

# Advertising as Communicative Discourse: An Analysis

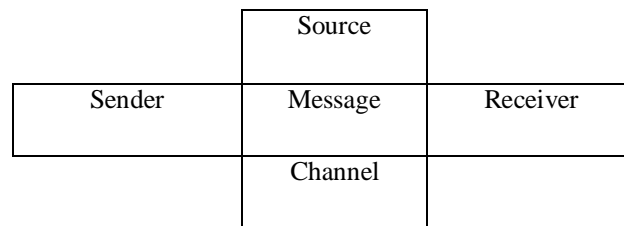
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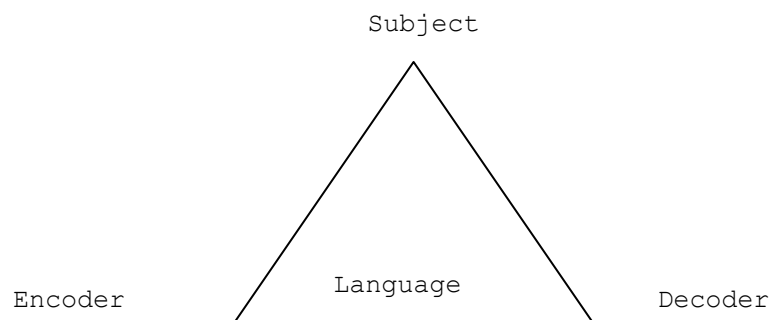
The task of modern creativity in advertising is to find fresh, interest-provoking ways of conveying meaningful information realistically and on the reader's own terms. As Nilsen says, "in many ways, advertisers are today's pop culture poets. They value the power and the flexibility of the English language just as much as do their literary colleagues on college campuses and writing colonies."<sup>2</sup> Though their purpose is different they employ many of the same literary techniques as do the most skilled literary writers. The various linguistic techniques employed in advertisements help to achieve the first aim of advertising-to catch the attention of the reader. The copywriter widens and deepens the potentialities of the language in several ways. The language in advertising is adapted to/for a well defined social purpose. A number of factors motivate a copywriter to write the advertisements in one way rather than another: the medium for which the advertisement is designed, the type of audience for which it is intended etc. Such predispositions vary according to the type of advertising.

Advertising communication can be looked at from the classic sender oriented perspective. Advertisers as senders treat the audience as receivers and attempt to manipulate source, message and channel factors to achieve their goal. Thus, there exists a correspondence between advertising strategies and theories of communication.



**Elements of Communication**

The whole phenomenon can be looked at from the encoder/decoder perspective also, as any form of discourse (here, the persuasive discourse of advertising) comprises of four agents: the encoder (writer or speaker), the decoder (reader, viewer), the subject and the language (code or signal) through which the encoder communicates a message to the decoder about the subject. All the four agents remain closely linked and cannot be isolated from one another. This relationship is traditionally referred to as the Communication Triangle:



**The Communication Triangle**

Advertisements, like any act of communication, primarily produce and reproduce meanings but the meaning of meaning remains ever-elusive predetermined as it is by the attitudes, beliefs and cultural responses of the decoder (consumer). In fact, advertising communication can't be fully defined and understood without taking into account its various components like pictures, music, people, language and paralanguage etc. All these derive their meaning from interaction with each other to produce a unified effect.

The elements may be seen interacting with each other in the sender – receiver mode where “a society is its senders, receivers, discourses and situations. A participant is identified by his or her language, paralanguage, position in society, and knowledge of other discourses.”<sup>3</sup> Paralanguage is an umbrella term for “those aspects of communication that surround and support our verbal language in... for example body position, gesture, physical proximity, clothing, touch, eye contact.”<sup>4</sup> To read an advertisement in isolation (only in relation to its language) is to devoid it of its growing tradition and hence mar its meaning.

To study and understand the language of advertisements becomes particularly interesting and useful in the present context as advertisements today mark a radical deviation from their counterparts of 1960s and/or 1970s, both in form and content. Advertisements in these days were rather plain, bland and simple in form - denoting only that much as was said. The advertisement for ‘Radhu Tyers’, to recapitulate one from the late 60s fame, depicted a female model sitting close to a bicycle, the voice-over (commentary by unseen speakers) proclaiming “Radhu Tyre, Ye raste mein dhokha nahin denge”. The visual showed only what the voice-over proclaimed. Those were the times when advertisements were both fewer and more direct. But today's advertising is much more creative and replete with semiotics. The Oxford dictionary defines semiotics as the study of signs and symbols, and their interpretations. Colours, fonts, symbols, logos, shapes, settings, objects – all form part of the communication of advertising wherein individual objects evoke contextual meanings and also help in conjuring up the whole meaning of the advertisement.

Discourse analysis of the text of advertisements that form part of the questionnaires form another important methodological tool. Broadly speaking, English may vary either according to the user or use. Varieties of English marked by ‘use’ in relation to social context are called ‘registers’. Registers may be differentiated according to ‘Style of Discourse’, ‘Mode of Discourse’, and ‘Field of Discourse’. Register analysis aims at identifying the grammatical and lexical features of the register of advertising. But it is combined with discourse to evolve a more inclusive paradigm to study the use of language as it is actually used in advertisement communication. The point about register analysis is that it is an operation on text, and does not reveal how language is used in the discourse process. In discourse analysis, the stress is not on sentence grammar alone but on how sentences are combined in discourse to produce meaning. To study a language in ‘use’ is to study it in ‘discourse’. Although discourse analysis mainly stresses on language, it also examines “the context of communication: who is communicating with whom and why; in what kind of society and situation; through what medium; how different types and acts of communication evolved, and their relationship to each other.... Discourse analysis views language and context holistically.”<sup>23</sup>

Advertising communication is a process whereby we “create, negotiate and interpret personal meanings”<sup>24</sup>. The emphasis, as a result, shifts from “the structure and grammar to function and communicative competence, from assembling sentences to doing things with utterances, from the sentence in isolation to the utterance in context.”<sup>25</sup>

### References

- [1]. John L.F. Nilsen and Alleen Pace Nilsen, “Why study the Language of Advertising”? *Language play: An Introduction to Linguistics* (Massachusetts: Newbury Publishing House, 1978), 53.
- [2]. Guy Cook, *The Discourse of Advertising* (London and Paris: Routledge Publications, 1992)
- [3]. Angela Goddard, *The Language of Advertising*, (London and New York: Routledge Publications, 1998) 15.
- [4]. Guy Cook, *The Discourse of Advertising*, 217.
- [5]. *Ibid.* 1.
- [6]. Philip Riley, *Discourse and Learning* (London and New York: Longman, 1985) 1.
- [7]. *Ibid.*