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**A STYLISTIC USE OF LANGUAGE
IN SELECTED NIGERIAN MEDIA ADVERTISING**

Miriam Stephen Inegbe

Department of English and Literary Studies
Akwa Ibom State University, Obio Akpa Campus, Nigeria
inegbemiriam@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study explored styles of language used as communicative medium in media advertising in selected advert samples in Nigeria. The data for this study were randomly drawn from seventeen advert slogans taken from various media advertising in Nigeria. Inputs were drawn from other adverts not included in the selected samples. The selected samples' data were analyzed from the linguistic point of view; graphological, lexical, syntactic and semantic. It was discovered, in the course of the study, that the impact of media advertisements depends largely on the advertiser's carefully manipulated language elements and resources such as; use of specific emotive adjectives, ellipsis, verb less sentences, exaggerations, imperatives, declaratives and unusual collocations to incite and encourage the target audiences' choice.

KEYWORDS: Stylistic, Language, Nigerian, Media, Advertising

INTRODUCTION

Advertising, to all intents and purposes, is a communication activity. Therefore, human communication and interaction play a vital role in it. Little wonder then that Akpan (2004: 20) argued that "not only is communication important in attracting the attention, it is the channel through which consumers are also informed about the nature, advantages, uses and possible misuses of the products/ services exhibited". The process of advertising is carried out and also achieved through a very important linguistic tool, which is language. Advertisers use language creatively to inform their target customers about their products or services on how useful they are. The language of advertising belongs to what Leech (1972: 27) describes as "loaded language", a language which is deliberately fashioned to change the will, opinions or attitudes of its audience. In essence, advertising has a precise set goal, which is to change the psychological mindset of the target customers and convince them to buy a particular kind of product. Dyer (1982: 2-3) argued that:

in its simplest sense, the word "advertising" means "drawing attention to something", or notifying or informing somebody of something... by word of mouth, quite informally and locally, and without incurring great expense. But if you want to inform a large number of people about something, you might need to advertise in the more familiar sense of the word, by public announcement you put a notice on a local newsagent's shop, design a poster, buy a space in the

newspaper... or even broadcast on local radio or organize a publicity.

The impact which advertisers have on their target consumers arises from their stylistical use of language obtained from a variety of language terminologies. To elucidate on the styles and uses of language elements and resources employed by advertisers, such a language will need to be studied linguistically in its abstract, mentalistic sense and also in a context of situation, which will lead to discourse and text analysis. This study is, essentially a stylistic exercise and to understand what a stylistic exercise entails, there is the need to first give the meaning of the word “style”. Nils Enkvist explains style as:

a shell surrounding a pre-existing core of thought or expressions; ... the choice between alternative expressions; ... a set of individual characteristics; ... deviations from a norm; ... a set of collective characteristics; and as those relations among linguistic entities that are storable in terms of wider spans of text than the sentence. (1964: 10-12).

From the views of Enkvist about what style is, we will abstract those that are relevant to our study. The stylistic use of language in various adverts slogans will be examined in terms of wider span of text than the sentence. Text creates enough grounds to study stylistics use of language because it is within the text that sentences are found. Individual sentences do not constitute style. What constitute style are the structure of the sentences, the word order in the sentences and the arrangement of the sentences into paragraphs, the system of paragraphing, the indexical features which include signs and symbols as well as the totality of the distinctive linguistic devices and non-linguistic elements which lace the text. The selection of linguistic elements could, therefore, be conscious as in language use according to the context, for instance, banking, marketing, medical, advertising contexts, etc. It may also be unconscious as in the language of informal conversation. To this end, style could be described as the extra-ordinary and peculiar use of language which is completely different from its general usage. Hence, stylistics is simply the study of style. Kirsten Malmkjaer (1991: 438) agrees with this as he defines stylistics as “the study of style in spoken and written text”. In sum, style and stylistics could be applicable to all kinds of situations in which language is used. This paper examines how language is stylistically used in selected Nigerian media advertising as a strategy to showcase products or services thereby attracting patronage in a way that the hearer uses this indication along with contextual variables to construct an interpretation in line with the expectation of relevance raised by the utterance itself. (see Sperber and Wilson, 2004:249-287).

METHODOLOGY

The advert samples selected for study are randomly taken from advertisements on drinks, food drinks, sports bets, domestic equipment, network communication, banking, eateries and household disinfectants. The approach adopted is basically qualitative. Since the study is language-based, the analyses are basically dual; they are discourse analysis approach and text analysis approach. Discourse analysis approach examines the structure of spoken language in

commentaries on radio, television, interviews, speeches, and conversations. On the other hand, text analysis examines the written language as used in literary texts, road signs, essays and textbook chapters. The analysis of language of advertisement, the examination of signs and icons and context analysis of literary texts fall within the domain of text analysis approach. Olateju (2004: 5) describes text as “the verbal record and analysis of a communication act”. These two approaches to stylistic analysis are sometimes extended to meet every situation of language including both spoken and written texts. The use of language in advertising in this study will, therefore, be analysed under these significant levels; graphology, syntax, lexis and semantics levels.

MEDIA ADVERTISING

Advertisements are very important as many commodity and service providers depend on them to improve their sales. Advertising therefore, becomes an avenue through which many companies and organizations showcase the uniqueness of their products and services to their target consumers. Norman Fairclough (1989: 199) argued that “advertising is the engine that propels consumerism”.

Media advertisements come in diverse forms such as bill boards, pages of newspapers, magazines, handbills, jingles over the radio, visual watch on television sets, transit posters, internet websites, and so on. In order to achieve the full objective of media advertising, a unique and peculiar style of language is often used in adverts in order to captivate and psychologically attract the target audiences: in other words, the advertiser makes choice of linguistic elements to rouse the consciousness of the public to his products/ services. It has been observed that this innovative and peculiar use of language in media advertising has a great impact on the target consumers. This pattern of media advertising is in line with Okigbo’s submission that “the effectiveness of advertising lies in the skillful use of language” (1985: 19). Advertising does not come in the same context. It comes in various forms since there are different types of advertising; for instance, trade and commercial advertising, medical advertising, educational advertising, to mention a few. The type of advertising determines the medium and devices to be used in order to get to the target consumers.

LANGUAGE CONTENT IN MEDIA ADVERTISING

The language content in advertisement is affected by media of expression. The radio, for instance, relies heavily on the interplay of the aural-oral mechanisms. What the target audience cannot see physically with their eyes is perceived through psychological closure. Thus, the language is imagistic, conveying pictures which easily register in the audience’s mind. The effect of this style is induced by the invocation of certain thoughts, feelings and desires by the innovative and stylistic use of language. The style also involves a series of repetitions and the application of sound devices taken together with the lexical choices which emphasize the main idea. The sounds could, for instance, be voices of children just like in the advert on “**Golden Morn**” and “**Bournvita**”. It can also include the use of wooden gongs and coded slogans in community based advertisements in such services like coronation, communal services and immunizations.

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Advertising on television emphasizes visual content and graphics. Television advertising therefore, is more realistic and economical with words, as the product/service name, colour and music form the psychological devices to capture the attention of the target audience while the language supports it with the linguistic elements, carefully chosen so as to attract patronage. Adverts on television also sometimes project the inter-relationships between human beings, animals, objects and the products being advertised. Examples of such adverts are those on “**Mr. Chef**”, “**Coleman Wires and Cables**”, “**Sunlight Detergent**”, “**Mamador Kitchen Makeover**”, and so on, on the Nigerian media. It also includes different brand names on products like baby kits, television sets and kitchen wares. The language of television advertising is veiled but very emphatic and wholesome in the expression of products and services content, value and in being eulogic in style. Most often, brand names are showcased by deviant spellings; all these will be discussed in our analysis of the sampled advertisements. The grammatical expressions have features of vagueness due to the stylistic innovation of inexplicit constructions. Products are presented in undertones in form of silent comparisons. Silent in the sense that comparison is indirect because the products being compared with are not stated.

The print media are the most versatile due to their easy accessibility to the people especially with the ease of carriage. The lexical items used in advertising are alluring, simple and personifying. The overall effect achieved through the use of punctuation marks makes the text conversational. Signs and symbols convey messages, thus filling the gaps where words and sentences could otherwise have served. This choice of lexical items and the unusualness in the patterning of these items build the aesthetic effect and the peculiarity which define advertisement text as a distinctive variety in language use.

Another stylistic device is the use of attractive colours and deftness in deviant spellings, for examples, “Y’ello bae” for “hello babe” or a “fair-skinned” lady otherwise popularly referred to in some parts of Nigeria as “yellow babe” and “•Xero-Studio” for “point- zero- studio”.

SELECTED MEDIA ADVERTISEMENTS SAMPLES

The samples to be used for analysis in this study are listed below, although, inputs will be drawn from products not included in the samples:

SAMPLES' NUMBER	BRAND NAME	ADVERTS SLOGAN
1	HERO SUPERIOR QUALITY PREMIUM LAGER	Fearless For those with courage The beer for heroes Every drop is earned
2	STAR FINEST LAGER BEER	SHINE ON
3	SEAMAN'S SCHNAPPS	The Original No.1 Prayer Drink
4	NEW BAILEYS Delight	CREAM LIQUOR Blended with the taste of African honey Light & Lush Cream Liquor

5	Loya Milk	More than just milk !
6	Nestlé MILO	Activ-Go THE ENERGY FOOD DRINK FOR FUTURE CHAMPIONS
7	Food Affairs	... deliciously different
8	Star MAGGI	With MAGGI, Every Woman is a Star. With MAGGI, Cook the Difference.
9	Indomie Instant Noodles	Tasty Nutrition. Good For You.
10	LG	Life's good
11	Haier THERMOCOOL	Choose Peace of Mind. Choose Thermocool.
12	access	... more than banking
13	Bet9ja	—Reward for Passion !
14	Glo	Rule Your World
15	MTN	Everywhere you go
16	Airtel	Data is life
17	JK	Extra Whitening Power. Perfumed STAIN REMOVAL. KILL GERMS.

ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE USE IN THE ADVERTISEMENT SAMPLES

The stylistic use of language in media advertising will be analysed under the following levels of linguistic analysis namely; graphological, lexical, syntactic and semantic levels.

GRAPHOLOGICAL ITEMS

Graphology is a linguistic level of analysis that studies the physical characteristics and patterns of writing. The importance of graphology as a linguistic level of analysis is particularly prominent in stylistic study of language use and multimodality which describe communication practices in terms of the textual, aural, linguistic, spatial, visual resources or modes used to compose messages. Katie Wales in *A Dictionary of Stylistics* describes graphology explicitly by stating the elements to be analysed within the category of graphology thus;

The study of such units (graphemes) in a language is called graphemics, or graphology. [...] Graphemics also embraces other features associated with the written or graphic medium: punctuation; paragraphing; spacing; etc. Different registers make particular use of such graphological features as: size of print and capitalization in newspaper and advertising lay-outs; different typefaces and sizes in dictionaries such as this one; special lines in poetry, etc. [...] Graphology can also refer to the writing system of a language, as manifested in handwriting and typography; and to the other

related features [...] e.g. capitalization and punctuation. (Wales, 2001: 182-183).

In advertising texts, the most important linguistic element is the headline. Some advertisers capitalize their brands or products' names significantly in an unusual way for some specific emphasis. This stylistic use of capitalization is noted in sample numbers 1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 10, 11, and 17 which are HERO, STAR, SEAMAN'S, NEW BAILEYS, MAGGI, MILO, LG, THERMOCOOL and JIK respectively. The use of capital letters for these brand names is for emphasis and for capturing mental disposition of the target audience to reach their desired purpose and for psychological effect. The capital letters are used in different typefaces ranging from big to small, for examples; HERO SUPERIOR QUALITY PREMIUM LAGER, STAR FINEST LAGER BEER and SEAMAN'S SCHNAPPS. This is stylistically done to significantly highlight the brand names for on-the-spot attention and visibility of the customers.

Colours also stand as indices for identification of brand names. For example, lemon green colour is identified with *Glo* network, yellow for *MTN* and red for *Airtel* networks respectively. These colours associated with these brand names make distinctive statements about their products and services. The colours are deep, bright and attractive, thus they command immediate attention of the publics.

Punctuation marks are also features associated with graphology. Some punctuation marks are noted in the selected samples for this study. They include full-stops < . >, apostrophe < ' >, commas < , >, dash < — >, ellipsis < ... >, exclamation marks < ! > and the graphic sign < & >. All these graphological elements are used for emphasis directed at the target audience to enable them make guesses as to how useful and effective the advertised products and services are. The use of exclamation marks in advertising text is specifically to achieve a precise material goal—how relevant the advertised products or services are. This is evident in sample number 5 and 13: the advert slogan of Bet9ja '— Reward for Passion!' and in *Loya milk* advert slogan 'more than just milk!'. The language of advertising here, 'more than just milk!' is inviting and encouraging and it belongs to the language which Leech (1972: 27) describes as "loaded language". The aim is to change the will, opinion or attitudes of the target audience and make them see the uniqueness in the advertised product. The ellipsis marks seen in sample numbers 7 and 12, in the advert slogans of *Food Affairs* '... deliciously different' and in *access* advertisement '... more than banking' are used to allow their target audience make guesses about the products and for economical reasons, to save space and money. The ellipsis is also suggestive of a movement forward, thus directing the target audience to move forward in steps towards the advertised product.

Number is also used to create stylistic effect in sample number 3, in the advert slogan of SEAMAN'S SCHNAPPS: 'The Original No.1 Prayer Drink'. The use of 'No. 1' distinctively differentiates this product from the rest. This is to also remark stylistically that the SEAMAN'S SCHNAPPS is the best for prayer purpose. The advertisers in a carefully manipulated language make use of overstatement to state obvious fact. The use of language here is to change the mental disposition of the target audience just to get the producer's desired goal—which is to sell the products.

LEXICAL ITEMS

Lexis is the set of all words and phrases in language which have a specific meaning. This includes the study of individual words and idioms in different linguistic contexts. Meanings of these words are judged through the analysis of the context, social relevance and from individual point of view. The dominant word class in the selected advertising samples language content are nouns, adjectives and verbs. The verb class is not very strongly expressed in the selected texts. The place of verbs is subsumed in adjectives which frequently perform the function of verbals although not in all cases. The verbs are simple as observed in the sample texts. For instance: “is, shine, go, delight, blended, choose and kill”. These verbs occur in different positions.

There is also an observation of a familiar grouping of words which appear together due to their habitual use. Fowler describes this term as “collocation” and goes further by identifying two basic kinds of collocations which are “habitual collocation and unusual collocation” (Fowler, 1976: 143). He went further by explaining “habitual collocation” as predictable elements while “unusual collocation” refers to collocational deviations. Advertising makes use of these two collocations but it thrives on collocational deviation which projects the product or service in an unfamiliar way. For instance, in the advertising samples of “access” and “Loya milk”, the expressions “...more than banking” and “more than just milk!” show deviation. The word, ‘more’ is in the comparative degree while ‘than’ measures the force of the adjectives used for the advertisements. These two advertising slogans from “access” and “Loya milk” could also be analysed as fragments. Although the phrases provide a lot of information to the listening audience, they do not contain proper subject and verb relationship. These fragments are innovative and they occur for stylistic effect.

The use of unusual spelling patterns by advertisers is also observed in the selected advert samples. This unusual spelling pattern creates stylistic effects although it shows deviation from the known norms. These orthographic deviations are observed in selected advertising samples of “MILO— Activ-GO” and “MTN— Y’ello Nigeria, Y’ello bae”. The deletion of the grapheme < e > in “Activ-GO” and the graphemes < h/w > and < b > in “Y’ello bae” is a deliberate deletion for stylistic effect. This deletion in a way, may also cause message distortion. This unusual orthographic deviation is also noted in *Diamond Bank’s* promotional adverts: “DiamondXtra Account” for “Diamond Extra Account”. Another significant example still on DiamondXtra Account’s promotional advert, is the unusual combination of letters as a spelling pattern at the beginning of the advertisement. For example “BreakiNews”. This spelling pattern is a combination of two ideas; ‘breaking and news’. Unusual combination of symbol as a spelling pattern for stylistic effect is also observed in the promotional advert slogan of “NEW BAILEYS”: ‘Light & Lush Cream Liquor’. The symbol used as a spelling pattern here is also an intentional strategy to create stylistic effect instead of using the conjunction ‘and’. Collocational deviation is also observed in SEAMAN’S promotional advert. A number is used in the advertising slogan: “The Original No. 1 Prayer Drink”. The ‘No.1’ used here is for emphasis and to differentiate the product from the rest. A number < 9 > is also seen in a brand name as style and for emphasis. This collocational deviation is observed in the brand name of “Bet9ja”.

SYNTACTIC ITEMS

In linguistics, syntax is the set rules, principles, and processes that govern the structure of sentences in a language, usually including word order. George Yule (1996: 100) describes syntax as “the structure and ordering of components within a sentence”. The predominant syntactic devices in the selected advertising samples are the use of incomplete sentences/ clauses as evident in “Glo, rule your world”, “MTN, everywhere you go”, “JIK, extra whitening power”, Indomie Instant Noodles, tasty nutrition. Good for you”, and so on.

Verbless sentences are also observed in the samples of advertisements: “Food Affairs, ... deliciously different”, “Bet9ja, —Reward for Passion!”, “access, ... more than banking”, “SEAMAN’S, The Original No. 1 Prayer Drink”, “MAGGI, With MAGGI, Cook the Difference”, “NEW BAILEYS Delight, Light & Lush Cream Liquor”, “HERO, the beer for heroes ” and “MILO, The Energy Food Drink for Future Champions.”.

Another prominent syntactic feature observed in samples of the selected advertisements is the device of vagueness due to inexplicit constructions found in the sentences. For instance “Choose Peace of Mind. Choose Thermocool”, “with MAGGI, cook the difference” and “The Original No.1 Prayer Drink”. In the examples above, instead of the vagueness to becloud the message, it evokes a sense of personal reasoning in the target consumer, due to silent comparison of products. Hence the vagueness in the language achieves a contrastive effect. This is so because, the advertisers have stated that if the target consumers ‘choose Thermocool’, they ‘choose peace of mind’, without stating which other product is good or better before insisting that the advertised product is the best.

The advertisers also make use of simple sentence pattern as observed in the selected advert samples. For instance: “Glo, rule your world”, “MTN, everywhere you go”, “LG, Life’s good”, “Airtel, data is life”, “HERO, every drop is earned” and “with MAGGI, every woman is a star”. The examples drawn above have the sentence structure of SVO. In other samples of the selected advertisements, one observes that, there are no verbs in some of the brands’ slogans yet the entire construction serves as a sentence. For examples: “HERO, the beer for heroes”, “SEAMAN’S, the original no. 1 prayer drink”, “NEW BAILEYS, light & lush cream liquor”, “Bet9ja, —reward for passion!”, and “MILO, the energy food drink for future champions”.

There is also the employment of emotive sentences in some of the brands’ slogans. For example: “data is life”, “choose peace of mind”, “rule your world”, “everywhere you go”, “the beer for heroes”, “with MAGGI, every woman is a star” and “shine on”. The sentences here are highly emotive. The advertisers’ choice of words here elicits emotions and arouses intense feelings of the target consumers. Through the advertisers careful manipulative choice of words for their adverts slogans, the target consumers may be persuaded to buy the product so advertised.

The nominal group ranges from simple to complex and examples are: HERO, STAR, Glo, MTN, LG, NEW BAILEYS Delight, Food Affairs, Bet9ja, Haier THERMOCOOL, and Indomie Instant Noodles. “Food Affairs” and “Haier THERMOCOOL” are noun-noun associative construction while “delight” post-modifies “NEW BAILEYS”. “Indomie Instant Noodles” could also be seen as an adjectival as the “instant” describes the advertised product, “Indomie Noodles”.

The verbal groups in the samples studied are simple, and they occur with or without auxiliary. This deliberate displacement of the verbal group is for stylistic effect and aesthetic

purpose. The verbs used in the studied samples are mostly in the simple present.

SEMANTIC ITEMS

In semantic, the meaning of words, phrases and sentences are studied. Linguistic semantics, according to George Yule, (1996: 114), deals with “the conventional meaning conveyed by use of words and sentences of a language”. One of the distinctive qualities in advertising is between the low and high context of communication. Words are exaggeratively used to incite and encourage the target consumers. The advertisers’ use of specific emotive words and tones, helps to paint mental pictures of the advertised products or services in the minds of their target consumers so as to achieve the desired goal of the products’ providers. The emotive adjectives used in advertisements build concrete images. They control application of meaning by being simple and concise. In some products and services advertised, meanings are expressed connotatively through the use of verbless sentences, exaggeration and ellipsis, as seen in the selected promotional samples numbers 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, and 14. Figurative use of words heightens the meaning. For instance: “shine on” and “Fearless, for those with courage, the beer for heroes, every drop is earned” which are brand advert slogans for drinks; “STAR beer” and “HERO” respectively. These brands’ slogans are ways of using overstatement to state the obvious facts. The target audience is made to infer meaning from adverts by the unusual pattern of sentence construction. For example: “HERO, every drop is earned”, “with MAGGI, every woman is a star”, “Glo, rule your world”, “MTN, everywhere you go”, “Food Affairs, ... deliciously different” and “Bet9ja, — reward for passion”. All these unusual patterns of occurrence of the lexical items are for stylistic effects. A unique way of expressing meaning at the sentence level in advertising is through the subordination of main clause under ellipsis while the subordinating clause is fronted for stylistic effect. The main clause is left in the deep structure represented by the ellipsis and the target audiences are constrained to make deductions from this stylistic aesthetic.

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that the impact of media advertisements depends largely on the advertisers carefully manipulated language elements and resources such as, use of specific emotive adjectives, ellipsis, verbless sentences, exaggerations, imperatives, declaratives, unusual collocations, to incite, invite, affect and persuade the target audiences’ choice. These distinctive resources are prevalent in the graphological, lexical, syntactic and semantic devices. From the advertisers’ unusual features and the unusualness in their adaptation and use of items from the common core resources of language, it is only obvious that a distinctive pattern in language use has evolved.

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