

A COMMUNICATIVE STUDY OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA ADVERTISEMENTS IN GHANA**Philip Arthur, Mercy Fumi & Martin****ABSTRACT**

A common phenomenon of global interest is advertisement. The Ghanaian media is replete with all kinds of advertisements ranging from education, through social issues to business. It is in listening to some of these advertisements that my appetite was whipped to look at their linguistic make up. This paper examines closely the linguistic structures and strategies that are employed by the advertiser to persuade potential users of their goods and services. The study reveals that advertisers employ various styles including dialogues, straight forward presentation, repetition, jingles, catch-phrases, superlative adjectives and pattern repetition in persuading their audience to use their products and services.

INTRODUCTION

The most popular means of electronic advertising in Ghana is through the radio and television. Although, the computer as a form of electronic advertising is appealing, it is not as popular as the radio and television. Thus, the radio and television still remain the most powerful and persuasive means of advertising in Ghana. About ninety- nine percent (99%) of the targeted market is reached through the electronic media. It is for this reason that we have decided to study the linguistic make up of advertisements that are used electronically in Ghana

The scope of this paper will cover the areas in the arrangement of the electronic advertisement as a means of communication and the focus will be on the use of English, its effectiveness and appeal in Ghanaian advertisements. We look at the levels of English used to suit the different people who make up the Ghanaian market. Therefore, for the purpose of this work, we shall use the following adverts in 2006 – 2009. The radio adverts will feature: the SSB savings account advert, the frytol (radio) advert, the Sika Card (radio) advert, and the Royco Shito Mix advert. However, other advertisements (both radio and television) will be culled into use should

they happen to best explain or illustrate the subject under discussion. The paper focuses on the style of the advertiser and how he manipulates the English language to serve his purpose.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Advertising is a vital means of communication in the field of marketing. It is, therefore, not surprising that quite a number of writers touch on this aspect of advertising as communication in business. Looking at the history and development over the years, Crawford (1960) states that advertisements have their roots deep in the history of man. It is inbred in man and is almost as old as man himself. Today, advertising has become a major form of communication in business. He adds that the nature of advertising makes it depend on the available media to carry the message.

Sampson (1930), points out that before the days of the print and electronic media, the only available media were signboards and town criers. These writers agree that the electronic media is the most influential. They state,

The electronic miracles of radio and television... are technical developments which have been applied to advertising to enable it to spread its influence more widely and more effectively in recent years.

This statement underscores the power of the electronic media in its communication function in modern advertising.

Sandage and Fryburger (1967) write that in a world of such technological advancement, the electronic medium is fast becoming the most popular choice in advertising. This is also true of the Ghanaian market where advertisers rely on the radio and television for far more reaching results. A study of the Ghanaian market proves that the electronic advertisements are the most commonly used since they are more convincing, persuasive and powerful in their appeal. This supports Swindells (1966), who says *Television is also the most dramatically effective ... and the radio is in most ways a very flexible medium*. Swindells, (p. 217, 280) According to him, the electronic advertisements, most commonly called commercials, serve to assist consumers in their search for goods and services. The advertisements are guides to buying. Thus, to Sandage and Fryburger, the language of these commercials "... must be adequate..." They further assert that the

qualitative information supplied through advertisements can be helpful to consumers and that *Clearly, advertising can and should give information Much advertising ... revolves around pure information.*

The writers also look at the kind and tone of language these commercial messages are put in. The language, to them, is mostly persuasive. Sandage and Fryburger note that “Advertising in any form, contains within itself an element of persuasion and any advertising that is purely informative is often all that is needed to persuade” a consumer. Therefore, advertisements should be highly persuasive.

In this study we look at how the advertiser is able to persuade the public to use his goods or services. Since advertisements are a vast means of communication and the Ghanaian advertiser’s use of the English language is very important, we consider this study essential.

FINDINGS

THE ADVERTISER’S LANGUAGE USE

Advertising, basically, has a dual nature; information and persuasion. The electronic advertisement or commercial is the closest thing to having a personal salesman visit every home. The Ghanaian community has varied languages as well as dialects. To make their work simpler, most Ghanaian advertisements are in English and so, advertisers hope to be successful when the language is used effectively. Advertisers achieve this effectiveness in different ways including the use of repetition, catchy words, double entendres and alliteration. We shall also look at the use of the snob appeal and exaggeration as the advertiser’s way of persuading his audience. The commercials arouse thoughts and feelings in the listener, that relate to the commercial’s central message. Identification by the listener can be established by the use of a dialogue, a straight-forward presentation, a jingle or a combination of the three.

THE USE OF COLLOQUIALISM AND DIALOGUES

A lot of Ghanaian commercials on both radio and television are in the form of dialogues. Normally, a scene is created and a service or product is discussed by characters. The Social Security Bank Card (Sika Card) commercials are in episodes using dialogue to effectively hold interest.

Each episode centres around a particular attribute of the Sika Card. One is on its safety, another on its convenience and a third on the advantage of the cash back system. In the episodes, the dialogue between the characters provides all the necessary information. The advertising copy may be in English and the construction of sentences is so simple as to send the message home. The dialogue is often able to carry the nuances of a normal conversation in any of the vernaculars.

The Omo soap satchet commercial is an example of how the English lines carry the nuances of a local dialect. One particular line in this commercial sounds almost as if the lady customer were speaking a local language. She says:

“Eh, you’ve sold Omo ahh, you’ve permed your hair.”

The construction is similar to the Asanti Twi equivalent which goes like:

“Eh, waton Omo aah, wa permi wuti.”

The dialogue in this advertisement is lively, funny and very natural. The dialogues in commercials are clear and colloquial. The SSB Account radio commercial has:

“Okey, meet me in front of SSB and I’ll give you some money”

The above line is simple and colloquial.

THE USE OF STRAIGHT FORWARD PRESENTATION

Radio and television commercials are also presented in a straight-forward manner. The Frytol Cooking oil commercial, both radio and television, is in this form of presentation. The lines are very simple:

“Nothing beats that special feeling of coming home.
Especially when you are coming home to good food.
Good food cooked with Frytol.”

The Omo Power foam is also in the form of a straight-forward presentation:

“Omo Power foam is really wonderful.”
Because I just dissolve it in water and the power foam starts to come up.
I take my dirty clothes and I just wash them gently ...
Omo’s power foam contains a special stain remover.

So now it cleans stubborn stains better than ordinary power.
And the Omo power foam removes all the stains
And it's so gentle
On my hands ...

One also notices the didactic manner in which the advertisement is presented. The advertiser presents the ad in stages showing how to use the Omo.

THE USE OF JINGLES

The jingle of a commercial is one of the most effective tools of communication with or without the dialogue or straight-forward presentation. A jingle here refers to the music that is the signature tune of a commercial. As a tool of communication, the jingle presents the name of the product, its use and slogan in a pleasing and memorable way. It is a device for getting people to carry away a selling message by setting it in a catchy melody that they can hum or sing. Some commercials, like the Royco *Shito* Mix advert, use the jingle often as the main source of communication. It contains a lot of information:

“Royco Shito Mix, so tasty so quick
Read the back,
Add some water ...
Fry in oil ...

A spicy hot sauce prepared with ginger, pepper, shrimps, and oil.

THE USE OF REPETITION

The repetition of a word, a line or meaning in a commercial is mainly for the purpose of emphasis. The Royco Shito Mix commercial as seen above is one example. It repeats a particular line so many times:

“... so tasty, so quick
... so tasty, so quick
... so tasty, so quick.”

By repeating this line, the advertiser positions the advantages of the product, that is, a very quick and tasty way of preparing Shito.

“Geisha lasts and lasts ...”

By repeating the word “lasts”, the advertiser directs attention to the long lasting nature of the soap. The advertiser repeats it not only for emphasis but for conviction as well.

The Fan Yogo or Yoghurt commercial repeats one word:
“Fan Yogo is good for you, you, you, you ...”

By repeating “you” the advertiser seeks to convince the listener that the product is good for him or her (ie. the targeted audience). The “you” can be taken personal and the listener feels exclusive, almost as if the commercial speaks to “you” alone.

The use of Catch-phrases

A commercial, as a way of catching attention, uses catchy words or lines. Sensational and interesting words that make a product or service look attractive. The Fan Milk (Tampico) advertisement has as its caption:

“A sensational fruit drink”

A drink that is described as “sensational” is certainly attractive to the listener who will be very eager to try it.

The Frytol Oil commercial has:

“Frytol, for meals **worth** coming home to”.
The Fan Milk chocolate drink has:
“Fan Milk, the **great** taste of chocolate”.

The use of Superlative Adjectives

Superlative adjectives are mainly used by the advertiser to create a sense of quality. Logic and evidence are not normally applied, and no real comparisons are made among competing products. Referring to a product or service as the best there is to go in for is a great selling strategy. This is done effectively with the superlative. The key soap advert uses the superlative. The key soap advertisement uses the superlative as its slogan:

“The **best** tradition goes on”.

The Omo soap slogan reads:

“The **strongest** soap for the **cleanest** wash”.

The use of the superlative is a common strategy in advertising competing products in commercials. Occasionally, an attributive or predicative adjective is used in a positive form.

THE USE OF DOUBLE ENTENDRES (AMBIGUITY)

An advertiser is able to invest many interpretations into the advertising message or caption, with the purpose to convince many people with different perspectives. The double entendre is when a double meaning (or ambiguity) is invested in a word or line. This is one way through which the advertiser achieves the aim of more than one interpretation. An example of a double entendre is in the SSB Sika Card commercial:

“It’s a **safe** in your packet.”

“safe” can be interpreted as “safety” and as a “safe”(in which money is kept).

Another commercial with the double entendre is the Club beer advertisement presented below:

“The Wedding club.....”

“The Fashion club.....”

“The Tourist club.....”

“The Worker’s club.....”

The “club” can be interpreted as the actual alcoholic drink, as in:

“The worker’s beer”

“The wedding beer”

Or:

The “club” can be interpreted as a “club” (an association), so:

“the tourist association”.

“the fashion association”.

THE USE OF ALLITERATION

Another common linguistic feature of the commercial is the use of alliteration. There is a play on the use of consonants in the words of the commercial to lend a pleasant and musical tone to the advertising message.

The Geisha soap has:

“Geisha, Lasts and Last Like a mother’s Love.”

There is a play on the lateral sound /l/ which is pleasing to the ear.

The Duraplast Plastic Pipe commercial has:

“Where Duraplast goes, water flows”

There is a play on the /ouz/ sound.

THE USE OF PATTERN REPETITION

The repetition in advertising is often in the form of a pattern and this is done for a particular or unique stylistic effect. It is for foregrounding the advertising message or for musical effects. The repetition can be at the phonological level, that is, when a sound is repeated. For example, the Supreme Furnisher’s commercial has:

“Our quality is the best”
“Our prices beat the rest”

The above phonological repetition is a linguistic rhyming mainly for its musical effect. Stress isochronicity, that is, the sameness of stress patterns is another example of phonological repetition. It has the artistic effect of investing two or more parallel structures with the same fate. An example is the Firestone Tyres commercial:

{“Fire stone tyre}
{still flying high”}

Similarly, the MULTITV advertisement has:

“Multitv No bills
Just thrills”

Each pair of lines above has an isochronous rhythm.

The pattern repetition can also be at the semantic level where lexical items belong to the same grammatical category and may be related synonymously or antonymously. An example of a semantic repetition with a synonymous relation is present in the same Supreme Furnishers’ commercial:

{“Our quality is the best”}
{“Our prices beat the rest”}

Here the two lines belong to the same paradigm because they are invested with the same meaning of quality. The Azar Wood Lacquer commercial has:

The best {start}
For a good {finish}

Here, the words in the paradigm are both nominal items but are antonymously related. The semantic opposition has been neutralized by the parallelism.

The repetition can also be at the syntactic level. That is syntactic equivalents or similar patterns. The Supreme Furnishers’ caption is an example:

Our	quantity	is	the	best
Our	prices	beat	the	rest.

The patterns can be represented as:

NP	+	NP2	+	VP	+	NP3
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Where,

NP - Noun Phrase
VP - Verb Phrase

THE USE OF SNOB APPEAL

Creating a snob appeal is another way by which the advertiser marks quality. Here, a product or service is made to seem or appear as the one that a distinguished personality will go

in for. The snob appeal is really effective because apart from marking quality, every consumer will want to belong to that elite “class” and will, therefore, go in for that product or service. The snob appeal may be done in a very blatant manner as in the Lipton Tea advert.

The caption reads:

“The **sign** of good taste.”

Thus, implying that people who drink the Lipton tea have good taste.

The Lux beauty soap commercial has:

“Lux, the beauty soap for **international stars**”

The Irokko Furniture commercial has:

“A **world class** furniture”

The snob appeal may not be so obvious but can be present in a subtle manner. The SSB Sika has a snob appeal. One student is shown the Sika Card by his friend and upon which the first student asks:

“Charlie, what’s up?”
To which his friend responds
“**Big** things”

and the card-holding student, really impressed, reaffirms his friend’s claim and says:

“**Big** things, Charlie”

Thus, the card is considered a **big** thing meant possibly for special people

The use of Over-Exaggeration

The advertising message in a bid to persuade, tends to exaggerate. The truth or fact about a product or service is stretched a little out of proportion. For example, the Ariel washing powder caption has:

“Ariel, not just clean but **pure** clean”
the use of “pure” makes the statement an exaggeration.

A product or service is often made to seem as a miraculous “cure” (or solution) to one’s problem or need. An example is the Rexona Lime Fresh toilet soap which has:

“Giving you a sense of confidence
that **never** leaves you.”

This advertising message implies that a mere soap is enough to give you all the confidence you need; an instant antidote for one who lacks confidence.

The Fan Milk Natural Yogo commercial has:

“Yogo, a pleasant health drink
for **perfect** solutions”

This advert is trying to say that the Yogo drink is all one needs for “perfect solution.”

Over exaggeration often leaves the critical listener feeling quite skeptical. An example of this is the Duraplast Plastic Pipe advert. A truckload of cement runs over a plastic pipe and it does not burst. Such an advert does not carry enough conviction to the critical listener. Perhaps, it will convince the uncritical.

The use of Pidgin English

Last but definitely not least under the advertising language is the use of pidgin in some Ghanaian commercials. An advertiser will choose to use pidgin instead of the Standard English. Perhaps one such reason is that the pidgin is a colloquial way of expression amongst certain groups of people. Thus, though very capable of speaking the Standard English, a copy-writer may decide to use pidgin. This is within the backdrop of raging debates on whether non-standard English or pidgin is permissible have often argued that advertising language should mimic the target. Such characters may prefer to use pidgin. In other words, it serves as a mark of comradeship between the model in the advertisement and the target audience. An example of this is the National Lottery commercial, one friend asks the other:

“Charlie, you sabe the time?”

put in Standard English means:

“My friend, do you know what time it is?”

The SSB Sika Card between two male students is another example. One student says to the other:

“I don’t know if they meant me or something?”

simply put:

“I don’t know if they have targeted me or what?”

The pidgin is also to mark class or profession. For example in the Duraplast Plastic Pipe commercial, the characters are manual labourers. Therefore, to use the Standard English in their dialogue will sound quite odd to the Ghanaian community. So we have one character saying:

“Dis people dey funny me
Dem think this truck go fit
Spoil this pipe.”

Simply put:

“These people are funny.
They think this truck can damage this pipe

The use of pidgin also makes the commercial interesting and beautiful. An example is the new Omo Multi Action Powder which features a fish seller who says:

“The new Omo, I like am well well
I no go tell you lie.
The stain wey we dey talk of:
Na as I cut the fish now the blood go come out
e go stain my body, why I put
the fish for fir, the oil e go come out
e go stain my body.
The smoke go come join the oil
and commot for the fish,
e go come black, e go stain my body.
I put new Omo for my hand,
I turn am for inside, I come
Shake am together. Then I come
Put my apron for inside. As I
soak am in come find no stain
Again. No single stain dey for
inside...
no single stain remain for inside

all don clean commot, no one
remain ooh.
My body begin dey nyu nyu scent
Scent na me I just dey smell
The old smell for fish e don die commot

This rather lengthy speech in pidgin makes the advertising more interesting and has much impact than if it has been said in Standard English which will have gone like:

“The new Omo, I like it very well,
I will not lie to you
The stains we are talking of:
As a cut the fish, blood will come out
And stain my body. When I put
the fish on fire, oil oil come out
and stain my body.
Black smoke and oil from the fish will come out and stain my body.
I put a handful of new Omo
in water and shake together. Then
I put in my apron and soak.
The stains disappear.
No single stain remains
It is clean.
My body feels clean and
all I smell is a new scent
The old fishy smell is
Washed clean

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper has examined linguistic strategies used in advertising goods and services in the Ghanaian electronic media. We found out that the advertiser in Ghana achieves effective commercials through repetition, alliteration, double entendres (ambiguity), catchy words, exaggeration, persuasion, superlatives, and the use of Pidgin English.

In fact the advertiser chooses to use English very often as the medium of communication on the Ghanaian market for obvious reasons. First, English provides a common medium of communication in a community like Ghana with different languages and dialects. Secondly, English has a wide communicative function than any other language in the country. Therefore, not only does the commercial in English achieve national standard but an international standard as well.

Advertisements or commercials are very important as communication mediums. A commercial can guide a consumer to find a product or service needed. However, the advertiser may tend to over exaggerate in the bid to persuade. This over-exaggeration may be misleading. In spite of this, electronic media advertisement or commercial is really a powerful tool. This is because it is a fast and effective means of carrying a message far and wide across the country.

We shall, therefore, suggest that certain national policies and legislations are couched in the form of advertisements using the strategies discussed in this paper. If this is done such policies and laws will reach many citizens fast and will be more easily understood by the people.

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