official languages of the country, with the status of associate national language, the mastery of English therefore is considered a social and educational accomplishment. Language has a powerful influence over people and their behaviour. This is especially all the more true in the fields of marketing and advertising. The choice of language to convey specific messages with the intention of influencing people is vitally important. Visual content and design in advertising have a very great impact on the consumer, but it is language that helps people to identify a product and remember it. Likewise, the kind of language used in advertisements as well as in leading journals and newspapers bring big success to companies. Today, success in the job market or even marriage market has come to be equated with fluency in English. In short, Kachru's pronouncement (1986:32) that English has now become an integral part of India's linguistic repertoire is all the more true today.

REFERENCES

- [1] Austin J. L. 1962. *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford University Press.
- [2] Atkin, A. 2006. Peirce's Theory of Signs, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- [3] Berger A. A. 1991. *Media Research Techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- [4] Harris Richard J., Sturn Ruth E., Klassen Michael L., and Bechtold John I. 1986. "Language in Advertising: A Psycholinguistic Approach," in *Current Issues and Research in Advertising*, Volume 9, Nos. 1 and 2, eds. James H. Leigh and Claude R. Martin, Jr., Ann Arbor University of Michigan.
- [5] Kachru, B. 1986. *The Alchemy of English. The Spread, Functions and Models of Non-Native Englishes*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- [6] Kachru, B. 1986. *The Power and Politics of English*. In *World Englishes*, Vol. 5, No. 2/3: 121-140.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971X.1986.tb00720.x>
- [7] Leech, G. N. 1966. *English in Advertising: A Linguistic Study of Advertising in Great Britain*. London, Longman.
- [8] McQuarrie, Edward F. and David G. M. 1992. On Resonance: A Critical Pluralistic Inquiry into Advertising Rhetoric, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19, 180-197.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/209295>
- [9] Ogilvy D. 1985. *Ogilvy on Advertising*, New York: Vintage Books.
- [10] India 1996. *A Reference Annual*. 1997. New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Government of India. Publications Division.
- [11] Indian Constitution. 1998. Available at: http://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/law/00034_.html (9 August 1998).
- [12] UNESCO. 2005. *First Language First: Community Based Literacy Programmes for Minority Language Contexts in Asia*.