

## CONCERNING PRAGMATICS OF MODERN ENGLISH ADVERTISING

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Articolul de față este dedicat cercetării științifice și metodice în pragmatică. După cum este cunoscut, de decenii savanții au pus în aplicare metode și tehnici tradiționale în studierea limbajului de reclamă, dar totuși mai sunt multe probleme interesante pentru lingviști privind diferite domenii. Pragmatica este domeniul unde limbajul de reclamă să găsească caracteristici noi care vor completa cu informații necesare pentru înțelegerea mai aprofundată a reclamei. De asemenea, este cunoscut faptul că limbajul de reclamă aparține stilului funcțional deosebit, încă nu este destul de clar ce fel de caracteristici are și cum ar putea fi descris mai aprofundat. Limbajul de reclamă are propria menire în formarea de bază a percepției limbii. Autorii au studiat limbajul reclamei americane din punctul de vedere al pragmaticii și prezintă caracteristici ale pragmaticii limbajului de reclamă în limba engleză.

Advertising English takes a special place among those functional substyles that refer to the language of mass media. Such a special place is provided by the *pragmatical aspect* [1, p.257-279; 2, p.87-125; 3] of the language of advertising. The advertisement is a multileveled lingual audiovisual entity created by business for business and represented in mass media. We have analyzed the American advertisements from the point of view of pragmatics. The pragmatical analysis of advertisements has given the following results. The main pragmatical message of any advertisement of goods or a service is "Buy it!" or "Do it!", and it has a concrete informational direction for a definite recipient in the whole community. Advertising is fundamentally persuasive in nature. It is an attempt to get you, the consumer, to act in some way that benefits whoever is doing the advertising.

**Persuasion is a claim of superiority of the product or the service being advertised**, it is usually embodied in the general composition of lingual audiovisual aids and means of the given advertisement, to be exact in each of the component chips in the semantics of the whole body of advertisement. Hence, the analysis of the linguistical part of the concrete advertisement is not possible without taking into account the semantics of its audio, video and graphical components. As shown by the carried out research, the linguistical part of advertisement is obligatory, sometimes it is the only one in the whole body of the advertisement. Consequently, we can conclude that the linguistical part is the most important as it is the center of the main informational (denotative or connotative) loading.

Further, the key part of the linguistic entity is **slogan** that is the summit of pragmatical multileveled pyramid of the whole advertisement. The basis of this pyramid may be the image, the sound or another linguistic part of the advertisement. In addition, the general pragmatical meaning of slogan may be decomposed into the following minor pragmatical components, such as:

1. the appeal to the public for the action,
2. the emotive evaluation of the product or service,
3. the emotive colouring of the pleasure taken in what is advertised.

As the analysis of the printed advertisements has shown, the lexical composition of slogan is not obligatorily referred to the denotation semantics of the advertised product or service. Not once has the slogan been based on the pragmatical meaning of the pleasure taken in what is advertised.

Discourse analysis as branch of pragmatics has been used for two main groups of utterances, that is a) spoken or written and b) more or less formal. Our discourse analysis has revealed the facts about the way the ad writers structure the language in advertising, how they create a certain meaning through this language, and why they choose certain structures or words. So, the "claim" may be expressed in the verbal or print form of an advertisement.

The largest number of advertisements are devoted to parity products such as gasoline, cigarettes, beer and soft drinks, soaps, and various headache and cold remedies. In parity claims, "better" means "best" and "best" means "equal to." If all the brands are identical, they all must be equally good. So "best" means that the product is as good as the other superior products in its category. When Bing Crosby declares Minute Maid Orange

Juice "the best there is" he means it is as good as the other orange juices you can buy. The word "better" has been legally interpreted to be a comparative and therefore becomes a clear claim of superiority. Bing could not have said that Minute Maid is "better than any other orange juice." "Better" is a claim of superiority. Only once can "better" be used, that is when a product does, indeed, have superiority over other products in its category or when the better is used to compare the product with something other than competing brands. An orange juice could therefore claim to be "better than a vitamin pill," or even "the better breakfast drink."

The second rule of advertising claims is simply that if any product is truly superior, the ad will say so very clearly and will offer some kind of convincing evidence of the superiority. If an ad hedges the least bit about a product's advantage over the competition, you can strongly suspect it is not superior - may be equal to but not better. You will never hear a gasoline company say "we will give you four miles per gallon more in your care than any other brand." They would love to make such a claim, but it would not be true. Gasoline is a parity product, and, in spite of some very clever and deceptive ads of a few years ago, no one has yet claimed one brand of gasoline better than any other brand. To create the necessary illusion of superiority, advertisers usually resort to one or more of the following **fourteen** basic techniques in pragmatics, as follows:

### 1. THE WEASEL CLAIM

A *weasel* word is a modifier that practically negates the claim that follows. The words or claims that appear substantial upon first look but disintegrate into hollow meaninglessness on analysis are weasels. Commonly used weasel words include "helps" (the usual weasel); "like" (used in a comparative sense); "virtual" or "virtually"; "acts" or "works"; "can be"; "up to"; "as much as"; "refreshes"; "comforts"; "tackles"; "fights"; "come on"; "the feel of"; "the look of"; "looks like"; "fortified"; "enriched"; and "strengthened," for example:

"Helps control dandruff symptoms with regular use." The weasels include "helps control," and possibly even "symptoms" and "regular use." The claim is not "stops dandruff."

"Leaves dishes *virtually* spotless." You are supposed to think "spotless," rather than "virtually" spotless.

"Only half the price of *many* color sets." "Many" is the weasel. The claim is supposed to give the impression that the set is inexpensive.

"Tests confirm one mouthwash *best* against mouth odor."

"Hot Nestlé's cocoa is the very *best*." In the language of advertising the "best" and "better" are routine.

"Listerine *fights* bad breath." Here the word "fights" is used but not "stops."

"Lots of things have changed, but Hershey's *goodness* hasn't." This claim does not say that Hershey's chocolate hasn't changed.

"Bacos, the crispy garnish that tastes just *like* its name."

### 2. THE UNFINISHED CLAIM

The unfinished claim is one in which the ad claims the product is better, or has more of something, but does not finish the comparison, for example:

"Magnavox gives you *more*." The ad reader should answer the question: "More what?"

"Anacin: *Twice as much* of the pain reliever doctors recommend most." This claim fits in a number of categories, but it does not say *twice as much* of what pain reliever.

"Supergloss does it with *more color, more shine, more sizzle, more!*"

"Coffee-mate gives coffee *more body, more flavor*." Also, the words "body" and "flavor" are weasels.

"You can be *sure* if it's Westinghouse." The semantics of the word "sure" is not suitable for the pragmatical message of the utterance "buy it!".

"Scott makes it *better* for you."

"Ford LTD – 700% *quieter*."

When the FTC asked Ford to substantiate this claim, Ford revealed that they meant the inside of the Ford was 700% quieter than the outside.

### 3. THE IMPLICIT CLAIM

People can remember implicit claims as having been explicit, for example:

"Get through the winter without a cold – take Eradicold". This claim is remembered as "If you take Eradicold, then you haven't got a cold in winter".

Olay: "Love the skin you're in".

**4. THE "WE'RE DIFFERENT AND UNIQUE" CLAIM**

This kind of claim states that there is nothing else quite like the product being advertised. For example, if Schlitz would add pink food coloring to its beer they could say: "There's nothing like new pink Schlitz." The uniqueness claim is supposed to be interpreted by readers as a claim to superiority, for example:

"There's *no other mascara like it.*"

"*Only Doral has this unique filter system.*"

"Cougar is *like nobody else's car.*"

"Either way, liquid or spray, there's *nothing else like it.*"

"*If it doesn't say Goodyear, it can't be polyglas.*" "Polyglas" is a trade name copyrighted by Goodyear. Goodrich or Firestone could make a tire exactly identical to the Goodyear one and yet couldn't call it "polyglas" – a name for fiberglass belts.

"*Only Zenith has chromacolor.*" The "chromacolor" has the same purpose of use as the "polyglas". Admiral has solarcolor and RCA has accucolor.

**5. THE "WATER IS WET" CLAIM**

"Water is wet" claims say something about the product that is true for any brand in that product category, for example, "Schrank's water is really wet." The claim is usually a statement of fact, but not a real advantage over the competition. There is a number of examples of the "Water is Wet" Claim:

"Mobil: *the Detergent Gasoline.*" Any gasoline acts as a cleaning agent.

"Great Lash greatly *increases the diameter of every lash.*"

"Rheingold, the *natural beer.*" The Rheingold beer is made from grains and water as are other beers.

"SKIN *smells differently on everyone.*" Many perfumes do the same.

**6. THE "SO WHAT" CLAIM**

This is the kind of claim to which the careful reader will react by saying "So what?" A claim consists of something which is true but which gives no real advantage to the product. This is similar to the "water is wet" claim except that it claims an advantage which is not shared by most of the other brands in the product category, for example:

"Geritol has *more than twice* the iron of ordinary supplements." But is it twice as much beneficial to the body?

"Campbell's gives you tasty pieces of chicken and *not one but two* chicken stocks." Does the presence of two stocks improve the taste?

"Strong enough for a man *but made for a woman.*" This deodorant claim says only that the product is aimed at the female market.

**7. THE VAGUE CLAIM**

The vague claim is simply not clear. This category often overlaps with others. The key to the vague claim is the use of words that are colorful but meaningless, as well as the use of subjective and emotional opinions that defy verification. Most contain weasels. The examples of the vague claims are the following:

"Lips have *never looked so luscious.*" Can you imagine trying to either prove or disprove such a claim?

"Lipsavers are fun--*they taste good, smell good and feel good.*"

"Its deep rich *lather makes hair feel good* again."

"For skin *like peaches and cream.*"

"The end of *meatloaf boredom.*"

"*Take a bite and you'll think you're eating on the Champs Elysées.*"

"Winston *tastes good like a cigarette should.*"

"*The perfect little portable for all around viewing with all the features of higher priced sets.*"

"Fleishman's *makes sensible eating delicious.*"

**8. THE ENDORSEMENT OR TESTIMONIAL**

A celebrity or authority appears in an ad to lend his or her stellar qualities to the product. Sometimes the people will actually claim to use the product, but very often they don't. There are agencies surviving on providing products with testimonials. The examples are the following:

"Joan Fontaine throws a shot-in-the-dark party and her friends learn a thing or two."

"Darling, have you discovered Masterpiece? The most exciting men I know are smoking it." (Eva Gabor)

In these speech acts the direct pragmatical meaning is "We're not selling anything". But it is disguising the communicative function of the ad for selling something. Just look: "Who says?" It is a celebrity or authority who is the communicative agent in the ad. It is him/her who creates the background implicature of the pragmatical meaning "It is worth buying".

### 9. THE SCIENTIFIC OR STATISTICAL CLAIM

This kind of ad uses some sort of scientific proof or experiment, very specific numbers, or an impressive sounding mystery ingredient, for example:

"Wonder Break *helps* build strong bodies 12 ways." Even the weasel "helps" did not prevent the FTC from demanding this ad be withdrawn. But note that the use of the number 12 makes the claim far more believable than if it were taken out.

"Easy-Off has *33% more cleaning power than another popular brand.*" "Another popular brand" often translates as some other kind of oven cleaner sold somewhere. Also, the claim does not say Easy-Off works 33% better.

"Special Morning – *33% more nutrition.*" It is also an unfinished claim.

"Certs contains a sparkling drop of Retsyn."

"ESSO with HTA."

"Sinarest. Created by a research scientist who actually gets sinus headaches."

### 10. THE "COMPLIMENT FOR THE CONSUMER" CLAIM

This kind of claim butters up the consumer by some form of flattery, as follows:

"We think a cigar smoker is someone special."

"If what you do is right for you, no matter what others do, then RC Cola is right for you."

"You pride yourself on your good home cooking..."

"The lady has taste."

"You've come a long way, baby."

### 11. THE RHETORICAL QUESTION

This technique demands a response from the audience. A question is asked, and the viewer or listener is supposed to answer in such a way as to affirm the product's goodness, for example:

"Plymouth – isn't that the kind of car America wants?"

"Shouldn't your family be drinking Hawaiian Punch?"

"What do you want most from coffee? That's what you get most from Hills."

"Touch of Sweden: could your hands use a small miracle?"

There is also a rhetorical structure according to which people respond in predictable ways to certain discourse schemas, such as problem and solution, for example:

"Your hair, our shampoo".

### 12. THE "QUESTION IN THE FORM OF RIDDLES" CLAIM

The language of advertising provides us from time to time with questions in the form of riddles. Here is one of them:

"What does an eclipse have in common with coffee beans?" This sounds like a game or a competition in which someone tests your knowledge by asking you questions for the purposes of entertainment, perhaps in front of an audience. In other words, the question looks very much like a quiz question. But it is not. It is the headline of an advertisement promoting a brand of Colombian coffee. That no answer is provided to the question in the headline is no accident. An intriguing question tempts the mystified reader to examine the advertisement for an answer. The fact that there is no answer results in the question sticking in the mind of the reader, as unresolved problems tend to do. What is more, the unexpected parallel between a natural phenomenon and the product might prompt the reader's imagination towards finding a personal answer to the quiz-like question in the headline, which in turn would lead to the reader being more actively engaged in the advertisement.

### 13. THE CLAIM WITH THE BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A lot of English advertisements use claims that are not appropriate to the context. They have an image of the product with the text in the advertisement that is superimposed on the picture. The text is a sentence that consists of the product name and is followed by an adverb of intensity like *evidently, naturally etc.* Some examples of this are as follows:

“Vivagel, of course”.  
 “Heudebert, naturally”.  
 “Francine, incontestably”.

Here is a situation where the product name is our referring expression and is presenting us with information for which we have a background provided. We have already seen the product Vivagel™, and therefore the name *Vivagel* is presenting the old information. However, the adverbial expressions like *of course* are not referring to or modifying the product or the product name. They are intensifying and affirming a proposition that was made previously and about which we have no information. The pragmatical meaning “presupposition” about the fact that “everybody knows it” may be expressed by the lexical units “of course”, “naturally”, “incontestably” etc. Also, there two more pragmatical meanings about the background of these advertisements, namely “communicative assumptions of relevance and cooperativeness” and “implications involving expressions of quality and comparison”.

Sentences of this type are typically used in a *conversational context* and not when they stand in isolation as they do here. More specifically, in natural language, they are not discourse openers, but they may be the responses that are given to questions like *What dish do you like?* or *What to choose from all these shelves?*. This fact then may be able to account for their apparent isolated occurrence in advertising where it may be that they are not, in fact, isolated. In this context, any preceding question is not presented to us but can hypothetically be posed by a reader. The question may be something as simple as *What is this?*, but can feasibly be asked by a reader, and then the text instantaneously leads them back to the product in giving them the answer.

**14. THE CLAIM WITH THE QUESTION ABOUT THE PRODUCT WITH THE ANSWER**

The claims with the question about the product with the answer are quite numerous among the factual data on the types of advertisements. The example is the following:

**Kwiat:** How do you say Kwiat?  
 Simply Brilliant.

The pragmatics parameters are the discourse with the strong persuasion and the presence of three participants, namely two speakers and one listener/reader that is the goal audience of the advertisement. The results of distribution of the above mentioned claims in our factual data have been shown in Figure. Distribution of Claims.

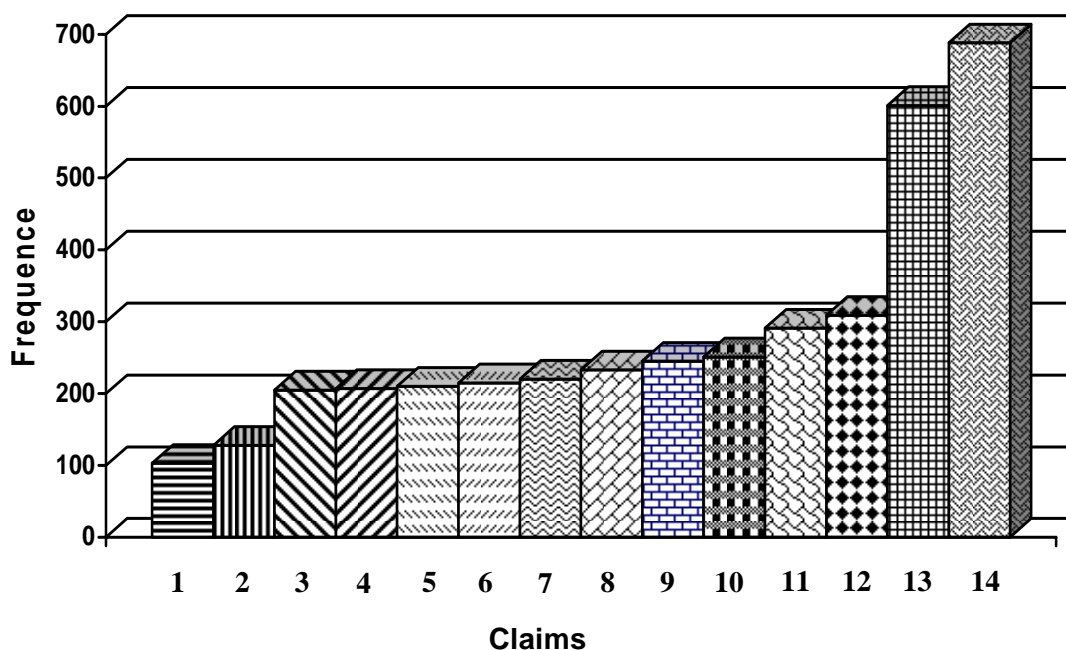


Figure. Distribution of Claims

1. Unfinished claim
2. Implicit claim
3. "Water is wet" claim
4. Weasel claim
5. Claim with the question about the product with the answer
6. "Question in the form of riddles" claim
7. Scientific or statistical claim
8. Claim with the background information
9. Vague claim
10. Rhetorical question
11. "So what" claim
12. Endorsement or testimonial
13. "We're different and unique" claim
14. "Compliment for the consumer" claim

The above mentioned claims are mainly characterized as two pragmatical patterns, namely the one containing the rational loading ("reason-why") and the other meaning the choice of "the best" ("lifestyle"). The pragmatical pattern of "lifestyle" contradicts to the pragmatical purpose of advertisement, in general, that is to attract the attention to the product or service of advertising. Some researchers consider that the more facts about the product and the service are included in the body of advertisement, the more is sold [4, p.8]. The pattern of "lifestyle" is chosen when there is nothing special to say about the product or service. It is an involuntary decision. At times, advertising seeks to achieve an impact by appealing to your rational self-interest as a consumer in a direct and transparent way. Other times, it seeks to have an impact in less direct ways, using techniques where effects may be difficult to consciously evaluate in real time as you absorb the ad's message.

During the discourse analysis of the language of advertising we have found the questions to be answered in further investigations, namely:

- a) How do discourse-level requirements determine the lexical and grammatical choices the speaker/the ad writer makes?
- b) What do listeners contribute to the telling of a story?
- c) How do speakers and hearers/the ad writers and readers cooperate in the reconstruction of the information from the past?
- d) What kinds of conversations can include stories used?
- e) What rules govern the conversation in advertising?
- f) How does an oral text differ from a written one?
- g) How do other factors such as linguistic differences in dialect by geography, class, gender, register or cultural background contribute to the construction of the pragmatical message of the advertisement and to the analysis of discourse of the ready made advertisement?

To sum up, the concepts and principles of linguistics, along with its allies rhetoric, psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics, are called up to help us make sense of the verbal component of that most ubiquitous of modern linguistic genres, advertising. For many people, an advertising copy is most of what they will read over the course of a year. We clearly need to understand more about how advertising works if we are to protect ourselves from its wiles and yet make use of the information it offers and moreover enjoy the creativity and playfulness of a genre that clearly attracts some of our most inventive wordsmiths.

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