

The Language of TV Commercials' Slogans: A Semantic Analysis

Mehwish Noor¹, Raza-e-Mustafa¹, Fakharh Muhabat¹, Bahram Kazemian²

¹Department of English, University of Gujrat, Punjab, Pakistan

²Department of English, College of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages, Tabriz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tabriz, Iran

Email addresses:

noorlinguist@gmail.com (M. Noor), razaemustafa@uog.edu.pk (Raza-e-Mustafa), biyakhan38@yahoo.com (F. Muhabat), bahram_kazemian@yahoo.com (B. Kazemian)

To cite this article:

Mehwish Noor, Raza-e-Mustafa, Fakharh Muhabat, Bahram Kazemian. The Language of TV Commercials' Slogans: A Semantic Analysis. *Communication and Linguistics Studies*. Vol. 1, No. 1, 2015, pp. 7-12. doi: 10.11648/j.cls.20150101.12

Abstract: This qualitative-descriptive study highlights the semantic property of the slogans of TV commercials. The study focuses on the analysis of linguistic tools used by the copywriters of TV commercials to influence the target audience. Leech's (1981) associative meaning with its sub-types provide a theoretical basis to the study. The research displays multiple strategies used by the copywriters. It underscores the associations attached to the keywords of the selected slogans according to the mentioned theory of meaning. The research helps the TV viewers to understand the guile used by the copywriters to entrap them as well as the researchers of the field of semantics.

Keywords: Language, TV Commercials' Slogans, Semantic Analysis, Rhetorical Strategies, Persuasiveness

1. Introduction

Language, nowadays, is not a mere tool of communication rather it has become a commodity to earn money. It is, in the business world, the most influential device of publicity owing to its attractive nature (Emodi, 2011). A clever use of words in an economic way is the beauty of TV commercial slogans. Television is a powerful source of entertainment for hoi polloi as well as aristocrats. Audience with multiple interests is bound to watch TV commercials during programs of their interest. These commercials affect the public view about their livelihood. They develop a certain point of view about different products introduced on the television screen. The most persuasive part of TV commercials is their beguiling slogans; simply, the language.

Semantics is the study of the mastery of imparting meanings which is the core element of marketing efficacy of a commercial (Leech, 1966, as cited in Kostkova, 2008). The element of persuasiveness on the part of the audience remains the target area of interests of the slogans. Choice and arrangement of words is the art to inculcate the desired outcomes. Appealing language, strong metaphors, word play, puns, innovative use of idioms and state-of-the-art collocations attract the viewers' attention and predispose them. Primarily, the language of commercials and advertisement is clandestine in nature (Fuertes- Olivera et al. 2001).

Copywriters of commercials try to convey their message in a very interesting manner. One of their main goals remains to use such combination of words which is easy to comprehend and recall. They also keep in mind their target audience and their expectations towards a new product or its modification (Dada, 2010). The entire impact of a commercial depends, predominantly, on the smart selection and arrangement of words. The copywriters of these slogans keep in mind the intended response of the viewers as well as possible inferences.

Principally, language exploited for commercials remains informal and conversational but sometimes the element of intertextuality is also found in such compositions. Poetic element and rhythm are some other key ingredients (Schmidt & Kess, 1986). The researchers intend to analyze the process of meaning according to Leech's (1981) stated type: associative meanings. The study aims at analyzing meaning of words and reveals mechanism of coding and encoding covert messages imparted in selected commercials' slogans. The study is unique in the sense that it caters living language traits and its analysis which has not been studied in Pakistan with respect to Urdu language yet.

1.1. Theoretical Framework

The study is based on Leech's semantic theory; types of meaning, particularly, associative type of meaning. It is further

subcategorized in, connotative, collective, affective, stylistic, thematic and reflected meaning. The associative type of meaning provides a conceptual framework to analyze the meaning making and comprehension process of the slogans of selected TV commercials.

1.2. Research Objectives

The study aims at:

- a) Analyzing linguistic tools that copywriters of TV commercials use in relation to product specialism
- b) Highlighting the semantic property of TV commercial slogans
- c) Pinpointing the strategies employed by copywriters to influence the viewers.

1.3. Research Questions

- 1) What are the linguistic means and devices used by copywriters of TV commercials to influence the viewers?
- 2) How does the semantic process of encoding and decoding of the slogans of TV commercials work?

2. Literature Review

Television is an influential device in the business world. It spreads the intended message worldwide in a very short time. The language of advertisement needs to be simple, attractive and economic.

Akinbode (2012) states that viewers acquire better living opportunities including health services from commercials. The study aims at revealing underlying linguistic mechanisms work to obtain the mentioned purpose.

Advertisements' slogans have been studied by various researchers around the world but from different dimensions and different aims. Sarage (2012) focuses on understanding the meaning of automobile slogans with respect to English language in Indonesia. The author concentrates on semantics of the very slogans with the help of multiple types of meaning. The aim of current research is to exhibit semantic property of TV commercials slogans with respect to Urdu language. Keeping in view, Urdu is Pakistan's national language and comprehensible throughout the country as well as other Asian countries and abroad (Durrani & Hussain, 2010). The researchers find a research gap here due to a lack of theoretical framework in the said study. The current study focuses on associative type of meaning for the semantic analysis.

Lapasansca (2006) analyzes advertisement slogans on linguistic scales by the quantification of different linguistic means used by the copywriters. The current study, basically, aims at the qualitative analysis of linguistic means of TV slogans supported by quantitative analysis of the viewers' response.

A comparative study of Swedish and Russian TV commercials has been conducted by Melchenko (2003) using pragmatic approach. The study centers on inferences, flouting and Implicature taken by the commercials. The present study, austerely, follows the semantic theory in order to analyze Pakistani TV commercials slogans.

Martin (2003) study focuses on a very important linguistic means; (English) code-mixing in French advertising. Mixing English is a common phenomenon in Pakistani context as well. The researcher also finds an instance of English mixing in TV commercials.

Fuertes-Olivera *et al.* (2001) find advertising language as metadiscourse which begins with 'informing' and 'manipulating'. They state that these slogans express simple information explicitly whereas implicitly persuade the viewers. The researchers have the same views with a different dimension.

A great deal of sociolinguistic research on the language of advertisements has been done in the world of linguistics (Dada, 2010). The current research fills the gap found in semantics' study with respect to Urdu language. In Indo-Aryan languages, no such of research has been found. The research is significant for TV viewers as well as the researchers related to the field of Semantics. It is a useful addition which supplements the previous work done.

3. Research Methodology

This qualitative research is descriptive in nature. The data is gathered by watching different TV channels from 7 pm to 8 pm for a month. The renowned brands of the products have been selected for the sample. The data is categorized according to the products categories, for instance; beverages, shampoo, soap, cooking oil, telecom companies, and detergents.

The data is analyzed on the basis of Leech's type of meaning, specifically, associative meaning.

4. Data Analysis & Discussion

The language of advertisements is a very interesting genre. It comprises hidden meanings in it. It is, especially, composed of such a combination of words that attracts the viewers. The language of TV commercials rests meaningful by owing to its catchy nature. The process of making meaning of TV commercials is under investigation. The selected data is analyzed on the semantic basis. Leech's associative type of meaning, commonly known as seven types of meaning provides a conceptual framework to the study.

Associative type of meaning, plainly, refers to particular sort of associations attached to words as well as their internalization by readers or hearers. It is an effective framework for the semantic analysis of language, the interplay of words meaning and the mechanism of multiple interpretations (Mao, 2013).

4.1. Connotative Meaning

This kind of meaning is beyond the conceptual/denotative meaning of words. It is attached to the dictionary meaning of words (Love, 1983). Connotative meaning is very commonly interpreted meaning due to its nature. It associates attributes of words to their literal meaning. For instance, a popular cooking oil brands' slogan:

1. Habib: kyon kay yeh dil ka muamla hay.

It delivers its message along with and beyond its literal meanings. It is product-related in the sense that it is harmless for heart patients. The key word “dil” has been used in two senses here; one as its medical/ physical sense and the other as its emotional sense. This multiplicity of meaning and two different connotations of the same word make the slogan very effective and powerful.

Economy of words is a great attribute of TV commercials. A single phrase acts as a main tool to influence the viewers, for instance:

2. Ariel: Aik Dhulai Challenge

It literally means that the product (detergent) gives a single wash challenge whereas connotes that its single wash is the claim of only the said product. It also associates the other meaning (connotation) of the word “Dhulai” means clean sweep and its colloquial use; to knock out other. Another example of a slogan is of a renowned soap:

3. Dettol: Detol ka Tarana Hy Pakistan Barhana Hy

In this slogan, the motto of the product is being presented in a poetic way. Literally, it falls under the category of stylistic meaning but by owing to its multiplicity of meaning the researchers discuss it here. The clause, “Pakistan barhana hy” connotes different meaning. The word ‘barhana’ means to extend and to increase and when it is associated with Pakistan, then it becomes interesting to interpret that with the use of an antiseptic soap we can increase Pakistan’s population, for instance, or the other way round, we can decrease germs and disease. “Barhana” connotes another meaning of “phalna phoolna” means to nourish or to cultivate. The slogan becomes meaningful with its different connotations to different sorts of audience. The target viewership of such slogans remains mothers who are the biggest consumers. Such kinds of slogans with their effective connotations really inspire them.

4.2. Thematic Meaning

It is concerned with the arrangement of words and thematic roles. The way words are sequenced in a phrase/clause or sentence is of great significance. The subject position and its role and when it is replaced with the object in passive voices, can affect the semantic property of the utterance (Mao, 2013). Here, in the case of TV commercial slogans, this strategy is an effective tool to optimize the desired results. The slogan of “Dalda” is a good example:

4. Dalda: jahan mamta wahan dalda.

Here, attention is placed on the strong feeling of motherhood and the product; Dalda, has been attached to it to gain viewers’ responsiveness. If we replace the positions of Mamta with Dalda, the consequences would be different. So to say, the thematic organization is an important means to mean something that is, actually, required.

Another instance of thematic type of associative meaning is powerfully drawn by the slogan of Pepsi, they say:

5. Pepsi: dunya hy dil walo ki.

The focus of attention is put on the noun phrase; Dunya. An international projection of the product is entailed through this

word order. The complement of copula verb “be” characterizes the subject dunya; means the world. The impact of the slogan resides in the very combination where the replacement of “dil walo ki hy dunya” might lose its captivating effect. There is another example of thematic meaning functioning as:

6. Coca cola: Chalo phir sy muskuraen, chalo ab saath khaen.

The copywriter has arranged the two clauses in a meaningful order where the first clause occupies the meaning of the second. The thematic emphasis is given to bringing about smile again. The swapping of both of the clauses might fail to capture the viewers’ attention.

4.3. Affective Emotive Meaning

It refers to the speaker’s or writer’s attitude or feeling towards what is said. It also belongs to the exclamatory feelings of the speaker/writer (Yusuf, 2010). It is a very important sort of associative meaning which directly effects on the listeners /viewers response. The slogan of 7up is a good example of the said type:

7. 7up: mana lo food ka love 7up.

In this way, the copywriter offers the audience to celebrate the love of food. The copywriter, implicitly, enacts an obligation of his/her attitude towards the product which results in a positive compliance on the part of the viewers.

The other way to express the affective/emotive meaning is through the use of exclamatory remarks. The exclamatory slogan of Bonus is the best way to describe it:

8. Bonus: wah! kia bat hy bonus ki.

In this way, the copywriter tries to regulate the viewers’ standpoint. The tone of the slogan is joyful which regulates the audience response in positive direction. This linguistic means is an effective maneuver to grab the viewers’ prospect.

The slogan of Waves Company is a robust instance of Affective Associative meaning. They claim:

9. Waves: naam he kaafi hy.

The claim presents a strong standpoint of the product which controls the audience panorama about the quality of the product. It is a suggested attitude towards the product by the copywriter to influence the worldview of the target audience.

The slogan of Head & Shoulder depicts covert imposition of attitude towards the utterance.

10. Head & shoulder: Number 1 say kam kabhi nahe.

The tone is suggestive which implicates not to compromise anything less than number one. It provokes clandestinely that the very product stands at number one position among all. Its indirect message prevents the viewers, unconsciously, to go for some other product.

The following slogans of telecom companies also depict the same course of action done by the copywriters:

11. a. Ufone: tum hi to ho

b. Zong: Sub keh do

c. Mobilink: Har dil har din

They, actually, speak out their own attitudes towards the products and due to the association of emotive meaning try to spawn a worldview. Ufone tum he to ho, means it’s all about Ufone is you; the consumer. The language of the slogan

suggests owning the product to the viewers.

Zong: sub keh do, informs that to say everything you have to join Zong customer ship. They actually target the female customer-ship due to the fact that women are, mostly, talkative and this network offers longest talk time in low rates.

Mobilink network espouses an emotional way of addressing their audience by publicizing the slogan Har dil har din, which is very heart touching. It literally means; every heart (uses it), every day. They symbolize every individual (user) with every heart.

There are other instances of suggestive language use to affect the audience's emotions, such as following:

12. a. Sunsilk: experts ka tyar karda

b. Clear: jab kuch nahe chupany ko tou bohot kuch hy dikhany ko

c. Safeguard: 5 beemario sy tahafuz

d. Life bhoy: Koi dar nahe.

In these instances, the slogans are like suggestions and claims. The imperative tone and declarative remarks are good examples of affective/emotional meaning. They declare their sense of reality to influence the audience. The educated circle of TV viewers gets inspired by the use of such words like, experts ka tyar karda, and 5 beemario sy tahafuz. The slogans such as, jab kuch nahe chupany ko tou bohot kuch hy dikhany ko and Koi dar nahereally stimulate their bold and daring emotions. It shows the effectiveness of this strategy used by the copywriters to win the viewers' hearts.

4.4. Collective Meaning

Collective meanings are associated with the habitual co-occurrence of words that are conventionally attached to certain words (Mao, 2013). The company of certain words imparts certain meaning to the utterances. The manipulation of popularly known collocations is a very effective strategy acquired by the copywriters. Powerful combinations of uncharacteristic collocation have been found in the slogan of Lux:

13. Lux: Aik khoobsoorat ehsas.

The copywriter presents an unusual collective expression "khoobsoorat ehsas". Khoobsoorat (beautiful) collocates with physical appearance but here it has been accompanied by ehsas (feeling) which is a mental or psychological sensibility. It is a common practice of copywriters of advertisements' slogan to give birth to innovative and meaningful collocations. The notion is strengthened with other such uses, for instance, the slogan of Surf Excel. They opine:

14. Surf Excel: Daagh to achy hoty hen

Dirt, here, is demonstrated as good to occur. The typical expression "dagh" depicts a negative connotation in the Urdu language. It entertains a stigmatized sense of meaning and habitually co-occurs with insolent attitudes. Contrary to normal practice, a very cleverly built collocation displays very positive effects. The said slogan has totally altered the traditional sense of the word "dagh".

The slogan of Dalda, to a large extent, depicts the same example of setting a collocative tradition.

15. Dalda: jahan mamta wahan dalda

The notion of motherhood (mamta) along with Dalda; a renowned product, goes side by side since its composition. It has become a tradition which inherits all the care customarily taken by a mother.

4.5. Stylistic Social Meaning

This type of meaning deals with socially acquired and communicated meaning by the social community. It differs from person to person and place to place. It, sometimes, varies among age groups. A prominent instance of social meaning is of Telenor:

16. Telenor: Sachi yaari sab pe bhari.

The youth, especially, youngsters mean it a lot. The slang word "yari" means friendship and exhibits informality of language use which, in turn, shows closeness and familiarity among the users. The target audience of telecom companies is the youth. So to say, the copywriter has effectively used the language which stylistically addresses the target audience and entails social associative meaning.

The eminent slogan of Surf Excel also employs social meaning:

17. Surf Excel: Dagh tou achy hoty hain.

Socially implicated meaning is drawn also from the said slogan. Product relatedness of slogan also works along with its sociability because it targets the children who are mostly ill-treated by their mothers for the dirt on their clothes.

4.6. Reflected Meaning

It is associated with the overlapping of one sense of meaning onto the other sense of the same word or phrase (Yusuf, 2010). The slogan of Meezan reflects the same type of associative meaning.

18. Meezan: her chez meezan main achi lagti hy.

The word meezan have multiple senses and might be interpreted in any of them. It refers to tarazu which means weighing scale, scale, iron beam and/or balance. In its religious connotation, it refers to the scale of weighing good and bad deed on the Day of Judgment. Here, in this stance it refers to a balance in which everything (food item here) becomes good (delicious). This sense of the word takes over the strongest sense of it.

The slogan of Dew is another illustration of reflected meaning.

19. Dew: Dar k agy jeet hy

The word Dar (fear) has a single denotative/literal meaning but is used in multiple senses according to the context. Interestingly, in this particular instance, it has been used by the copywriter in its opposite sense means, dare. The word dar, usually, connotes weaklings or cowardice but in this syntactic arrangement its reflected meaning associates it with courage. The mostly discussed slogan of Surf Excel can be exemplified here:

20. Surf Excel: Daagh to achy hoty hen

Where, the newly given positive sense takes over its old negative sense. The slogan of Gaey soap also reflects associative meaning. They propagate:

21. Gaey: her koi gaey kay gun gaey

In this slogan, the word *gaey* has been utilized in two different ways. The former expression refers to a noun, an animal; cow, whereas the later stands for the verb, to sing. The slogan means as, everyone admires cow. The literal meaning of the utterance fails to deliver complete sense that is intended by the copywriter. This expression *gaey* refers back to the product and neither the actual animal nor the action of singing. It refers to admiring of the product indeed. This association of meaning becomes meaningful due to the reflected meaning of the word *gaey*.

The interplay of words' meaning and their interpretation becomes easy to understand with the help of these types of meaning.

The study unveils the underlying mechanism of encoding and decoding meanings of the discussed slogans of TV Commercials. The copywriters of TV commercials employ a number of linguistic means to enhance the charismatic appeal of their slogans. The use of the multiplicity of meaning of the same word has been found the mostly adopted tool in this regard. The repetition of words and use of pun are commonly used strategies. The researchers have found manipulation within the word in the slogan of Sting: Taste ka jhatzzzka in which the word *Jhatka* (shock) is miss-spelled. The insertion of the sound impression of the product enhances its efficacy and acceptability. Miss-spelling is a common trait among the youth in their written discourse. Such an expression touches the target audience as the youth habitually consume soft drinks. The use of figurative language is also an eminent characteristic of the language of TV commercial slogans.

Code-mixing of English words has been found as a means used by the copywriters. It affects a large range of the audience because the combination of Urdu and English words is a common practice of Pakistani public due to the phenomenon of multilingualism.

5. Conclusion

Summing up the discussion, it is evident that the language of TV Commercial slogans has been found very rich in its semantic underpinning. The underlying mechanisms of meaning making and interpreting processes depend upon various strategies used by the copywriters. The comprehension of encoding and decoding the language becomes easy as well as interesting with the application of Leech's Associative meaning and its sub-types.

The aim of the language of commercial slogans remains to grasp as more attention of the viewers as is possible. The copywriters, to achieve the intended goal, apply different strategies which in turn are unconsciously used by viewers. Encoding of these meaningful utterances has been done consciously by reading the minds of the target audience. It happens because product relatedness and targeting the audience are very necessary steps while encoding the language. Decoding of the language of TV commercial slogans is done at the unconscious level by the audience. They unconsciously follow the same lines of decoding the message

that were expected by the copywriters. It is done due to the fact that natural languages' mechanisms of meaning vary from person to person and place to place. But a clever use of language may compel the audience to follow the expected lines.

The objectives of the current study have been gained by the successful application of Leech's types of associative meanings. The very types entertain a large range of meaning-making processes in order to study the underlying mechanisms. Copywriters smartly use different stratagems to convince the audience.

The language of the slogans of TV Commercials is a major commodity in the world of advertisement. Most of the studies done by contemporary authors, focus on marketing aspects of TV Commercials. The study is exclusive in the sense that this area of linguistic semantics has not been visited in Indo-Aryan languages. Some previous studies (Kazemian et al, 2013; Kazemian & Hashemi, 2014a, b) have focused on lexico-grammatical aspects in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and rhetoric properties of language in scientific, political discourses etc. whereas the semantic nature also needs further study with different dimensions and contexts.

The implication of the study is quantitative analysis of the said topic. The viewers' response may reveal some other directions for further investigation. The present study shall be helpful for further investigation of the semantics of language on the part of the general audience, copywriters of TV commercials as well as future researchers.

References

- [1] Akinbode, O. (2012). A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Advertising Language in Selected Nigeria Mass Media Commercials Research on Humanities and Social Sciences. 2(8) ISSN: 2222-1719. ISSN 2222-2863 www.iiste.org
- [2] Dada, S, A. (2010). Language Use and Communication Artifacts in GSM Adverts in Nigeria. Linguistik online.
- [3] Durrani, N. Hussain, S. (2010). Urdu Word Segmentation-Association for Computational Linguistics. Retrieved from www.aclweb.org/anthology/N10-1077.pdf on 20/12/2013.
- [4] Emodi, L, N. (2011). A Semantic Analysis of the Language of Advertising. An International Multi-Disciplinary Journal, Ethiopia. 5(4) 21. 316-326.
- [5] Fuertes-Olivera, PA. Velasco-Sacristan, M. Arribas-Bano, A. Samaniego-Fernandez, E. (2001). Persuasion and advertising English: Metadiscourse in slogans and headlines. Journal of Pragmatics. 33 (8) 1291-1307.
- [6] Kazemian, B., Behnam, B. & Ghafoori, N., (2013). Ideational grammatical metaphor in scientific texts: A Hallidayan perspective. International journal of Linguistics, 5(4), 146-168. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v5i4.4192>.
- [7] Kazemian, B. & Hashemi, S., (2014a). Nominalizations in scientific and political genres: a systemic functional linguistics perspective. International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 3(2), 211-228. Retrieved from http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2514388.

- [8] Kazemian, B. & Hashemi, S., (2014b). Critical discourse analysis of Barack Obama's 2012 speeches: Views from systemic functional linguistics and rhetoric. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 4(6), 1178-1187. doi:10.4304/tpls.4.6.1178-1187.
- [9] Kostkova, Bc, P. (2008). Advertising of Food Products. Diploma Thesis. Retrieved from is.muni.cz/th/104550/pedf_m/DP_hotovo.doc on 1/1/2014.
- [10] Lapasansca, J. (2006). The language of advertising with the concentration on the linguistic means and the analysis of advertising Slogans. Diploma thesis. Retrieved from on 6/12/2013.
- [11] Leech, G. (1981). *Semantics: the study of meaning*. Penguin, London.
- [12] Love, N. (1983). Translational Semantics: A discussion of the second edition of Geoffrey Leech's *Semantics: the study of Meaning*. *Stellenbosch Paper in Linguistics*, 11,115-136. Doi: 10.5774/11-0-106.
- [13] Mao, C. (2013). Associative meaning in social and cultural context. 2nd International Conference on Science and Social Research (ICSSR 2013). Retrieved from www.atlantis-press.com/php/download_paper.php?id=779 on 12/2/14.
- [14] Martin, E. (2003). *Mixing English in French Advertising*. World Englishes. Blackwell Publishers Ltd 2002. DOI: 10.1111/1467-971X.00256.
- [15] Melchenko, L. (2003). Inferences in advertising: A study of Swedish and Russian TV commercials. Master's thesis. Retrieved from: <http://lup.lub.lu.se/luur/download?func=downloadFile&recordId=1330117&fileId=1330118> on 3/1/2014.
- [16] Sarage, J. (2012). Dee Ayu:A Semantic Analysis of Language Used in the Slogan of the Auto Mobile in Indonesia. Retrieved from ayudewiputri.blogspot.com/2012/.../semantic-analysis-of-language-used-... on 3/1/2014
- [17] Schmidt, R and Kess, F, F. (1986). *Television Advertising and Televangelism: Discourse Analysis of Persuasive Language*. John Benjamins Publication Company. Retrieved from books.google.com.pk/books?isbn=9027225559 on 1/5/2014.
- [18] Yusuf, N, L. (2010). A study on the associative meanings of the Jakarta Post Weekender Magazine. Doctoral thesis. Retrieved from www.academia.edu/.../a_study_on_the_associative_meanin... on 2/2/14.