

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### Statement of the Problem

Today, the world seems to have become smaller when compared to the past decades. We cannot deny the importance of mass media in effecting this circumstance. This is because mass media has the power to connect diverse groups of people in diverse settings and regions. Print media, as well as electronic media, is the most popular channel for conveying information from a news source to its audience. Generally, all mass media are concerned with three important services, viz. information supply, entertainment and advertising. Each of these services has a vital and different role to perform in meeting the needs of its target audience.

In the case of advertising, it plays an important role in supporting the media business. Its form is an integral part of the business system and an important ingredient in human lives (Bolen, 1984 : 4). The products people use in their homes, the newspapers they read, the television programs they watch, the places where they shop, and the recreational activities they engage in are all affected by their exposure to the advertising of these products and services. As Kleppner, et al. (1983 : 1) suggest, “[d]oing business without advertising is like winking at a girl in the dark. You know what you are doing, but nobody else does.” Hence advertising is immensely important, and it has a massive impact on influencing human behavior and consumption patterns.

Advertisements pervade throughout mass media, to which most individuals are exposed, consciously or unconsciously. Even if we “do not read a newspaper or watch television, the images posted all over our urban surroundings are inescapable” (Williamson, 1983 : 11). The ubiquitous quality of advertisements makes them an inevitable part of our lives. What is most crucial about advertising is that advertisements have become one of the most important cultural factors in molding our lives, our ideologies and our views of the world. To a certain extent, this is achieved through verbal expressions. As Stovall (1990 : 162) claims, “advertising is based on the assumption that words have the power to produce a change – a change in thinking, attitudes, beliefs and ultimately, behavior.”

It is generally accepted that the primary aim of advertising is to attract the attention of audiences and expose them to the product or service on offer. That is, the advertisement should stimulate the customer’s desire to have the product or use the service. Dyer (1982 : 139-141) states that capturing the attention and imagination of audiences and aiding their memory are the primary functions of advertising language. In a similar view, Jefkins (1976 : 33) claims that advertising has to serve certain copy functions – attracting attention, compelling interest, creating desire, inspiring confidence, and promoting action. In effect, advertising language functions to draw attention and eventually to convince its audience to buy a product or service, or to promote a positive image of a business or an institution. In light of a need to sell products or services, advertisements must catch the eyes, ears or heart or all three of an audience (Shirley, 1992 : 302).

From a linguistic point of view, it is of merit to investigate how advertising language achieves the advertisements’ goals; that is, how advertising language is used

to appeal to its audience, to persuade, to convince, to compel and ultimately to change the audience's behavior. In our daily communication, the speaker may utter a sentence and mean what he says and also mean something more (Davis, 1992 : 265). Advertising language is not different. In fact, the language of advertising is sometimes more important than the visual aspect since words have greater power over visual images in effecting a course of action or bringing about some understanding of the matter at hand. (For example, try watching a movie without the volume turn up and see how much of the action you can understand.) Dyer (1982 : 132) points out that copywriters are well known for playing with words and manipulating or distorting their everyday meanings; they break the rules of language for effect, use words out of context and even make up new ones. How advertising language achieves this is extremely interesting and worthy of study.

### **Language and Speech Act Theory**

In a typical speech situation involving a speaker, a hearer, and an utterance by the speaker, there are many kinds of acts associated with the speaker's utterance. When the addresser or speaker moves his jaw and tongue and makes an utterance, it means that he is characteristically performing something rather than saying something. As Austin (1962 : 5-6) states, "the uttering of a sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action." For example, since the utterance "I do" (take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife) is pronounced in the course of a marriage ceremony, the speaker is not just reporting something, but he is also doing something – namely, marrying. This observation, made by Austin, is called "performative". However, the

term “performative” was replaced by notion of “speech act” which was introduced by Searle (1978 : 22).

Actually, every utterance is some kind of speech act. We can make promises, issue warnings, christen boats, or offer congratulations, for instance. By saying, “I warn you that there is a sheepdog in the closet”, we are using the utterance to warn someone. Verbs like “bet”, “promise”, “warn”, are performative verbs. Even when there is no explicit performative verb as in “It is raining”, we recognize an implicit performance of stating or asserting. Slightly altered, the utterance “Is it raining?” becomes a performance of questioning. In these instances we could use an actual performative verb: “*I state* that it is raining”; “*I ask* if it is raining.”

The study of how we do things with utterances is the study of speech acts. In studying speech acts, we should be aware of the importance of the context of the utterance. In some circumstances “There is a sheepdog in the closet” is a warning, but the same sentence may be a promise or even a mere statement of fact, depending on the circumstances (Fromkin and Rodman, 1974 : 159-160).

### **Advertising Language in Newspapers**

The primary functions of advertising language are to catch attention, to create imagination and to aid memory (Dyer, 1982 : 132). Moreover, advertising is based on the assumption that words have the power to change the audience’s attitude and behavior. It is undeniable that word choice in advertising is extremely important. The copywriter realizes that in a limited advertising space he must choose the most powerful and convincing words.

Among the various forms of mass media, newspapers are the best carriers for advertisements aimed at an educated and reasonably moneyed audience. As Hydes (1975 : 15-17) notes, “Among the various forms of mass media, the newspaper is the most reliable source of information, especially to the high-earning and well-educated subscriber.” As such, they appeal to the consumer who has both the knowledge as well as the spending power. Such consumers, once educated in product or service knowledge, are bound to become loyal consumers (Jefkin, 1976 : 1-2).

In Thailand, there are two leading English-language daily newspapers: *the Bangkok Post* and *The Nation*. It is assumed that *the Bangkok Post* is more popular than *The Nation*, based on the fact that *the Bangkok Post* holds more market shares than *The Nation*<sup>1</sup> and that it has been in existence longer than *The Nation*<sup>2</sup>. In addition, it is found that the readers of *the Bangkok Post* are typically an affluent, well-educated and influential group. 67% of the readers are Thai, the others are foreigners who work in diplomatic missions, international organizations, multi-national corporations and businesses (“Rate Cards: Display Advertising and Classified Advertising”, 1998).

*The Bangkok Post* is, thus, chosen as the representative of the English-language daily newspapers in Thailand; the advertising language therein is investigated and analyzed.

---

<sup>1</sup> The daily circulation of *the Bangkok Post* is 65,000 copies (“Rate Cards Display Advertising and Classified Advertising”, 1998) and *The Nation* is 60,000 copies (Chanovit, [Orawan@nation.nationgroup.com] 1998).

<sup>2</sup> *The Bangkok Post* published its first issue on August 1, 1946 and *The Nation* on July 1, 1977.

## **Objective**

The objective of this research is to analyze and describe the advertising headlines in the Bangkok Post using a speech act theory as well as the strategies used to convey the message and to help achieve the advertising objectives.

## **Significance of the Research**

While most works study advertising language and speech acts separately, this work seeks to analyze speech acts in advertising language. It aims to provide a vivid analysis of the various ways in which advertising language is manipulated in order to achieve its aims. The study will, therefore, be of benefit to those who are interested in the advertisement register and its rhetoric force. It will also be beneficial to those who are interested in the effective use of language in communication.

## **Limitation of the Study**

This study focuses only on display advertisements in the 1997 Sunday issues of the *Bangkok Post*. This is because the Sunday issue has the highest circulation and the highest sales compared to the week-day circulation (Kleppner, et al., 1983 : 106). It is assumed that because of the popularity of the Sunday edition, the advertisements displayed therein are designed to capture the largest possible audience.

## **Definition of Terms**

Jameison and Campbell (1992 : 162-168) define the terms as follows:

1. Display advertisement: A display advertisement is an advertisement in print that usually utilizes size, color, illustrations, photographs, and various decorations and typography to attract the reader's attention.
2. Product advertisement: A product advertisement is an advertisement that aims to sell a product or a product line. It discloses the product, familiarizes the readers with the product's name, and induces the readers to experience the sensation of consuming the product.
3. Service advertisement: A service advertisement is an advertisement that promotes a service of a particular business organization.
4. Image advertisement: An image advertisement is an advertisement that promotes the positive image of the product or service business and dissociates them from any negative images.
5. Speech act: A speech act is an act of utterance and it is assumed that the utterance performs a certain function such as representative, expressive, verdictive, directive, commissive, and declarative as per Searle's theory.

6. **Advertisement Headline:** A headline is the dominant part of a print advertisement. The words or sentences of which are usually short, snappy and eye-catching. The main function of headline is to draw attention from the reader to read the advertisement.