

A Pragma-linguistic Analysis of Textual Features in Some Advertisements by Nigerian Companies on YouTube

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Abstract

Language is an essential driving force that brings advertisements into focus or reality. This is because it is through language that advertisement is brought to public domain. Hence, language and advertisement are interconnected. This paper examines how language is used in selected YouTube advertisements of telecommunication and food manufacturing companies. Ten excerpts were selected from the data for analysis and the descriptive method of analysis was used to analyse the collected data. The study identified and discussed the linguistic functions of the words deployed in the advertisements using Halliday's Systemic Linguistic Theory. The analyses reveal that the advertisers used declarative statements more than exclamatory, interrogative and imperative statements. The implication of this is that advertisers use declarative statements to give explanations, provide facts or information to make their intentions known to their prospective clients. This study further reveals that language use varies from one company to another which confirms that the context of each advert determines the choice of words used by the advertiser. The study recommends that advertisers should consider the linguistic functions of the utterances made and that grammar in advertisements should be carefully selected such that it will give more accurate meaning to the prospective clients.

Keywords: Linguistic, Functions, YouTube, Advertisement, statements

Introduction

Advertisements are usually made by companies in order to make the public to be aware of the existence of certain products or services. The choice of language in advertisements is of utmost importance as it makes it possible for the products or services being rendered to get to the desired people and places (Akinbode, 2012). Language is an essential driving force that brings advertisements into focus or reality. This is because it is through language that advertisement is brought to public domain. Consequently, language and advertisement are interconnected (Widyahening and Hum, 2015). Out of the media of advertisements, the YouTube, a social media video platform on the internet, is an important medium. This is because the world is now connected through the Internet and has become a 'global village' – a term coined by the Canadian media theorist, Marshal McLuhan (www.inquiriesjournal.com). People now find it easy to check or watch adverts on YouTube. That is why it is considered expedient to select the information on adverts features in this study.

Advertisements: Wasajja (2014) examined the language style in advertisement and explored adverts associated with business premises, vehicles and institutions in languages like English, Kiswahili and Ekeguli that are found in the two towns of Kisii and Keroka. Wasajja (2014) studied the adverts in terms of context, content, and invitation or persuasion potential using the semiotics linguistic landscape for easier categorization. The study, anchored on the Sperber and Wilson theory of Relevance focused on narrowing and broadening of words' meanings, disambiguation and adding of social meaning and presuppositions that formulate information and strategy of advertising (www.researchgate.net).

Akinbode (2012) researched on a sociolinguistic analysis of advertising language in selected Nigerian mass media commercials. According to the scholar, advertising is a form of communication and it is one of the oldest activities in the world that is as old as humanity. It was also emphasised in the work that language is a very powerful tool in advertising and advertising language is unique in terms of usage and the mass media are the agencies of diffusing advertisement messages. The study discussed the essential characteristics of advertising language in the mass media which enabled the advertisers to reach the target audience. One of the specific objectives found out how advertising language influenced the consumer's purchasing attitude. The study hinged on Interactional Sociolinguistic theory that is based on the interactions between linguistic, sociology, and anthropology. It also made use of Speech Act theory to explain the ethnography of communication and micro-ethnography that are concerned with language, society and culture. It recommended skill training in the use of English and communication regularly for effective advertisement messages (www.researchgate.net).

El-Dali (2019) studied the Language of Consumer Advertising: Linguistic and Psychological Perspectives. The study examined consumer advertising directed towards the promotion of some products or services to the public. It also focused on the interaction of language, image and layout, and examined advertising persuasive strategies. In doing so, it drew on various linguistic (particularly pragmatic, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic) theories. In addition, the study analyses some advertisements using different ways of interpretations; and ended with a discussion on the interrelationship between culture (schemes) and advertising discourse. In this connection, instances from the Egyptian media and their analyses were provided with a view to clarifying some rhetorical categories in Arabic Advertising and showing that texts construct meaning through interaction with other types of discourse and inseparable from the culture of the advertising text.

Kangira (2009) investigated on Product-oriented communication: A linguistic analysis of selected adverts with emphasis on the language that is used in commercial advertisements. The basic assumption of the work was that language of advertisement does more than just inform the public about products that are on sale; the language usually has an extra crucial task of trying to persuade potential customers to buy the products. The research questions were designed to answer how designers of adverts make them persuasive. The conclusion of the research was that designers of adverts pay

attention to the morpho-syntactic, semantic and phonological aspects of the language used in advert (www.researchgate.net).

Jafari and Mahadi (2014) conducted a study on The language of advertisement and its features and characteristics: investigating the issue from a deeper view. The scholars investigated and discussed the fundamental as well as the main characteristics of advertising language to know what it takes to have an effective and successful advertisement in terms of its features. The study identified the characteristics of the good and operative advertising language and looked at the features which were essential and indispensable for the advertising language. The authors concluded that advertising language is a persuasive language linked closely to the culture and that language has informative function. Thus, the way the informative language of the advertisement is presented, must deal with the concept of persuasion. Syntactically, simple statements are often used in advertisements. Sentences in advertisements are short. A general observation of the titles of the previous related studies to the current study indicates that the scholars worked on language of advertisements but from different perspectives.

Types of YouTube Advertisement

YouTube advertising, done through Google Ads, is a way of advertising video content self-generated on YouTube. There are different types of YouTube Ads. These include:

- **True View Ads** – This type of ads gives viewers the most control over the advertisements they see. The maximum length a TrueView video ad can be is maximum 6 minutes and minimum is 12 seconds. True View ads are of two main types: (i) in-stream ads and (ii) discovery ads. In-stream ads play before a viewer's selected video plays. While True View Discovery ads come up within the YouTube search results. It is displayed on the right-hand sidebar of watch pages above the suggested video list. The ad usually has an image thumbnail with texts not more than three lines. When a True Discovery ad is clicked on, it takes users directly to the YouTube watch page. (<https://ng.oberlo.com/blog/youtube-ads-beginners-launch-first-campaign>)
- **Non-skippable In-stream Ads** play before a viewer's chosen video and viewers are not able to skip them as the viewers do not have control over this type of ad. Previously, the non-skippable in-stream can play for 30 seconds but recently, the video can only play for 15 to 20 seconds. (<https://ng.oberlo.com/blog/youtube-ads-beginners-launch-first-campaign>)
- **Bumper In-stream Ads** - This type of ad plays before a viewer's chosen video and should not be more than 6 seconds. (<https://ng.oberlo.com/blog/youtube-ads-beginners-launch-first-campaign>).
- **Sponsored Cards Ads** - This type of ad appears within videos as small call-to-action popups. (<https://ng.oberlo.com/blog/youtube-ads-beginners-launch-first-campaign>)

- **Overlay Ads** – This type of ad appears along the bottom of videos as banner. (<https://ng.oberlo.com/blog/youtube-ads-beginners-launch-first-campaign>)
- **Display ads** – It is a simple YouTube ad format that appears in the right-hand sidebar above the suggested videos list. (<https://ng.oberlo.com/blog/youtube-ads-beginners-launch-first-campaign>)

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Halliday's (1984) Systemic Linguistic Theory. The theory sees the functions of language as primary and it seeks to understand what language does and how it achieves it. It attaches great importance to the sociological aspect of language and considers the social functions of language and how language fulfils the social functions. Linguistic functions in advertisement have to do with what is done with language through their utterances. It also typifies the active use of language for specific purposes. Advertisers use linguistic functions in order to express ideas and intentions, pass messages across to the hearers. Linguistic functions shed light on why a statement is uttered. Language functions therefore require some kind of grammar (sentences) like stating an idea (declarative), expressing strong emotions (exclamatory), asking questions (interrogative), giving orders, direction or instructions (imperative). The study identified and discussed the various linguistic functions of the words deployed in the advertisement of selected telecommunication and food manufacturing companies.

Methodology

Five telecommunication and five food manufacturing companies' oral communication ads on YouTube were purposively selected and examined. Descriptive method of analysis was used to analyse the collected data. The setting, the title of the adverts, date posted on YouTube and dates the data were accessed are presented in the table below:

Table 1 - Data Groupings

Context	Title	Date	Date accessed
Telecommunication Companies	MTN Saka's Data Adventure	28/10/2019	10/02/2021
	MC Lively Vs The Crying Baby: MTN Data TVC 2020	03/10/2020	18/02/2021
	Glo Recharge & Win (Loan Shark) Pidgin Version	04/10/2019	08/02/2021
	Glo You Don Hit My Car	02/09/2020	10/02/2021
	*444# Airtel Lyrics Video	26/07/2020	08/02/2021
Food Manufacturing Companies	Golden Penny Pasta	14/05/2018	13/02/2021
	Indomie Instant Noodles TV Ad	06/10/2010	13/02/2021
	Power Oil Nigeria- No. 1 Vegetable Cooking Oil	24/02/2015	03/03/2021

	Keep Mo+ving with Gala	16/08/2017	03/03/2021
	Dangote Pasta Ad	30/05/2018	13/02/2021

Data Analysis and Results

Declarative Statements

In English grammar, a declarative sentence is used to make statements, give explanations, provide facts or provide information. Advertisers make use of declarative sentences to make statements, give explanations and provide information to the hearers as seen in the examples below.

Example 1

Speaker: We are watching cartoon
Ask Grandma, I am the one that used to take care of lyabo
that time. Take your time.

This is an utterance from the MC Lively vs The Crying Baby. It is a declarative statement. The Speaker only gives information to the hearer in the advert. It is a kind of assurance given to the person at the other end of the telephone conversation.

Example 2

Speaker: As a mother, I always try to ensure my family has a great
day and it starts with Golden Penny Pasta.

This is another utterance that is a declarative statement uttered in the Golden Penny Pasta Advert. The statement is just an explanation.

Example 3

Speaker: Not every cooking oil is good for your body
Some cooking oil is so bad for your health

This example from Power Oil Nigeria is a declarative statement. The utterance is a piece of information that is giving more meaning to other utterances in the advert.

Example 4

Speaker: As a lover of good food, I enjoy trying different recipes

In Dangote Pasta Advert, the example above is a declarative statement. It is a statement that reveals what the advert is all about. The kind of words used in the utterance makes it easy to know that the advert is about food.

Exclamatory Statements

In English grammar, exclamatory sentences are statements that convey strong emotions like joy, love or hate, anger or frustration or excitement and it usually ends with an exclamation mark. Even in the verbal utterance, the exclamation can be felt. For example, saying an emphatic Yes! when excited.

Example 5

Speaker: Agbabiaka o! Hope is not lost.

Hearer: Ah!

In the Glo Recharge and Win (Loan Shark) Advert, the speaker utters the word 'Agbabiaka o'. The word can be the name of a person or just used as an exclamation. The context in which the word is used is that of an exclamation and the emotion it conveys is that of disappointment. The hearer in the advert also responds with an exclamation. The emotion here is that of surprise.

Example 6

Speaker: And the winner is JR!

In this advert by U.A.C. Foods – Keep moving with Gala, the first utterance is an exclamatory statement. The emotion it conveys is that of excitement. From the utterance, the viewers and prospective customers know that the advert will be full of utterances that will show both excitement and doing what will make one a winner in life.

Interrogative Statements

Interrogative sentences are often used in spoken and written language. It is a statement associated with question. An interrogative sentence is punctuated with a question mark. It is used to make requests and gather information or make enquiries. They are used in advertisements to create imagination. This can be seen in the examples below from some of the adverts.

Example 7

Speaker: Hello Customer, food don ready o, abi you no go chop today?

Hearer: Today na my cheat day

The example above is extracted from MTN Saka's Data Adventure Video. The question used in the advert is to make enquiry from the Customer. The hearer gave the required answer which means that the question asked has meaning and the hearer in the advert is also able to deduce the meaning of the question.

Example 8

Speaker: Where is my money?

Hearer: Please give me more time, I beg

This example from Glo Recharge & Win (Loan Shark) uses question to make a request. Obviously, the hearer in the advert owed the Speaker some amount of money and the response of the hearer shows that things were really hard for the hearer.

Imperative Statements

These are statements or sentences that are used to give command, instruction, offer advice or even to make requests. Fundamentally, imperative sentences are used to tell people exactly what to do. Advertisers make use of imperative sentences in their adverts to tell the prospective customers the next step to take especially after listening or watching an advert.

Example 9

Speaker: Use Power Oil, that's what I use for my family.

This example from Power Oil Nigeria – No. 1 Vegetable Cooking Oil advert has already given the necessary information on the need to always use healthy cooking oil. Eventually, at the end of the advert, an imperative statement is uttered. It is a command.

Example 10

Speaker: Just recharge N200 for one day and you sef fit follow win 200 and hundreds of hundred heavy prizes like Keke Napep, Industrial sewing machine, grinding machine and generator.

The above example is culled from Glo Recharge & Win (Loan Shark): Pidgin Version. The advertiser's aim is to sensitise the public about the promo that can make the subscribers to win different prizes. In order to achieve their aims, the advertiser has to use imperative statements which is to make the subscribers to take quick action on the advert.

Discussion of Findings

From the analyses, it is evident that language use is of great importance in advertisements. Examining the study conducted by Shahnaz (2019) on Linguistic Analysis of E-Print Media Advertisements in Pakistan with a focus on the practices and functions, it was found out that the study filled the gap in knowledge in the aspect of language practices and function of advertisement in Pakistan. The study therefore revealed that language of advertisements was so attractive and fascinating that it made it possible to retain in the long-term memory of client which was the main objective of the

advertisers. When Shahnaz (2019) findings were compared with this study, It revealed that advertisers from the four communications companies and the food companies used for the study used more declarative sentences. With those findings, it showed that advertisers were making statements that give explanations and that which provides facts or information about the products so that their clients would have all the necessary information about the products. The study also revealed that telecommunication companies use declarative, exclamatory, interrogative and imperative statements while the food manufacturing companies use more of declarative and exclamatory statements.

Conclusion

The data for the study was categorised into two groups: Telecommunication and Food Manufacturing Companies. This study finds out that language use varies from a company to another which confirms that the context of each advert will determine the choice of words to be used. The study is able to identify and discuss the linguistic functions of the words deployed to achieve the acts in the adverts. The analyses reveal that the advertisers in the two groups used declarative statements more than exclamatory, interrogative and imperative statements. The implication of this is that advertisers use declarative statements to give explanations, provide facts or information to make their intentions known to their clients. This is evident in some of the excerpts culled from the data.

This study is useful for students and teachers that are interested in knowing how context contributes to generation of meanings in a given situation especially in advertisements. It is expedient for students and teachers to pay attention to situation or contexts in which words are generated and how it contributes to understanding the meaning of utterances.

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