

# THE STYLE IN THE LANGUAGE OF PROMOTIONAL LITERATURE

Pop Anamaria Mirabela

Universitatea din Oradea, Facultatea de Științe Economice, Str. Universității 1, Oradea  
mipop@uoradea.ro, +40-259-408-799

*Abstract: Advertising is an inevitable part of the modern capitalist consumer society whose outstanding feature is its competitive fight. The aim of advertising is to be catchy and easy to remember. Advertisers use language quite distinctively: there are advantages in making bizarre and controversial statements in unusual ways as well as communicating with people using simple, straightforward language. Copy-writers are well-known for playing with words and manipulating or distorting their everyday meanings. They break the rules of language for effect, use words out of context and even make up new ones.*

*Key words: advertising, ads, language, rhetorical devices*

## 1. Introduction

In its simplest sense, the word “advertising” means “drawing attention to something”, or notifying or informing somebody or something. You can advertise by word of mouth, quite informally and locally, and without incurring great expense. But if you want to inform a large number of people about something, you might need to advertise in the now familiar sense of the word, by public announcement.

Advertising as we know it today has undergone major transitions from its early forms. Trademarks as symbols on objects to represent its creator have been in use since thousands of years BC. The urge to connect objects with their manufacturer and to create that relationship between the user and the creator establishes the foundation for all forms of advertising that have come since. In the beginning of industrialization, when advertising for commodities first came about, imagery was mostly used to represent the product and to depict the desirable effect of such new products on its users. Most advertisements at the time were aimed at women—white homemakers—and promoted goods to make their life more convenient. The first advertising agency was founded in 1843. To accommodate the growing demand for advertising space in newspapers, these early advertisers were mostly in charge of selling the space in the paper rather than the actual design. It was not until the early 1880s that advertising agencies became responsible for the content of the ads which included more than simply securing the space in the publication, but also writing, designing and illustrating the ad. Victorian era ads are text heavy and read like an instruction manual accompanied by illustrations. From today’s perspective these early advertisements are too busy to be arresting and the overall unity and identity of a company is missing. This began to change after the turn of the century when Peter Behrens was the first designer to create a full identity system for a company (AEG). However, trademarks and identity design were not truly embraced until the mid 20th century.

In the course of time, people tried more and more to differentiate their products and began to find out new ways of presenting. They started to accentuate the visual aspect of the advertisement. With the expansion of colour printing and colourful posters the streets began to revel in colours. These posters were ancestors to modern billboards. As the economy and the trade were expanding during the 19th century, the need for advertising grew. Gradually, advertising transformed into a modern, more scientific and sophisticated conception. New visual techniques have been launched. Not only the content of the message is important, but also the form. The creativity of copy-writers, who are finding new ways, leads to the richness of various forms of advertising.

People who criticize advertising in its current form argue that “advertisements create false wants and encourage the production and consumption of things that are incompatible with the fulfilment of genuine and urgent human needs”.<sup>246</sup> According to Dyer, advertising is an irrational system which appeals to humans’ emotions and to anti-social feelings which have nothing to do with the goods on offer.<sup>247</sup> Advertisements usually suggest that private acquisition is the only avenue to social success and happiness – they define private acquisition and competitiveness as a primary goal in life, at the expense of less tangible rewards like better health care and social

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<sup>246</sup> Dyer, Gillian, *Advertising as Communication*, London: Routledge, 1982, p.3.

<sup>247</sup> Cf. Gillian Dyer, *Op.cit.*, p.3.

services. It is said that the consumer economy diverts “funds from socially useful and human needs and make us greedy, materialistic, and wasteful.”<sup>248</sup>

On the other hand, those who defend advertising say that it is necessary, economically speaking and has brought many benefits to society, contributing to “society’s wellness and raises people’s standard of living by encouraging the sales of mass-produced goods, thus stimulating production and creating employment and prosperity.”<sup>249</sup>

## 2. Advertising as communication

### 2.1. The language of advertising

Advertising language is a “loaded language”.<sup>250</sup> Its primary aim is to attract the attention favourably towards the product or service on offer. Advertisers use language quite distinctively: there are advantages in making bizarre and controversial statements in unusual ways as well as communicating with people using simple, straightforward language. Copy-writers are well-known for playing with words and manipulating or distorting their everyday meanings. They break the rules of language for effect, use words out of context and even make up new ones. However, simple and direct language and modes of address can still be used to attract attention and add emphasis to a picture. The use of the imperative mode is very common in advertising: “Buy this”, “Try some today”, “Don’t forget”, “Treat yourself”.

Catching the audience’s attention and imagination and helping memory are the main functions of advertising language. The public’s memory is also helped by brand names, slogans and catch-phrases, rhythm and rhyme, fragments of songs or verse and endless repetition.

The language of advertising is able to “take on any form that is required for communicating its message, thus covering and utilizing the entire linguistic continuum”.<sup>251</sup> Speaking the language of recipients is one of the major requirements of successful sales talk.

### 2.2. Linguistic means used in advertising language

#### 2.2.1. Phonology

Advertising language often uses the techniques similar to those in poetic texts. The advantage of so-called mnemonic devices (rhyme, rhythm, alliteration and assonance) is the mnemotechnical effect. It guarantees that the receiver of the advertisement better remembers the text and recalls it at the right moment.

##### a) Rhyme

Rhyme is a pattern of “identity of sound between words or verse-lines extending from the end to the last fully accented vowel and not further.”<sup>252</sup> Rhyme refers to sounds, not spelling. It is commonly found in jingles, slogans and headlines.

e.g. “Eukanuba gives their teeth the strength they need.”<sup>253</sup>

##### b) Rhythm

The aim of advertising is to be catchy and easy to remember. One of the devices how copywriters can reach it is to use prosodic features – intonation, rhythm and lexical stress - because they have a great emotional and mnemonic effect. Copywriters often use language with rhythmical arrangement. The listener or reader need not notice it and he perceives it only subconsciously. The result is that the text is memorable and linguistically neat. If the rhythm has some regularity, it is called metre. “Metre is a pattern composed of rhythm groups (feet) consisting of similar

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<sup>248</sup> Cf. *Idem, ibidem*.

<sup>249</sup> Dyer, Gillian, *Op.cit.*, p.4.

<sup>250</sup> Leech, Geoffrey, N., *English in Advertising: A Linguistic Study of Advertising in Great Britain* (English Language Series). London: Longman, 1972, p. 76.

<sup>251</sup> Sternkopf, Sylva-Michele, *English in Marketing: International Communication Strategies in Small and Medium- Sized Enterprises*, Frank & Timme GmbH, 2005, p.210.

<sup>252</sup> *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* 2004

<sup>253</sup> [www.eukanuba-eu.com/](http://www.eukanuba-eu.com/)

or identical patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables. (...) Metrical scheme may easily pass unnoticed.)”<sup>254</sup> English poetry has various types of metrical feet. Among the most important belong *an iamb* (an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable: x / ), a *trochee* (a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed one: / x ), a *dactyl* (a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables: / x x ), a *spondee* (consisting of two stressed syllables: / / ), a *pyrrhic* (two unstressed syllables: x x ), and an *anapest* (two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed one: x x / ). Advertisement slogans often benefit from the metrical regularity:

e.g. “Flatter your figure with Dietrim.”<sup>255</sup> This slogan is composed of three dactyls.

/ x    x / x        x / x x  
 'flæ/tə(r) jə(r) 'fl/gə(r) wɪð 'daɪ/ə/trɪm

#### c) Alliteration

Alliteration can be defined as “literary technique, in which successive words (more strictly, stressed syllables) begin with the same consonant sound or letter.”<sup>256</sup> It is widely used in advertising slogans.

e.g. “Performance. Prestige. Passion for Innovation.”<sup>257</sup>

#### d) Assonance

Assonance is a linguistic device, in which the same vowel in successive stressed syllables creates a vowel harmony. It is not so obvious type of scheme as alliteration.

e.g. “How much reality can you handle?”<sup>258</sup>

#### e) Graphic aspect of the text

The graphic aspect of the text deals only with graphic elaboration of the text. Almost all printed advertisements exploit from the fact of being printed. Copywriters have to decide how to make the layout. The selection of script, its colour, type and size is the inevitable part of making a good advertisement. However, not only this may contribute to the final effect. The other possibilities are:

- *Unpredictable spelling of words* (“Beanz Meanz Heinz”, “4ever”, “Bar B Q”, “süper”, etc.)
- *Higher frequency of low-frequent letters* that produce outstanding sounds (‘X’ is very popular: “Xerox”, “Botox” and use of palato-alveolar consonants /tʃ/, /f/, /d\_/).
- *Unexpected print of letters* - whether the size or their shape is similar to some object and this object replaces the letter.
- *Acronyms and initialisms with graphic exploitation* – the letters of abbreviation create the first letters of words. The effect is highlighted by means of colour, size or layout:

e.g. “XTROVERT. XPLOSIVE. LOVE THE COLOUR. COLOR XXL”

<sup>254</sup> Leech, Geoffrey, *Op. cit.*, p.186.

<sup>255</sup> [www.vitabiotics.com/dietrim/](http://www.vitabiotics.com/dietrim/)

<sup>256</sup> <http://www.wikipedia.org/>

<sup>257</sup> [http://www.clevelandjewishnews.com/pdf/MANN\\_Jewelers.pdf](http://www.clevelandjewishnews.com/pdf/MANN_Jewelers.pdf)

<sup>258</sup> [www.samsung.com/](http://www.samsung.com/)

f) Transliteration

Using of transliteration in advertisement is not so frequent, but when occurred, it makes a positive result. It definitely attracts reader's attention. Transliteration means the transformation of foreign words into English. Usually the spelling of the foreign word is different but the pronunciation in these special cases is the same as English:

e.g. "BE COINTREAUVERSIAL."<sup>259</sup> (COINTREAU is the name of French alcoholic drink)

2.2.2. Lexical and morphological aspect

f) Adjectives

While reading the advertisement, the reader may notice the hyperbolic character of the language. This exaggeration causes increased number of comparative and superlative adjectives. The product is better, nicer, newer, and tighter and the customer is happier and more satisfied. The product offers more information, more entertainment, more comfort, more than any other product.

Adjective	Pharmaceuticals	Bottled Water	Cosmetics	Shampoo	Soap	Cereal	SUV	Jeans	
Alive		2	4	6	6	5	2	5	2
Clear		2	9	8	2	4	0	0	0
Comfortable		1	0	2	0	0	0	9	10
Crunchy		0	0	0	0	0	10	0	0
Fresh		0	7	3	6	6	5	0	0
Good-looking		1	0	10	5	0	0	5	9
Good value		3	3	2	5	5	4	9	3
Happy		3	0	6	1	1	2	3	2
Healthy		7	10	4	5	3	10	0	0
Large		0	3	0	2	0	1	10	0
Loud		0	0	3	0	0	0	1	1
Pure		6	9	6	5	6	3	0	0
Reliable		2	0	1	0	0	0	10	0
Rugged		0	2	0	0	0	0	9	9
Safe		9	2	3	1	1	1	10	0
Small		2	1	2	0	0	0	0	1
Strong		7	0	2	2	3	1	7	2
Stylish		0	0	8	8	0	0	6	10
Tasty		1	1	0	0	0	9	0	0

Source: [www.stanford.edu/class/linguist34/](http://www.stanford.edu/class/linguist34/)

a) Epithet

is a descriptive word or phrase, which "An adjective expressing some quality, attribute, or relation, that is properly or specially appropriate to a person or thing; as, a just man; a verdant lawn."<sup>260</sup> There are two types of epithets: *epithet constans* (commonly used stereotyped collocation, e.g. heavy rain, bright day) and *epithet ornans* (decorative). In advertising, most widely used are epithets like fresh, new, gentle, creamy, silky, delicious, beautiful, ideal, excellent, unforgettable, eternal, etc., and, accordingly, the gradational forms of them.

<sup>259</sup> [www.becointreauversial.com/](http://www.becointreauversial.com/)

<sup>260</sup> <http://www.brainyquote.com/words/ep/epithet161070.html>

### b) Foreign words

Foreign words are used in advertisements to emphasize the origin of the product or exclusiveness of the product in relation to particular country:

e.g. “La crème de la crème of lipcolour.”<sup>261</sup>

French word ‘crème’ evokes the impression of good-class French cosmetics. Even more, the phrase ‘crème de la crème’ is taken from French and it means ‘the best people or things of their kind’.<sup>262</sup>

### 2.2.3. Semantic aspect

Each linguistic expression has its literal meaning. Literal meaning denotes what it means according to common or dictionary usage (or more exactly, what “the reader is most likely to assign to a word or phrase if he or she knows nothing about the context in which it is to be used.”<sup>263</sup> The same linguistic expression, however, may have also its figurative meaning. It connotes additional layers of meaning and evokes associations; for example, the word ‘professional’ has connotations of skill and excellence. It is not possible to give an exhaustive account of the connotations of the expression, because connotative meanings, which have been evoked in an individual, depend on people’s entire previous experiences and on conventions of community. Therefore, the connotations of the same expression will differ slightly from person to person. Furthermore, the same denotations can have different connotations in different context. Vestergaard and Schroder believe that in advertising language, the most frequent word for ‘acquisition of product’ is ‘get’, and not ‘buy’, because ‘buy’ has some unpleasant connotations, like ‘money’ and the parting with it.<sup>264</sup>

For people, associations are very powerful, so the advertisers pay attention to this aspect of language. They play with colours, because colours may have various positive or negative connotations: innocence / snow / ice / race, and others for white; passion / blood / stop signal / fire for red etc. They must be careful about the target group, because each culture may have different connotations to the same expressions: in Chinese and Indian tradition, white is the colour of mourning, death, and ghosts. In India, white also stands for peace and purity. Red colour in Eastern European countries may have slightly negative connotation in relation to the identification of communism with “socialist” red.

A *trope* is “a word or phrase that is used in a way that is different from its usual meaning in order to create a particular mental image or effect.”<sup>265</sup> It is a figurative expression. In what follows, we provide a list of most important tropes used in advertising language: personification, simile, hyperbole, and metaphor. In relation to semantic aspect of language, antithesis, polysemy, and homonymy are defined.

### c) Personification

Personification is a term used mainly in literature to name the figure of speech, which “involves directly speaking of an inanimate object, or an abstract concept, as if it were a living entity, often one with specifically human attributes. These attributes may include sensations, emotions, desires, physical gestures and expressions, and powers of speech, among others.”<sup>266</sup> The readers of advertisements usually do not register or realize that there is used personification in the text. It is used very widely – in all the expressions like “...(name of a facial crème) gives you silky skin”, “...(name of a product) fulfils your wishes” or “Dirty kitchen? Nothing cleans it up like ... (name of a cleaner)” are on the base of personification of a brand name: a cleaner ‘cleans’, but even thought, cleaning is an activity proper to human beings.

### d) Simile

Simile is defined as “a direct, expressed comparison between two things essentially unlike each other, but resembling each other in at least one way.”<sup>267</sup> Usually, similes are marked by use of the words ‘like’, ‘than’, ‘as’ or ‘as if’. We may also find comparative constructions used when comparing two things or two situations: “as...as”, “so...as”.

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<sup>261</sup> [www.sephora.com/](http://www.sephora.com/)

<sup>262</sup> *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, 2001

<sup>263</sup> <http://www.wikipedia.org/>

<sup>264</sup> Vestergaard, Torben, Schroder, Kim, *The Language of Advertising*, New York: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1985, p. 94.

<sup>265</sup> *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, 2001

<sup>266</sup> <http://www.wikipedia.org/>

<sup>267</sup> <http://home.cfl.rr.com/eghsap/apterms.html>

e.g. “Ibuleve gel as fast & effective as pills? Now there’s clinical evidence.”  
“Breakfast without orange juice is like a day without sunshine.”<sup>268</sup>

e) *Hyperbole*

A hyperbole is “the deliberate use of overstatement or exaggeration to achieve emphasis. Businessmen and manufacturers use the figure of speech to advertise their goods in as attractive a way as possible.”<sup>269</sup>  
e.g. “No other pain-relieving gel works like Deep Relief.”<sup>270</sup>

f) *Metaphor*

Central to much of modern day advertising in glossy magazines is the use of metaphors, similes, and analogies. Metaphors are interesting because depending on how individual’s perceptions, interests, experiences and motivations they can lead to different interpretations. A single metaphor can be worth a hundred words of copy. Typically defined as statements and/or pictures that cause a receiver to experience one thing in terms of another, these literary devices can efficiently communicate additional information and transfer meaning between a referent and a brand. Metaphors can also stimulate deeper levels of processing because of their interest value and because they stimulate curiosity about a brand. The word metaphor is derived from the Greek word “*metapherein*” meaning “to transfer.” According to *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* a metaphor is defined as follows: “A figure of speech founded on resemblance, by which a word is transferred from an object to which it properly belongs to another in such a manner that a comparison is implied though not formally expressed.”<sup>271</sup> A metaphor is a form of comparison, a rhetorical trope, classified as a direct comparison or crossmapping across two or more seemingly unrelated subjects.

Lakoff and Johnson in their book, *Metaphors We Live By*, define metaphor as “statements and/or pictures which cause a receiver to experience one thing in terms of another.”<sup>272</sup>

e.g. “Clearly, Mother Nature is a romantic.”

In advertising, a metaphor usually creates a comparison between the product or service and some other quality the advertiser wishes to be associated with the product or service advertised:

e.g. “One touch. One light, effortless touch and she realized freedom was something you feel.”<sup>273</sup>

This advertisement is for Revlon face powder. The sentence indicates that the freedom is actually the powder, because when you put the powder on your face, you will feel free.

There are two types of metaphor: verbal and visual. *Visual metaphors* do not relate only to words, but they depict relationships between a product or service and some object or visual element with qualities that the advertiser wishes to attribute to the product or service. In print advertising, visual metaphor is widely used, because it takes advantage from the possibility to accompany the text by the image.

Advertisements for perfumes often without the body text but with the picture of a young beautiful model in light transparent dress use a metaphorical implication: a perfume will ‘cover’ you in the same way like the dress gently covers the woman in the picture.

There are cases, in which a famous person stands for and represents the whole brand. The qualities of him or her are attributed or aligned with the qualities of the product. Sasha Cohen, a famous figure skater, represents the unstoppable quality and charm of the product, a bracelet:

e.g. “UNSTOPPABLE *Charm* SASHA COHEN HAS IT. So does her Citizen Eco-Drive.”<sup>274</sup>

g) *Antithesis*

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<sup>268</sup> [www3.fertilethoughts.com/forums/archive/index.php/t-321565.html](http://www3.fertilethoughts.com/forums/archive/index.php/t-321565.html)

<sup>269</sup> <http://www.languageinindia.com/march2005/advertisingenglishhongkong1.html>

<sup>270</sup> [www.sorenomore.com/testimo2.html](http://www.sorenomore.com/testimo2.html)

<sup>271</sup> *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*,

<sup>272</sup> Lakoff, George, Johnson, Mark, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980, p.8.

<sup>273</sup> [www.revlon.com/](http://www.revlon.com/)

<sup>274</sup> [www.citizen.co.jp/english/](http://www.citizen.co.jp/english/)

“Antithesis is a figure of speech, which uses the same or similar structure to express two opposite ideas so as to achieve the effects of emphasizing the meaning and the contrast. The figure has the characteristics of harmonious combination of sound and rhyme, balanced syllables, sharp rhythm and compendiousness. The combination of pleasant senses of vision and hearing often stimulates the good feelings of readers and arouses consumers’ buying desire.”<sup>275</sup> Antithesis relates to words, clauses or sentences. It is based on antonyms (words of opposite meaning) or opposite ideas:

e.g. “Talks inside. Shouts outside. New 2006 Fiesta.”<sup>276</sup>

### **3. Conclusion**

Advertisers play a major role in shaping society’s values and habits. In general, the success of advertising depends not on its logical proposition but rather on the fantasies it provides. The world of ads is a dream world where people and objects are taken out from their material context and given new symbolic meanings, placed on hoardings. Everything means something to somebody, whether people realize it consciously or it stays in their unconscious. At the same time it is important to note that the creator behind meaning—even if it is incredible vague—brings their own background and collection of connotative meaning and associations to the piece. By overlaying image with words—which are in themselves signifier—we create a wide array of meaning that can be various and that is completely arbitrary. As we are confronted with images and text, our mind starts to associate all of the signifiers within a construct with our own personal experiences, knowledge, emotions and feelings. So even if the creator of such a construct never intended for it to have any meaning it is as good as impossible to rule out any associations for the viewer.

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<sup>275</sup> <http://www.languageinindia.com/march2005/advertisingenglishhongkong1.html>

<sup>276</sup> [www.ford.com/](http://www.ford.com/)