

Perspectives on Media Discourse

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A Speech Act Analysis of Cigarette Advertising
in the Nigerian Media

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Introduction

Advertising generally means any technique used for the promotion of goods, services and ideas through any medium of mass or public communication. It involves all processes involved in bringing to the notice of the general public some items or pieces of information in order to persuade them and ultimately manipulate their interest. All over the world, advertising is a pervasive phenomenon being "the cheapest and fastest way to inform large numbers of people about products or services for sale and to persuade them to buy" (Reece, 1990: 71). The main advertising media are newspapers, television, direct mail (leaflets, brochures, catalogs and other printed ads delivered by post services) radio, magazines and outdoor signs (like posters or billboards, painted bulletins and electric spectaculars).

The subject of advertising has generated a lot of controversies between the two groups of stakeholders (the practitioners and the critics) with each side of the divide accentuating its sentiments. The practitioners of advertising maintain that advertisements are meant to sell products and not to create values and that they advance improvement through competition while the critics contend that adverts do create values and impel people to buy things they neither need nor want (Briggs, 1989: 11). Perhaps, the latter opinion finds more justification in the advertising of cigarettes than in any other product. This paper attempts to analyze how advertising deliberately suffused with various pragmatic techniques, seduces or impels people to buy what is dangerous. Adverts in Nigeria are critically examined and the totality of devices (linguistic and non-linguistic) that the advertisers employ to encourage or persuade the public to buy or consume what they themselves acknowledge to be hazardous. Though the data are mainly drawn from billboards across Nigeria, some are drawn from newspapers and news magazines.

The Nature of Advertising

Advertising is a form of creativity, having its own language. The associative meanings that the language of advertising involves qualify it for linguistic investigation like the language of poetry (Yule, 1996a: 115). This language is often beautifully crafted for the purpose of persuasion, appeal and conscientization. All adverts have slogans, main headlines or jingles which are short phrases or expressions used over and over in the portrayal of products. The slogans or headlines provide a very simple direct form of channeling messages, making little demand on the reader (or viewer or listener) and are displayed in big letters on posters. Slogans are very effective in the sense that they are memorable and are easily identifiable with the brand name. Figures of speech are also employed as part of the creative potentials of advertising and the guiding principle is identifying the right message, selecting the right style and employing the right creative elements.

As advertising is designed to inform, influence or persuade people, an advert must attract attention and gain a person's interest. Most adverts begin with a basic appeal, which is the scheme or selling point. Other techniques commonly used are attention-getting headlines, slogans, testimonials, product characters, comparison of products and repetition. Other functional aspects of ads, especially of billboard advertising, are the extra-linguistic use of colours and pictures for effect. According to Adedimeji (2002:93), pictures add more meaning to the linguistic texts as they compliment speech acts (direct and indirect) to increase.... the force \sense of the locution". Adegbija (1989:56-57) contend that pictorial accompaniments of consumer ads are not just peripheral but perform, at least, three pragmatic functions which are:

- (a) They act as word-surrogates
- (b) They represent speech acts dramatically, thereby attempting to confirm the written message
- (c) They provide concrete context for the reader's inferences to work on thus tending to remove the ad from the world of fiction into that of 'truth', thereby drawing the ad closer to the real life of the consumer.

Colours are equally a variable means of communication and all colours are meaning- bearing. It is known that at road junctions, red light means *stop*, green light means *go*. To many people, white means *peace* and black symbolizes *gloom* and *mourning* to some. Yellow represents the light of the sun or hope while green stands for lush vegetation or productivity (Adedimeji, 2002:43). All these colour concepts are evoked largely in cigarette advertising in Nigeria.

The Speech Act Theory

Speech acts are central to pragmatic study as they are concerned with the specific social acts accomplished in making utterances (e.g making a promise, a request, giving advice, naming, judging, etc). The speech act theory was first developed by Austin in his seminal book *How to do things with words* (1962), published posthumously, where he rightly posits that utterances are produced to perform actions. He differentiates between constatives (which are "statements...traditionally treated as having the property of truth or falsity" (Adegbija, 1982: 6), and performatives, where actions are performed by force. Performatives are analyzed as either "felicitous" or infelicitous".

Austin (1962) further notes that engaging in a speech act means performing the complementary acts of locution, illocution and perlocution. According to Lawal (1997: 151 - 152), a locutionary act is a sentence uttered with a determinate sense and reference, an act performed to communicate. To Austin, the locutionary act covers the phonetic act (indicated by the utterance of certain noises), phatic act ("uttering certain vocables or words, i.e, noises of certain types, belonging to, or as belonging to a certain grammar") and rhetic act (using vocables with a certain more or less definite sense and reference" (Austin, 1962: 95; Odebunmi, 2006:79). An illocutionary act, like commanding, daring, nominating, resigning, threatening, warning, condemning, advising, etc., on the other hand, is a non - linguistic act performed through a linguistic and locutionary act, effected through performative sentences, with or without performative verbs. To perform a locutionary act is also to perform an illocutionary act. Linguistic communication is particularly achieved with illocutionary acts. Meanwhile, a perlocutionary act is the intended or unintended consequence of, or a reaction to, what is said (cf. Adedimeji, 2002: 42 - 43).Based on the submissions of Austin (1962:119),three points can be surmised that perlocution involves effects the speaker produces on the hearer or the result of the utterance made; that perlocutions are non-conventional in nature, but can be achieved through conventional acts; and that perlocutions can be achieved through verbal and non-verbal means (Odebunmi, 2006:85). All these are manifested in cigarette advertising in Nigeria.

Speech acts have been classified in different ways by theorists. While Austin (1962) identifies the five categories of Verdictives, exercitives, Commissives, Behabitives and Expositives, Searle (1969) arguing that Austin's classification is deficient, proposes the classes of Assertives, Directives, Commissives, Expressives and Declarations, with various sub-categories. To Bach and Harnich (1979), there are just two main categories of illocutionary acts: they are: Communicative with categories of constatives, directives, commissives and acknowledgements and Non-communicative with subcategories of effectives and verdictives. Other speech act theorists include

Saddock, Traugott and Pratts, Adegbiya, Leech, Allan, Lowell, Yule, etc (cf. Ayodabo 1997: 133-135).

Methodology, Analysis and Findings

The study is basically descriptive. A general observation of fifteen cigarette advertising billboards is undertaken in the South-Western Zone of Nigeria. Of these fifteen, nine are selected for study. In each poster, the text of the advert and the accompanying non-verbal elements of colours, picture and graphology are noted. The types of context against the background of which particular speech acts are being performed or identified. A general analysis of the entailments, inferences, implicatures, mutual contextual beliefs (MCB's) etc is then undertaken with a view to unveiling the invisible meanings of the various linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of the posters. The products randomly selected for study are St. MORITZ, YES! BENSON & HEDGES. Rothmans, FORUM, REGAL, DORCHESTER, SUPERKINGS and LONDON, all of which are imported to Nigeria. The basic features of the language of all these products are the following, generally or specifically:

- (a) The language is specific, and goal oriented.
- (b) The language has authority and immediate impact
- (c) It is appealing and memorable
- (d) It is believable and acceptable
- (e) It contains verbal and non-verbal elements of communication.

We provide below samples and speech act analyses of cigarette advertisements:

Text 1:

ST. MORITZ

Text: Choose Style and live it

St. Moritz The cool, smooth choice

Speech acts: Directive, assertive.

Contexts: Psychological, linguistic.

Non-Verbal Elements: Colours- green and white.

Analysis: In this poster, the readers are instructed to choose style. As the advertisers are aware of the social goals of Nigerians, they exploit this common goal, based on the mutual contextual belief (MCB) (Bach and Harnish, 1979) in force. It is presupposed that style, which has to do with a special way, a remarkable way of doing things, is not in other products except in St. Moritz and as a result of that, people should live with the style associated with St. Moritz. The text "the cool, smooth choice" is printed on a stick of St. Moritz and it is implied that only the product is cool and smooth. The linguistic context of the definite article, "the" and the two adjectives that are psychologically

salient make the message to impinge on the readers' minds. Graphologically, style is rendered bigger than the remaining words to underscore the relationship between St. Moritz and style, which people are presupposed to admire being identified with. The speech act directs and asserts with the performative verbs "choose" and "live" reinforcing the illocutionary force of insisting, commanding and asserting. Giving the connotation of green and white colours on which the locutions are printed, it is entailed that smokers of St. Moritz are productive or agile and peaceful at heart or happy. The implicature is that except when one smokes St. Moritz, one does not know yet what style and living in style mean. But constrained by the Nigerian government policy on cigarette advertising, the advertisers end the piece with the warning, which is antithetical to the goal of the advert: THE FEDERAL MINISTRY OF HEALTH WARMS THAT SMOKERS ARE LIABLE TO DIE YOUNG.

Text 2:

YES!

Text: JUST SAY YES!

Speech acts: Directive, assertive

Contexts: Psychological, linguistic

Non-verbal Elements: Picture – a smiling young man
evidently saying 'yes' Colour – Yellow

Analysis: The text of the advert is imperative, a technique that confers authority on the advertiser. The text is a directive, an assertive, with the verb "say" underscoring the illocutionary force of commanding and instructing. It is our world knowledge that "yes" is positive and 'no' its antonym, is negative. We are thus directed to be positive by saying yes. The word yes entails two meanings: being positive and adopting the product named yes! The message is thus that for one to be positive which subsumes qualities such as being happy, progressive, healthy, socially important, etc., all one needs is to smoke Yes! The pictorial accompaniment of a smiling young man is a further reference to the sense of these qualities. The psychological context of being charming, handsome, healthy and happy like the man in the picture is in force. The deep yellow colour means the brilliance and hope associated with the product.

Text 3:

Rothmans

Text: The best tobacco money can buy

Speech acts: Declarative, expositive

Contexts: Psychological, linguistic, socio-cultural

Non-verbal Elements: Picture – (a football star)
Colour – blue

Analysis: The advert text declares that the product is the best. The speech act is both declarative and expositive by making it plain that the product is the best (c.f. Austin, 1962: 153). The verbs *buy* foregrounds the inherent illocutionary force of asserting, and boasting in the sentence, "(Rothmans is) the best tobacco money can buy". It is presupposed that as everybody wants the best things in life, or specifically, the best value for his/her money, Rothmans is the best of all other tobacco products. The choice of blue colour is to suggest the love that the advertiser has for the reader so that the reader will also be prominent like the footballer who the spectators watch with admiration. The psychological context of the natural quest for the best and the Nigerian's somewhat socio-cultural passion for football are further deployed into the coding and encoding processes.

Text 4:

BESON & HEDGES

Texts: Loud & Proud: Hopes & Dreams: Body & Soul

Speech acts: Declarative, constative

Contexts: Socio-cultural, linguistic

Non-verbal Elements: Picture and bright yellow (golden) colour

Analysis: The advertisement of Benson & Hedges provides a variety of patterns all aimed at the perlocutionary effect of smoking the product. In the *loud & proud* poster, the accompanying picture is that of a man playing a musical instrument. The linguistic context of the two rhyming words makes them memorable as the message of being vocal and confident is entailed in the location. In *hopes & dreams*, the two senses of which are almost synonymous, the accompanying picture is that of a man (a head) looking above. The meaning of the verbal and non-verbal aspects is that good things are bound to come the way of smokers of Benson & Hedges. In *body & soul*, where these two words which share a collative meaning, there is the picture of a musician who has just performed body and soul and thrilled the audience. The colour is always golden with its connotation of being precious and valuable.

Text 5:

REGAL

Text: The difference is REGAL

Speech acts: Declarative

Contexts: Linguistic, psychological

Non-verbal Elements: Picture – a man jubilating, his right hand raised. Colours – white and blue

Analysis: The pun on regal engenders the advertiser's strategy in this advert. It is stated that there is a difference. Regal is defined as 'typical of a king or queen and therefore usually impressive' (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 1995). The text means that *regal*, the product is the difference or the unique one of all and it at the same time means that the difference is 'impressive'. The picture of a man in blue suit, beaming with smiles and with a hand raised as in the celebration of victory, lends credence to the sense of the location. The background white colour entails peace and purity that the smoker of *Regal* enjoys. The intention of the advertiser is to psychologically capture the reader as the reader will normally want to have a "kingly" or royal association with regal.

Text 6:

SUPERKINGS

Text: SUPER QUALITY, SUPER TATSE, SUPER VALUE, SUPERKINGS

Speech acts: Declarative

Contexts: Linguistic, socio-cultural, physical

Non-verbal Elements: Picture (Young men and women having fun, celebrating)

Analysis: The reader is told that the product, apart from having the features of quality, taste and value, has all these qualities in a "super" or superb form. The repetition of super has mnemonic import and it has the perlocutionary potential of making readers desire to be super. The physical context of sociable young men and women in a happy mood refers to the joy that one would have when one smokes *Superkings*. It is entailed that those who smoke the product, like those in the picture, will not only be kings in their own capacities but will even be superkings – underscored with three underlines. The combination of verbal and non-verbal aspects makes the advert rich and its effect more profound. *Superkings* is associated with happiness and we are to infer that if we want to be happy, we must smoke the product.

Text 7:

DORCHESTER

Text: Quality at an affordable price

Speech acts: Declarative

Contexts: Psychological, linguistic, socio-cultural,

Non-verbal Aspects: Logo and three packets of Dorchester in picture Colour – white

Analysis: The advert text declares that the product has quality, which is thematized. It is presupposed that world knowledge would make the reader know the essence of quality. Given the socio-cultural context of Nigeria where a vast majority is poor and the tendency is to look for cheap products, the advert meets the reader's goal by assuring him that the product is not expensive despite its quality. The logo of the product is presented and the reader is indirectly obliged to associate the logo with quality and the product itself, represented by three packers, with affordability. The inference made is that without compromising quality, *Dorchester* provides cheap smoking pleasure. The white colour means the purity of the product.

Text 8:

NEW FORUM

Text: Get the great taste

Speech acts: Directive, assertive

Contexts: Linguistic, Socio-cultural

Non-verbal Aspects: Colour – white

A ribbon below two packets of cigarettes

Analysis: The speech act is clear: the reader is instructed to get the great taste. This means that a special taste that is better than what obtains in other cigarettes is in *New Forum*. The illocutionary force of imploring, advising and recommending is present in the linguistic context of the performative verb, 'get'. The white background implies that, apart from purity, the great taste of *Forum* makes room for peace and class. The illocutionary force is to make the reader buy the product and the intended perlocutionary effect of wishing to savor the great taste is hoped to be felt by the reader. The linguistic context of *new* qualifying forum is to appeal further to the reader, as it is our world knowledge that new things are more valuable than old ones.

LONDON

Text: Welcome to London

Brings out the London in you

Speech acts: Expressive, assertive

Contexts: Socio-cultural, psychological, physical

Non-verbal Aspect: Picture (a man and a lady are passing a glass of drink to the each other)

Analysis: The word *London*, like the previous analysis of YES! and REGAL with their semantic duality, is used to suggest two senses – the product and the city. Given that Nigeria is a former colony of a government based in London, the word London has psychological appeal. Most Nigerians who have not been to London, one of the most developed cities of the world, hope to go there. It is

implied that smoking *London*, a cigarette, is just like visiting London, in terms of delightful experience and pleasure. The reader is further told that the product brings out the London in him. London is associated with development, progress, civilization and power, all of which will be conferred on a person who smokes *London*. This is the psychological context of the speech acts. The picture of a young man and a girl suggests love sharing; and the physical structures on which each of them stands, reveal splendor, grace and beauty. There is the intended perlocutionary effect of the audience wishing to be in such a socio-cultural context. The speech acts are essentially expressive.

General Appraisal and Study Implications

The foregoing analysis reveals the strategies and acts of the cigarette advertisers in Nigeria. It shows how linguistic and non-linguistic symbols are exploited to motivate people in order to consume what the advertisers acknowledge to lead to early death. The advertisements manifest a strong reliance on the linguistic, socio-cultural, psychological and physical contexts of meaning which make them a perfect representation of what Jones and Wareing (1999: 38) refer to as "the language of deception".

The fraudulent use of language to achieve commercial purposes at the expense of humanistic purpose has serious implications for Nigeria and the world. These implications mainly border on morbidity (disability) and mortality (death) problem caused by cigarette consumption. According to H. A. Abdulkareem, a Professor of Medical Biochemistry at the College of Medicine, Lagos State University, the smoke of cigarettes contains "almost four thousand chemicals highly dangerous to human health. Indeed, more than twenty-five of these chemicals are carcinogens (cancer causing agents) to human beings" (Abdulkareem, 2002: 4). It is added that the consumption of cannabis and other hard drugs is less (or half as dangerous) than that of cigarettes "because chemicals released from cigarette smoke are more numerous and dangerous to health than those from cannabis".

Globally, 2.5 million deaths per year are recorded as a result of smoking and the figure is projected to rise 5 fold to 12 million deaths per year by the middle of the next century. Nigeria, like other "third world countries" contributes a good percentage to this global death record. One of the factors associated with the 'success' of tobacco companies in making good business out of their systematic murder is advertising. According to the Director-General, World Health Organization, Dr. Harlem Brundland, efforts geared at curbing the 'unnecessary habit of smoking' are always thwarted by cigarette companies which are internationally noted as being dishonest, adamant and powerful (2).

Everyday in Nigeria and the whole world at large, thousands of people are afflicted with lung cancer and cancer of other organs as a result of cigarette smoking leading to millions of death worldwide. The financial benefits of employment opportunities; revenue generation for government and development are insignificant in the long run, to the cost implications of treating morbidity and mortality cases occasioned by tobacco. While many advanced countries are fighting cigarette companies and curbing the impact of their deadly products, ironically, they are being promoted in Nigeria through all forms of ads in the print and electronic media. The use of bill boards as a means of targeting a large audience focused in this study is a case in point.

In the analyzed data, it is found out that of other types of context, psychological context predominates with 66.7% or six occurrences. This shows that the advertisers of cigarettes mainly appeal to the human mind to sway feelings and attitudes in their favour. In the same vein, another 66.7% of the speech acts are "assertive", entailing the confidence and sense of authority in commanding the products to the public. The total pragmatics of verbal and non-verbal aspects of the various adverts and promotional activities now result in tobacco addiction, which is daily increasing. According to a report in Nwajah et al (2003: 14), the year 2001 record shows that over 4.2 million Nigerians smoke cigarettes each day, as between 5000 and 7000 Nigerians teenagers light cigarettes for the first time each year. The same report adds that "currently, 24.3 per cent of school children between ages 12 and 17 now use tobacco".

Against the backdrop of the activities of tobacco companies, the Royal College of Physician (1983) declares:

The health risks of smoking do not lessen with the passage of years, rather they increase. As more and more people suffer the consequences of this unnecessary habit (of cigarette smoking), the urgency for action remains as strong as ever. Actions to control and eventually abolish the distress caused by smoking-related diseases and the burden they place on the National Health Service have to be taken seriously by smokers, by non-smokers, by educators in school and beyond, by health care professionals and most importantly, the governments.

(Abdulkareem, 2002: 8)

Therefore, since what is good for Britain in this regard is also good for Nigeria, it is recommended that the Federal Government ban the advertisement of cigarettes in Nigeria. Our findings reveal that the warning of the Federal Ministry of Health is no more than an empty slogan, and as such, does not deter people from smoking. A more practical approach is therefore needed if the government sincerely cares for the lives of Nigerians. This process of banning should include:

- (1) Banning the advertising of cigarettes on radio, television, newspapers, magazine, billboards, and other means of mass communication.
- (2) Using the same media from which cigarette advertising is banned to enlighten people about the consequences of smoking. A syndicated programme of public campaign, public lectures, documentaries, etc. should be integrated here.
- (3) Imposing high taxes and levies on tobacco companies so as to rightfully decrease their stupendous wealth and excessive profits with which they make mischief and do politics with language.

Conclusion

Advertising is a form of creativity – a rigorous exercise. Each creative work of art, Williams (2001: 27) contends, be it writing, sculpting, music or character building emerges from the physiological to the sociological and the psychological and demands as much mental and nervous energy as the physical demand from a heavy weight boxer. In other words, the creative potentials of advertisers impinge on the society, as the society tends to believe that what they say is true. Their language of persuasion, encouragement, rhetoric and appeal eventually makes a strong impact on the individual mind such that an individual is wittingly or unwittingly subliminally seduced to believe their advertorial claims. The techniques used by advertisers range from attention getting characters, comparison of product to repetition (Reece, 1990: 75). In a situation where advertisers or creative users of language use language, verbal and non-verbal, to promote what is deleterious to the hearer or reader (with appropriate pragmatic devices) such "pragmatic acrobatics", as in the case of cigarettes, should be determinedly controlled.

In this paper, we have attempted to show how advertisers of cigarettes use language to deceive and mislead readers to the benefits of smoking - which contrarily has no positive benefits. Brief interpretations of cigarette billboard adverts are undertaken, using the speech act theory. The implications of smoking are highlighted with a view to showing that adverts of cigarettes only play on the readers' collective intelligence by associating health, happiness, pleasure and youthfulness with their products, and as such, the adverts should not only be ignored but be stopped. It is our submission that, given that using language has sociological and psychological effects on the hearers or readers, a more radical approach should be taken by the government to stop those who use language, in the words of Birk and Birk (cited in Adedimeji, 2002: 107), as "a powerful weapon for destruction".

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