

Chapter 4

Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestion

Discussion and Conclusion

1. Speech Acts in Advertising Headlines

Miller and Eimas (1995 : 373-374) and Traugott and Pratt (1980 : 229-230) recognize six main types of speech acts: representative, directive, commissive, expressive, declarative, and verdictive. Four types of speech acts: representative, directive, commissive, and verdictive are found in this study. Note that a two-part headline with two types of speech acts is grouped with the first speech act it carries; e.g. a representative & verdictive speech act is grouped with representatives. Only representative, directive and commissive speech acts are considered prevalent in this study. Choices of speech acts and their frequencies in relation to advertisement types are given below.

Type of Speech Acts	Product Advertisement	Service Advertisement	Image Advertisement	Total
<i>Representative</i>	26	14	3	43
<i>Directive</i>	7	12	-	19
<i>Commissive</i>	5	2	3	10
<i>Verdictive</i>	-	-	1	1
Total	38	28	7	73

Table 1: Choices of Speech Acts in Different Advertisement Headlines

The data in Table 1 is quite revealing. First, we do not find a declarative speech act such as blessing, marrying, baptizing, passing sentence, arresting and the like since it is totally irrelevant in the field of advertising. Although we find one expressive speech act (i.e. thanking in a Cathay Pacific advertisement # 50), it is just part of a directive advertisement. Since it occurs only once, it is taken as insignificant. A verdictive also occurs once preceding a commissive (Philips advertisement # 73); it is considered insignificant as well. Interestingly, we find representative, directive, and commissive speech acts quite preferable by most copywriters. In product and service advertisements, representatives score quite high. Such preferences are justifiable: representatives include claims and assertions. To a certain extent, advertisements have to make certain claims or assertions. The capacity of a product has to be asserted (advertisements # 2; 7; 8, for instance) or a certain claim about the product's quality or attribute has to be made (advertisement # 4, for instance).

A directive speech act which includes a suggestion or a mild command that someone does something or an invitation for someone to do something is also natural in product and service advertisements. A directive asks, advises, commands or requests the audience to try the product or to do something and enjoy a certain result (# 10-14; 32). Directives usually take the form of imperatives, and according to Dyer (1982 : 139), imperatives can "push the reader favorably towards the product or service on offer" or "get the reader closer to the action" (Jefkin, 1976 : 37). It is very interesting that a directive is not at all found in the image advertisement. Of course, an image can be created but the audience can do nothing about it; that is, he cannot be asked to physically go out and destroy it, for instance.

In product/service/image advertisements, copywriters need to **make a certain** promise to the audience: the product can do such and such things; or **the audience** would enjoy such and such **benefits/discounts**. A commissive is then **called for**.

To conclude, representative, directive, and commissive speech **acts are what** we would naturally expect in the kinds of advertisement headlines under study.

2. Advertising Strategies

Advertising strategies found in this study are not uncommon; they have **been** discussed in several works on advertisement as reviewed in chapter 2. **Remarks on** such strategies are given below.

1) Several advertisements (# 5, 6, 9, 10, 12, 16, 21, 23, 32, 35, 36, 42, 50, 51, 55, 58, 60, 64, 68-73) resort to conversational language to create an informal tone and to reduce distance from the audience. The pronoun 'we' is used to convey a sense of solidarity and involvement while 'you' and 'your' are used to address the audience directly and to establish familiarity. This strategy is also in concert with the use of an imperative mood, adding an action-urging force.

2) Attention-catching strategies are various; they range from use of effective words, alliteration, repetition, to use of figurative language. Such powerful, evaluative words as 'extraordinary' (# 3), 'reliable, affordable' (# 6), 'unbelievable' (# 7), 'incredible' (# 10), 'instant' (# 13), 'prestigious' (# 17), 'world class' (# 22), 'amazing' (# 26), 'precious' (# 30), 'breathtaking' (# 49), 'perfection' (# 55) and 'delights' (# 57) are used to provoke desire, convince the audience of the products' qualities or attributes, and invite them to try or have the products under possession. Alliteration (# 1, 10, 12, 37) and repetition (#36, 40, 41) not only attract the audience

but with rhythmic beats also aid memory. An excellent example of the use of repetition is found in advertisement # 41 in which the word 'class' has been repeated 5 times—'magnifica class', 'first class', 'business class', and 'a class in a class'. Not only does the repetition ensure that the audience gets the message, it also produces product recognition. A hyperbole is used in # 41, where we find "The biggest show in the sky." On one reading, this sounds like an exaggeration about the biggest in-flight entertainment offered by the Singapore Airlines. On another reading, this could be taken as a pun, in which 'biggest' indicates extent rather than size. "The biggest show in the sky means "the widest selection of in-flight entertainment." A hyperbole is an overstatement, and probably a copywriter is cautioned not to overstate the quality of the product or service. This may explain why one instance of hyperbole is found in the data.

3) It is found that copywriters play extensively with both lexical and structural ambiguity in advertisement headlines. Words or phrases with multiple meanings have been skillfully employed. Because of their multiple readings, the headlines are very striking. "Extremely ... Experienced! Champion" (# 19) is a good example of the manipulation of lexical ambiguity. Here "Champion" has three possible readings, and all are relevant to the advertisement in question. The Monarch Lee Gardens Hotel's advertisement # 58—"Start your day over-easy..." contains a cute pun on different kinds of cooked eggs and their corresponding adjectives ("over-easy" and "hard-boiled"). Coupled with an illustration of two over-easy eggs, the headline is lovely and quite appealing.

Many advertisements rely on structural ambiguity. Often in a comparative construction, the than-clause is intentionally omitted; the product or service is then

compared to “unidentified others” (Jameison, et al., 1992 : 188). Acer Notebook’s advertisement # 4 just claims that it is “less in weight ... and price.” We do not know whether it is less in weight and price than what. Likewise, in the Northwest Airlines advertisement # 40, “More flights, more destinations, more convenience” is ambiguous since the *than*-part of the comparison is deliberately left out. Perhaps more flights, more destinations and more convenience *than in the past* or *than other airlines*. Obviously, the headline is aiming at both readings.

Another form of structural ambiguity is the use of [the + adjective [Ø]_N]_{NP} as in # 3. “The extraordinary” with an empty head noun can refer to anything. Many possible nouns can fill in the empty slot, giving multiple positive readings. This will yield more readings at the price of one.

Suggestion for Further Study

In analyzing the headlines, it has been found that certain headlines are beyond full comprehension without their immediate contexts: illustrations, launching date/time of the advertisements, and written texts in the body. Closely related to this issue is the substantial presupposition of the audience’s background knowledge about the products/services as well as their producers/companies. It is interesting to find out what would happen if this information was striped off from the audience. Would they keep on reading and try to figure out what the advertisement is all about (i.e., attention has been arrested), or would they simply skip it and the advertisement is thus a total failure since it cannot capture the audience’s attention?

Based on verbal contents of the advertisements, it is claimed in this study that so-and-so words or phrases would invoke on the audience certain feelings, aid

memory and connote so-and-so images. It is worth testing whether such **claims are** valid, whether the audience really feels that way, or what image comes into **mind after** they have read the advertisement headlines. In short, a **perception test of the** advertisements should be carried out.