

# EPL Final Project: Research Proposal

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## 1 Introduction

Advertisements are a major part of modern life, and making advertising slogans recognisable and easy to recall is a major topic for advertising researchers. One common claim is that advertising copy should be as simple as possible to be effective (Bradley and Meeds, 2002). The degree of this simplicity is determined using theory of transformational grammar (Chomsky, 1957), which states that a sentence is easier if less “grammatical transformations” occur in comparison with the kernel sentence. These transformations include the negative, passive and question form of said sentence along with combinations thereof. While retaining simplicity in advertisements is supported by Bradley and Meeds (2002), they argue for the use of moderate syntactical complexity as it improves recall and attitude towards the advertisements. These improvements were tested by examining the effects of two surface structure transformations: changing the voice from active to passive, and changing adverb placement. These experiments lead to the conclusion that moderate complexity in the form of adding one single transformation to advertising copy is the most beneficial for recall and attitude.

### 1.1 Follow-up

In this study, we want to try replicating the findings by Bradley and Meeds (2002) and add an additional surface structure transformation. By adding this additional transformation, the sturdiness of the claims can be tested and possibly strengthened. This is supported by the paper, which mentions the limitations of only testing two surface-structural transformations. The limitations also include adverb placement not being universally accepted as a true transformation. By replacing it with a different transformation with effects on structural complexity, the validity of the claims can be broadened to encompass more transformations and thus increases validity of the research.

The transformation that we will add is clefting. In this research, clefting will refer to it-clefting, which adds “it” and a conjugated form of “to be” to the beginning of a structure. An example of a structure with clefting would be “It was this proposal that we wrote.” instead of “We wrote this proposal.”. Other types of clefting will not be used to keep the transformations as consistent as possible.

### 1.2 Research Question

The sections above result in the following research question:

Are the findings of Bradley and Meeds (2002) which claim benefits of simple and moderate structural complexity in advertising copy reproducible, and does the addition of clefting as a surface structure transformation improve validity of these claims?

### 1.3 Hypothesis



We expect to observe results similar to Bradley and Meeds (2002). This means simpler structures just cause easier recognition, while moderate structural complexity comes out on top as it benefits recall and attitude towards advertisements. We also expect clefting to add to these results, solidifying their validity.



However, as adverb placement is not universally acknowledged as a full-fledged transformation, the contrast with the findings of this experiment could impact conclusions in a surprising manner.

## 2 Objectives

In this research, we hope to solidify the validity of the findings of Bradley and Meeds (2002). By adding clefting as an extra factor, we hope to detect improvements in attitude, recognition, or recall. If such improvements are found, it could discover new methods for the field of advertising research or support current practices.

## 3 Proposed method

To replicate Bradley and Meeds (2002), we opt to create an online questionnaire via IbexFarm. This falls within the scope of this project, enabling us to implement the experiment in a simple but clear manner. It is also suited for quick distribution and aggregation of results, as well as providing cross-platform compatibility.

### 3.1 Experiment contents



The experiment will contain advertisement copy based on the appendix of Bradley and Meeds (2002), with the addition of clefting. As there are now **three types of transformations**, the total amount of possible combinations is extended to  $2^3 = 8$  options. As the study to be replicated shows that structures with two transformations already contain enough complexity to show disadvantages, we opt out of using all three in a single sentence. Also, as adverb placement is a transformation that is not universally accepted, we choose to only use clefting and voice. As the experiment still tests two transformations, it is able to back up the claims by Bradley and Meeds (2002) using a 2 (active or passive)  $\times$  2 (no clefting or it-clefting) design.

The variables that need to be tested in the experiment are recognition, recall, and attitude. Recognition should not yield important differences as has been noted by Bradley and Meeds (2002). However, it can still be measured by taking a look into reading times of advertisement copy with different levels of complexity. **By asking participants to focus on what they read, reading times could give an implication of how much time is needed to understand the message.** Secondly, attitude could be measured with questions in a Likert-scale format which ask participants to rate the advertisement on (for example) likeability, informativity and clarity. Lastly, recall will be the hardest part to test within an online experiment. A possible test could be asking participants whether they can replicate the exact slogan per advertisement. By assigning points in a comparable manner to Bradley and Meeds (2002) to the reproduced slogan, it is compared to the product seen in the experiment and thus gives a measure of recall.

## 4 Expected results



With the hypothesis in mind, we expect to have the lowest reading times of low complexity advertisement copy to represent recognition. Secondly, we expect the highest ratings on moderate complexity advertisement copy. Lastly, we expect participants to obtain the most recall points concerning moderate complexity advertisement copy as well.

## References

- Bradley, S. D. and Meeds, R. (2002). Surface-structure transformations and advertising slogans: The case for moderate syntactic complexity. *Psychology & Marketing*, 19(7-8):595–619.
- Chomsky, N. (1957). *Syntactic structures*. The Hague: Mouton.