

LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF TV COMMERCIALS AND MARKETING STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING CONSUMERS

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31410/ERAZ.2020.175>

Abstract: *Advertisements are unavoidable and ubiquitous. We encounter them on television and the radio, in newspapers and magazines, on billboards, in public transport vehicles and mailboxes, on mobile phones or on websites we visit on the Internet. The aim of this paper is to examine linguistic features and marketing strategies used by advertisers to attract and hold consumers' attention, make them remember advertisements and encourage them to buy advertised products. This paper discusses the way advertisers, using the advertising discourse, manipulate consumers' opinions, beliefs and behaviour. Starting from previous research of the advertising discourse, this paper shows the results of the analysis of the most important linguistic features as well as marketing strategies for addressing consumers used in TV commercials broadcast on four Serbian TV channels - TV Prva, RTS 1, TV B92 / 02 and TV Pink, from March 2016 to September 2019. The analysis is based on the theoretical principles of Critical Discourse Analysis.*

Keywords: *Advertising discourse, TV advertisements, Marketing, Manipulation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of mass media caused the expansion of advertising, which enabled the growth of modern consumer capitalism. In order to increase wealth, economy and industry have to produce more goods and services and in order to sell them the number of consumers must be increased. Advertising plays a crucial role in persuading potential customers to purchase a product or a service. Advertisers use important aspects of consumer ideology in the form of the following strategies: stimulating greed, envy and desire to possess power; provoking a feeling of dissatisfaction in potential customers if they do not purchase a product irrespective of their needs; presenting purchase as a way of solving problems or acquiring positive characteristics of the advertised product; promising potential customers a new identity if they purchase the advertised product; inviting potential customers to identify with the success of celebrities endorsing a product; promising receivers of the advertised message that by acquiring an exclusive, unique or traditional advertised product they will differentiate themselves from others, become superior to them or lead a lifestyle which accompanies the product (Goatly, 2000).

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. The concept of manipulation in Critical Discourse Analysis

Manipulation is one of the crucial notions of Critical Discourse Analysis. According to Van Dijk, manipulation is a social, cognitive and discursive-semiotic phenomenon. Unlike persuasion, which represents legitimate mind control, manipulation represents its illegitimate control.

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Manipulation is an abuse of social power, i.e. domination and recipients of a message are victims of manipulation due to their passive role in the process and their inability to understand the real intentions and consequences of the manipulator's actions as well as a lack of knowledge necessary to resist manipulation. It is a cognitive phenomenon because it always involves control of the minds of recipients of a message (their beliefs, knowledge, opinions and ideology) and a discursive-semiotic one since it is exercised through both verbal and non-verbal means (Van Dijk, 2006).

Manipulation as a social phenomenon is illegitimate in a democratic society since it produces and may reproduce social inequality - it serves the interests of powerful groups against the interests of less powerful groups because it is exercised against their will and to their disadvantage. On the one hand, the power of elite is represented in the ability of preferential access and control of the mass media and public discourse. On the other hand, public discourse is a mean of reproduction of elite power (Van Dijk, 2006).

The cognitive dimension of manipulation has three levels. The first level refers to the control of information processing in the short-term memory, namely to the control of discourse understanding, i.e. specific features of text and talk direct the attention of recipients of a message to some pieces of information, while others stay hidden. The second level of the cognitive dimension of manipulation refers to the formation of mental models in the episodic memory. Mental models include our opinions and feelings about specific events we hear or read about. They are unique, individual and personal and their formation and activation is automatized so that recipients of a message are often unaware of manipulation. The third and most important level of manipulation refers to the formation or change of social representations, i.e. general, abstract, stable and permanent beliefs, such as knowledge, attitudes, ideologies, norms and values. Social representations are acquired gradually throughout life and they do not change fast. That process occurs in the long-term memory and we share social representations with other members of the same social group and culture (Van Dijk, 2006).

The discursive-semiotic dimension of manipulation includes both verbal (text and talk) and non-verbal communication (gestures, facial expressions, text layout, sound, music, photography and film). The main strategy of the manipulator is positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation (Van Dijk, 2006). Advertisements represent typical medium of manipulation in a broad semiotic sense.

Fairclough distinguishes between two types of exercising power: through coercion, including physical violence, and through manufacturing consent. Ideology is a crucial mechanism of exercising power through manufacturing consent, and discourse plays an important role in it. Two main aspects of the relationship between power and language are power in discourse and power behind discourse. Power in discourse refers to participants in discourse who have the power to control and constrain the participation in discourse of those who do not have it. Power behind discourse is hidden and people are unaware of it (Fairclough, 1989).

Fairclough states that discourse is a form of social practice which is determined by social structures. Discourse is a process of social interaction which involves text as well as the process of production of which the text is a product and the process of interpretation for which the text is a resource. The three key dimensions of discourse are text, interaction and social context (Fairclough, 1989).

According to Fairclough, the advertising discourse is marked by inequality in communication. Advertisements work ideologically in three ways: by building relations between the producer / advertiser and the audience, by building specific image for the advertised product and by building of consumption communities. The relationship between the producer and the large and indeterminable audience is one-way and therefore usually personalised, but the personalization is artificial (Fairclough, 1989).

1.2. The main features of the advertising discourse

One of the key features of the advertising discourse is its multimedial nature, i.e. intertwining of verbal, visual and auditory code. The visual code is often more dominant than the verbal one since nowadays message recipients are more affected by images than words. However, the linguistic code of the advertising message is still extremely significant (Gjuran-Coha i Pavlović, 2009). Music and images create atmosphere, strengthen the force of an advertisement and affect the emotions of viewers. Paralinguistic features – accent, tone, volume and pitch of voice, rate of speech, body language, gestures and facial expressions add emphasis and shades to a verbal message or may be completely opposed to it (Cook, 2001). Another important feature of the advertising discourse is its persuasive nature. Although all linguistic functions are present in the advertising discourse, conative function is dominant since its purpose is predominantly persuasion and it is always directed to message recipients and contains ideology elements (Katić-Bakaršić, 1999). The aim of the advertising discourse is to inform potential customers about qualities of the advertised product and to induce them to purchase it. The force of the advertising discourse lies in glorification of the advertised product and implicit reproof of those who do not possess it (Marcoci, 2014). The advertising discourse has always been based on the rhetoric of persuasion. In the past, potential customers were persuaded of the quality of the advertised product. Nowadays, they are promised to become part of an exclusive group by acquiring the advertised product (Bagić, 2006). Due to the oversaturation of the market with advertisements, there is a need for new means of attracting attention of recipients of the advertising message, which results in significant use of various original and witty linguistic and stylistic devices (Gjuran-Coha & Pavlović, 2009). Surface layer of the advertising message is used to attract attention and create the desired atmosphere and its true meaning is on the level of connotation. Multiple meaning is created using rhetorical devices and figures (Lekić, 2009). Breaking grammar rules is another typical feature of the advertising discourse used in order to surprise potential customers with the unusual or unexpected and attract their attention (Leech, 1966). Humour is widely used in TV commercials as well, with the aim of entertaining recipients of the advertising message and attracting their attention (Leech, 1966).

2. ANALYSIS OF LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF SERBIAN TV COMMERCIALS

The TV commercials analysed in this paper were broadcast from March 2016 to September 2019 on four Serbian TV channels: TV Prva, TV Pink, RTS 1 and TV B 92/O2. For the purpose of this paper, the TV commercials which best illustrate the most important linguistic features used with the aim of manipulation of recipients of the advertising message were excerpted from the extensive corpus. Despite the multimedial nature of TV commercials, the focus of the analysis was on their linguistic code.

2.1. Strategies for addressing consumers

In the analysed sample of TV commercials addressing consumers is in some cases formal, using the second person plural, which demonstrates respect. In other cases, it is informal, using the second person singular, which, together with colloquial language, creates a relaxing, close and friendly relationship with recipients of the advertising message (Udier, 2006) and thus masks the inequality of power between them (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000), which makes manipulation easier. The first person singular is common in the type of commercial called ‘testimony’ (Tadić, 2006) with a trustworthy person describing their experience with the advertised product and creating the impression of intimacy with potential customers. In some commercials advertisers use the first person plural with the intention of conveying the impression of stability and building trust in the manufacturer of the advertised product. Using the inclusive first person plural advertisers want to create the atmosphere of closeness between the consumer and the manufacturer (Katnić-Bakaršić, 1999).

The first person singular

- *I like taking care of my skin and now I can do the same with my laundry* (Silan fabric softener).
(In Serbian: *Volim da negujem svoju kožu, a sada to mogu da uradim i sa svojim vešom.*)

The first person inclusive plural

- *OTP bank. We trust each other* (OTP bank).
(In Serbian: *OTP banka. Verujemo jedni drugima.*)

The second person singular

- *In order not to miss anything, Vip offers you free TV or film content on your phone* (Vip mobile operator).
(In Serbian: *Da ništa ne propustiš, Vip ti daje besplatan TV ili filmski sadržaj na tvom telefonu.*)

The second person plural

- *Enjoy longer the cleanliness of your face* (Nivea micellar water makeup remover).
(In Serbian: *Uživajte duže u čistoći svog lica.*)

The first person plural

- *We use the best quality cereals from our best climes and turn them into delicious and appealing products* (Vitanova Pionir biscuits).
(In Serbian: *Uzimamo najkvalitetnije žitarice sa naših najboljih podneblja i pretvaramo u ukusne i primamljive proizvode.*)

1.2. Question form

In the analysed sample of TV commercial a ‘vignette of problem and solution’ (Tadić, 2006) is very frequent. This type of commercial begins with a rhetorical question which identifies a problem or an unfavourable situation which recipients of the advertising message might be in. Advertisers provide a solution to the problem in the form of the advertised product (Goddard, 1998). Using this type of commercial, advertisers attempt to involve recipients of the advertising message and create a close relationship with them in order to fog the inequality between them, which is a form of manipulation.

- *Is your blood sugar level high in spite of treatment? We have a solution. Regulex capsules lower the blood sugar level and reduce complications of diabetes, having a beneficial effect on pancreas, kidneys, liver and blood vessels* (Regulex diabetes capsules).
(In Serbian: *Da li je vaš šećer visok i pored terapije koju imate? Imamo rešenje. Regulex kapsule snižavaju nivo šećera u krvi i ublažavaju komplikacije dijabetesa delujući blagotvorno na pankreas, bubrege, jetru i krvne sudove.*)

1.3. Imperative

Verb phrases in the advertising discourse are very simple. Passive voice is rarely used. The most common verb forms are imperative and present (Leech, 1966). Appellative function of the advertising discourse is reflected in the frequent use of the second person singular/plural imperative, often followed by an exclamation mark (Udier, 2006). Advertisers use the imperative to create a close relationship with potential customers and thus manipulate them into purchasing the advertised product.

- *Beat the pain!* (Vitalis sports cream).
(In Serbian: *Pobedi bol!*)

2.4. Adjectives

Noun phrases in the advertising discourse are more complex than verb phrases. They often include two, three or more adjectives, especially those which express emotions or praise (Leech, 1966). Comparatives and superlatives, particularly of adjectives with positive connotation, are widely used in order to emphasize quality and distinctive features of the advertised product, with the aim of manipulation. Advertisers stress higher effectiveness and quality of the advertised product in comparison with competitive products in the market which results in greater customer satisfaction.

Comparative

- *For healthier and stronger teeth from day one* (Blend-a-med toothpaste).
(In Serbian: *Za zdravije i jače zube od prvog dana.*)

Superlative

- *The gentlest Nivea deodorant* (Nivea deodorant).
(In Serbian: *Najnežniji Nivea dezodorans.*)

2.5. Foreign words and phrases

In the analysed sample of TV commercials foreign words and phrases are very common. Commercials aimed at younger population are rich in foreign words and phrases, mainly from English, usually used together with informal, everyday language in order to create a close and intimate relationship with that target group. In some TV commercials advertisers use foreign words, mostly from French and German, in order to emphasize quality, luxury, tradition and origin of the advertised product and convince potential consumers that they purchase a lifestyle together with the product.

- *OMG, everything has changed!* (Fanta fizzy drink)
(In Serbian: *OMG, sve se promenilo!*) The English acronym OMG (Oh, my God), typical of electronic communication, was used in the commercial in Serbian.
- *Garnier discovers Ultra Doux Mythique Olive nutritional care for hair* (Garnier shampoo).
(In Serbian: *Garnier otkriva hranljivu negu za kosu Ultra Doux Mythique Olive.*) The name of the product is in French to highlight exclusivity of the product.

2.6. Neologisms

The use of neologisms demonstrates creativity of the advertising discourse. Most neologisms in the analysed sample of TV commercials are blends. Advertisers use neologisms to make commercials memorable and thus attract the attention of recipients of the advertising message and make them remember the advertised product, which is a sign of manipulation.

- *Fairyconomical* (Fairy washing-up liquid).
(In Serbian: *Fairykonomično*.) The blend consists of parts of two words – the brand name Fairy and the adjective economical.
- *Feel Fantastic* (Fa deodorant).
(In Serbian: *Osećaj se Fantastično*.) The blend comprises parts of two words – the brand name Fa and the adjective fantastic.

2.7. Technicisms (technical terms)

Technicisms are widely used in advertising medicines and curatives. They are often used instead of ordinary words since their meaning is unknown to average viewers. The use of incomprehensible, complex sentences and technical and scientific terminology makes the understanding of the message more difficult and thus reassures potential customers about the quality of the advertised product as well as about the manufacturer's technical knowledge, inspires respect and consequently eases manipulation.

- *Treatment of gastroesophageal reflux symptoms* (Gaviscon heartburn pills).
(In Serbian: *Tretman simptoma gastroezofagealnog refluksa*.)

2.8. Idioms

Idioms and their modifications are very frequently used in the analysed sample of TV commercials. Since idioms are common in everyday conversation, advertisers use them in the advertising discourse in order to create relaxing and informal atmosphere and make a close relationship with potential customers and consequently manipulate them.

- *When you know that everything you love is always within arm's length. Moja kravica yoghurt. Always in the family circle* (Moja kravica yoghurt).
(In Serbian: *Kada znaš da ti je sve što voliš uvek nadohvat ruke. Moja kravica jogurt. Uvek u krugu porodice*.)

2.9. Stylistic devices

Although the focus of the analysis was not on stylistic devices, the authors noticed a significant number of them in the analysed sample of TV commercials. They reflect expressiveness, richness and variety of the advertising discourse. Stylistic devices affect emotions of recipients of the advertising message, attract their attention in a creative way and make them remember the brand and the product. They can also make potential customers laugh and thus create the feeling of intimacy with advertisers for the purpose of manipulation. The salient stylistic devices in the analysed sample are: rhyme, anaphora, metaphor, personification, simile, hyperbole and pun.

- *The chimney sweep of your throat – Negro* (Negro Pionir candies).
(In Serbian: *Odžaćar Vašeg grla – Negro*.) An example of metaphor.
- *Always fresh. Always close. Always Maxi* (Maxi supermarket chain).
(In Serbian: *Uvek sveže. Uvek blizu. Uvek Maxi*.) An example of anaphora.

- *Fresh like a mountain morning* (Rosa mineral water).
(In Serbian: *Sveža kao planinsko jutro*.) An example of simile.
- *What are you waiting for? Crack a problem!* (Nescafé 3 in 1 with a hazelnut and chocolate flavour).
(In Serbian: *Šta čekaš? Skrekaj problem!*) The creative and witty pun is based on the polysemy of the verb crack. Its literal meaning, break into pieces, refers to a hazelnut and the other one, figurative, refers to finding a solution to a problem. The visual part of the commercial displays a hazelnut surrounded by words 'you' and 'exam'. The implied advertising message is that having a coffee with hazelnut flavour will help you pass an exam.

2.11. Evocativeness

Evocativeness is very common in the sample of the analysed TV commercials. It is manifested in emulating features of other types of discourse or in the form of a humorous paraphrase of a well-known saying, song or a film or book title (Bagić, 2006). Using the aforementioned forms of evocativeness, advertisers make advertising messages more attractive and memorable, affect consumers' emotions, entertain them and consequently manipulate them.

- *Once upon a time there was a cough...and that was the end of the cough story* (Hemo-farm children's cough syrup).
(In Serbian: *Bio jednom jedan kašalj...čiča miča i gotova kašalj priča*.) The beginning of the commercial evokes a typical beginning of a fairy tale and its ending is a humorous paraphrase of a typical ending of a children's story. The evocative elements were probably used with the intention of easier approach to children.
- *Some like it sweet!!!* (Grand Black 'n' Easy coffee with sugar).
(In Serbian: *Neki to vole slatko!!!*) The advertising slogan is a humorous paraphrase of the title of the film 'Some like it hot'. Many coffee lovers like it hot and some of them like it sweet.

3. CONCLUSION

This paper presents the results of the content analysis of TV commercials broadcast from March 2016 to September 2019 on four Serbian TV channels: TV Prva, TV Pink, RTS 1 and TV B 92/O2. The analysis is based on the theoretical principles of Critical Discourse Analysis. It confirmed the presence of most linguistic and stylistic devices used with the aim of manipulation of consumers' opinions, beliefs and behaviour as noticed in previous research of the advertising discourse. The analysis attested multimedial and persuasive nature of the discourse of Serbian TV commercials as well as its imaginative, informal and humorous character. In the analysed TV commercials advertisers break grammar rules, use informal, everyday language, neologisms in the form of blends, idioms and their modifications and foreign words and phrases, mainly from the English language, in order to attract consumers' attention, make a close and friendly relationship with them and consequently manipulate them. In TV commercials for medicines advertisers use technical terms, incomprehensible to average consumers, in order to convey the impression of scientific knowledge and thus create consumers' trust and respect and manipulate them. Positive adjectives, particularly comparatives and superlatives, are widely used so as to emphasize the quality of the advertised product and consequently convince potential customers that they will acquire positive characteristics of the advertised product and the accompanying lifestyle by purchasing the product. Advertisers address potential customers in the first person singular and plural and use rhetorical questions to create a close and friendly relationship with

them and thus hide manipulation. The appellative nature of the advertising discourse is evident in the frequent use of the imperative verb form and addressing potential customers either informally, in the second person singular, or formally, in the second person plural. Stylistic devices, especially metaphor, simile, rhyme, anaphora, personification, hyperbole and pun, are very common in the advertising discourse and they indicate advertisers' creativity with the aim of attracting attention of potential customers with a memorable, humorous, witty and original advertising message, which makes manipulation easier. Evocativeness is one of the main features of the advertising discourse and it is manifested in the form of emulating features of other types of discourse or a humorous paraphrase of a famous saying, song or a book or film title with the aim of entertaining potential customers. All the aforementioned linguistic features are used as tools of marketing strategies for addressing potential customers for the sole purpose of persuading them to purchase the advertised product, i.e. to manipulate their opinions, beliefs and behaviour.

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