
An Analysis of The Speech Acts in Advertisement Slogans

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Abstract:

The major challenge the consumers face with the slogans is interpretation. The strategic patterns with which the slogans were designed leave the consumers in a state of quagmire. The work addressed those problems the consumers face in understanding speech acts used in advertisement slogans. The research also explained that advertisement slogans perform some acts. The research emphasized as well that the adequate understanding of the speech acts and intentions of the copywriters is insightful and rewarding and that the meaning abstracted from the acts controls the responses of the consumers. The research analyzed some slogans pinning down the various speech acts which enable the consumers interpret the purposes and the intentions of the advertisers. The qualitative content analysis with the descriptive survey method which enabled them inferred and generalized the finding of the study was adopted. The Mutual Contextual Beliefs as a pragmatic theory was adopted and it was found out that context and speaker's intention play vital roles in conveying messages from advertisers to the audience. And that the meaning abstracted from the acts control the responses of the consumer unconsciously. It was recommended that consumers should watch out for the acts or functions inherent in every slogan as to clear certain confusion that arises from inadequate interpretations. We then concluded that some pragmatic and semantic squabbles facing advertisement can also be addressed through an adequate interpretation of the speech acts inherent in the slogans. Moreso, an adequate understanding of the various speech acts by the consumers as employed by the copywriters enable the consumers to make the appropriate choices.

Keywords: Speech acts, Advertisement, Slogans, Interpretation, Meaning.

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Introduction:

At any points we use language or make utterances we perform some acts. Even many advertisement copywriters consciously or unconsciously try to observe the various categories of what Austin considered as performatives - using utterances to do something or perform an action order than mere stating or saying something. Emezue (2011) alluding to Austin (1962) observed that:

Some utterances that seem like statements do not necessarily behave like statements by having the overt truth value. He points out that not only do such statements describe or report anything; the uttering of the sentence is a part of the doing of some action, which again would not normally be described as or 'Just' as saying something. So, Austin calls such statements **performatives** and distinguishes them from constatives (which are declarative statement whose truth or falsity can be judged) (p.60)

The unit of linguistic communication is a speech act not sentence or utterance. This is an act that depends on intentions of the speaker and the hearer. Speech acts are like physical acts (hugging a loved one) and a little like mental acts (envisioning hugging a loved one). These acts are used to perform some functions such as to scold, to threaten, to question etc. Naturally speaking, speakers are good at specifying just a stretch of meaning they intend to communicate assigning to the hearer the responsibility to reconstruct the details.

This is why Emezue (2011) emphatically said

... to adjudge a particular language user as having used an expression appropriately, consideration ought to be given to such notions as the intentions of the addressor, the effect of the addressor's speech or writing on the addressee, the implicatures that follows them from expressing something in a particular way, and the knowledge and beliefs about the communication environment within which the addressor and the addressee operate as participant in a particular speech event (p.11).

In general language use, the speakers are faced with the problem of design—how to construct their utterances as to facilitate the hearer's recognition of their intentions; while the hearers' task or problem has also been on how to determine the speakers' intentions from the utterances they hear. The nature of language provided a net which enables advertisers to organize meaning in a way that is not easier to be understood by the audience. This gives rise to meaning distortion in advertisement. Meaning in advertisement seems unintuitive as opposed to the Linear-Sequential analytic mode imposed by everyday language. Without a proper knowledge of the style of language of advertisement; it will be difficult to lift a particular piece of information out of its setting. Moreover, we have carefully observed that most meaning in advertisement have been naturally achieved through a process of typicality – the audience ability to discern what is variant in their experience across content. This ability allows the audience to understand particular

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events as examples of more general meaning. Thus the process of typicality seems to mold the audience actions and also seem to posit an influence on them.

Every utterance made by a speaker performs a particular action. In speaking, speakers purposefully do things with words. These are actions such as informing, commanding, warning, preaching, congratulating, swearing, and betting etc. which are performed using words. (see Austin 1962 and Searle 1979). Every action performed by a speaker carries a force which is known as illocutionary force. A speech performs three kinds of acts – Locutionary, Illocutionary and Perlocutionary. A speech act can be both direct and indirect. It has been observed that a speaker can say something, mean something and in addition mean something else. This is the position of Searle's Indirect Speech Act Theory. On this backdrop,

Emezue (2011) alluding to Schiffirin (1994) admits that: An indirect speech act is defined as an utterance in which an illocutionary act is the performance of another. What happens is that the hearers are able to interpret indirect speech act by relying upon their knowledge of the speech act, along with general the principles of co-operative conversation mutually share factual information and a general ability to draw inference (p.110)

The advertisement slogans as a form of utterances are loaded with action words (illocutionary forces) that help them achieve their perlocutionary effects. Meanwhile, Searle (1969) argues that there are five major types of action that human beings can perform by the use of the language, which include representative, declarative, directive, expressive and commissive. These actions word of the slogans is so designed to get the audience do thing on the basis of their understanding what they mean.

Most perlocutionary effects are intended and others are not. It is worthy to note that perlocutionary is not part of understanding itself. What is needed for understanding is merely recognizing the meaning. However, the act of one getting one's audience to recognition itself is termed illocutionary effect. Illocutionary acts are of various types, which include telling, asserting, requesting, questioning, ordering, apologizing and promising etc. According to Searle's argument these acts differ in what he called their illocutionary point- their publicity intended different illocutionary points. Searle in his argument also divided the illocutionary act into five-assertive, directive, commissive, expressive and declarations.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study include the following:

- 1) To find out if there are speech acts inherent in the advertisement slogans and the effects they have on the consumers.
- 2) To see If the consumers' ability to interpret the speech acts in the slogans influence their actions
- 3) To analyze the slogans to account for the particular speech act in the them.

- 4) To find out whether the mutual understanding that exist between consumers and the copywriters play vital roles in interpreting the slogans
- 5) To investigate if meaning is communicated more effectively literarily or otherwise.
- 6) To know how the advertisers get their audience or consumers reorganize the illocutionary they are performing.

Research Questions

- 1) Do speech Acts as found in advertisement slogans affect the consumers' behaviour?
- 2) Can the consumers' inability to interpret or understand the speech acts in slogans affect their actions or responses?
- 3) Can there be different speech acts in the advertisement slogans?
- 4) Can the background knowledge or mutual understanding between consumers and the copywriters play vital roles in understanding the slogans?
- 5) Is meaning communicated more effectively literarily or otherwise?
- 6) How do advertisers get their consumers or audience reorganize the illocutionary they perform.

Literature Review

Desri and Adeloma (2020) in the study of the Analysis of the Speech Acts on Headlines of Medan Newspaper determined the speech acts types and the pragmatic functions as found in the median Newspaper Headlines. Rex and Medoza (2004) did an analysis of the utterances in the game of thrones. The research identified the speech acts embedded in the utterances of the characters of the Game of Thrones. Fatima and Alhad (2022) in their in-depth analysis of the representation of speech acts and language functions in Libyan Public High School English textbooks and workbooks amid at examining the use of speech acts and the language functions in the 21st century English for Libyan secondary 1,2,3, and 3 course books and five workbooks. Other scholars like Nor Sgamimi and Nor Hairunaisa (2022) also investigated speech acts in COVID-19 related Facebook comments. Their work aimed at identifying also the various speech acts used to communicate users' thoughts in COVID-19 related Facebook comments.

These scholars dealt mainly on investigating the speech involved in these subject areas but to the present researcher limited knowledge none has investigated the speech acts in advertisement slogans and this forms the essence of the research exercise. The research in investigating the speech acts in advertisement slogans observed that these slogans contain pragmatic potency which are strategically and intentionally employed by the copywriters as to distort or bridge communication in order to deceive consumers who may not be able to interpret and understand the speech acts in the slogans

Research Methodology

The analysis adopted in this research is qualitative content analysis with the descriptive survey method. The reason for the use of the survey method is that the population of study is infinite and to enable the researcher to infer and generalize the findings of the study. The population of the study is heterogeneous and proportionate random sampling was used in selection our sample size. The population constitutes of Newspapers, Magazine's billboard sand Graffiti The main source of Data collection which is the primary source was the in-depth interview method. This was done as the interviewers share their experiences on how they interpret and understand the advertisement slogans. The population was stratified into strata which enabled the researcher randomized and ensured that all groups were represented which enable the researcher interpret and analyze the data effectively. The analysis was based on Bach and Harnish (1979) theory- Mutual contextual Beliefs.

Theoretical Framework

Mutual Contextual Beliefs

From the view of Kent Bent and Robert Harnish (1979), every speech exhibits an act known as speech act which is intention – inference based. To them, every speaker performs an illocutionary act for effective communication; the listener has to understand the speaker's act via mutual contextual beliefs (MCBs). For them every interaction or conversation must involve an inferential process. The inferential process is inevitable in any communication event; hence their term "speech act schemata (SAS)". The theory – Mutual Contextual Beliefs was formulated by Kent Bach and Robert Harnish (1979). In this theory they posit that mutual contextual beliefs between the speaker and the hearer propels an inferential process because whatever inference made or should be made by a hearer does not necessarily depend on what the speaker says but on the contextual knowledge shared commonly between them,

According to Acheoah and Olaleye (2017, p.23)

Bach and Harnish theory help to explain the vital components of natural communication: what words mean, what the speaker literally says when using them, and what the speaker means and intend to communicate by using those words, which often goes considerably beyond what is said. What someone says is determined by the conversational meaning of the sentence uttered and contextual processes of disambiguation and inference making. What the speaker implicates can be calculated from the rational principles of maxims governing conversation. What is said is connected to the literal content of the utterance, whereas what is implicated (the implicature) is connected to the non-literal component (what is intentionally communicated without being covertly said by the speaker).

Apart from linguistic knowledge, contextual information plays a role in determining what is said. Despite the

potency of language to mean beyond the sentence, messages reflect physical form in which the mastery of linguistic convention is instrumental to pragmatic or extra-linguistic communication. The most useful notion of saying is that what is said should be closely related to the conventional meaning of the uttered sentence.

Bach and Harnish's attempt to integrate Grice, Searle and others theory gave birth to their unified theory known as mutual contextual beliefs. For them, as documented in Stanford Encyclopedia of philosophy (2006), in determining an illocutionary act amounts to determining

- 1.The operative meaning of the sentence uttered
- 2.The referents for the referring expressions
- 3.The properties and relations being ascribed
- 4.The times specified

Having known these, the hearer understands what a speaker has said at the locutionary level and makes references based on the linguistic meaning plus the contextual information concerning the speaker's intention.

Mutual contextual beliefs emphasize the need for the hearer to understand the speaker's intention which is known as "Reflexive – intension" (R-intentions). (Acheoah and Olaleye 2017, p.27).

To Bach and Harnish, to communicate is to express an attitude such as belief, an intention, a desire etc. Their theory differentiated two categories of illocutionary act: communicative and non-communicative. Their illocutionary act is of four major categories – Constatives, Directives, commissive and acknowledgements. These then four major categories correspond closely to Austin's Expositives, Exercertives, Commisives and Behabitives and also to Searle's Representatives (Assertives), Directives, commissives and Expressives. But only differ in their characterizations. Non-communicative illocutionary acts are of two categories – Effectives and Vindictive, they are also roughly related to Searle's declarations. Acheoah and Olaleye summarized the detailed account of the categories established by Bach and Harnish's speech act that express the speaker's belief and intention or the implication that the hearer forms a like belief. Bach and Harnish's non-communicative (or conventional) illocutionary speech acts are divided into two Effectives and verdictives.

This theory is considered relevant to this research work because it can be used to explain that the mutual understanding existing between the consumers and the advertisement copywriters and also a good knowledge of both the literary and pragmatic potency of the advertisement slogans enhance effective communication.

Data presentation and Analyses

The advertisement slogans selected and numbered below are the Date for the analyses. They are analyzed here to account for illocutionary acts (speech acts), their types and effects.

Illocutionary act	illocutionary Effect
Assertive	To get the addressee attend to a belief
Directives	To get addressee to do something
Commissives	To commit the hearer to do something
Expressive	To express a feeling towards the addressee
Effective	To change an institutional state of affairs
Verdictives	To determine what is the case of any institution

The illocutionary is ad-infinitum. However, in advertising it could be asked how do advertisers get their audience to recognize the illocutionary act they are performing? The advertisers and the scriptwriters have achieved these by their choice of sentence modality. The slogans below will help the researcher account how the various modalities in English language helped scriptwriter achieve the acts effectively their advertisement slogans.

Consider the slogans:

1 “Everything is taste”

- Magic

2“Life tastes good”

-Coca-cola

These sentences are all declarative. The illocutionary acts are assertive. The sentence modality loaded with exaggerations were so used to convince the consumers to believe that the tastes of those products are something they cannot do without. The perlocutionary effect boosts the consumers’ beliefs.

WH/interrogative.

4“What would fancy foods be without fancy wine to drink with them?”

5“What can I ever do without the sun”

-Sun Newspaper

The speech acts seen in these slogans (1 and 2) are request. More so the slogan indirectly performed another act known as directive. In doing this they direct the interest of the consumers to be pinned down on the the unavoidable qualities of the products

6“vanilla cream is one of the fastest growing flavour nationwide and Hank’s is one of the best ”

7 Imperative: “UNTLL wax is here to stay”

GLO with us.

The advertisers can as well use illocutionary force identifying device in addition to sentence modalities to specify the illocutionary act they are performing. For instance, they at time mark their utterance as a request with please, why not? Etc, many advertisement slogans lack enough illocutionary force-identifying device to pin down the illocutionary act the advertiser is performing. For example;

8 “Sow the seed of security

...Cultivate the saving

habit with mercantile

Bank, the bank than never fails”

-Mercantile Bank

9 “Enjoy delicious Nasco biscuits anytime, anywhere You’ll love their distinctive flavor and oven freshness. Nasco biscuits are the best in the world, specially prepared with high value nutritional ingredients-eggs, milk, butter, glucose flour and sugar, Nasco biscuit are packed under extremely hygienic conditions”.

-Nasco Biscuit

10 “If you have got a reason, this is the season”

The above slogans accomplished the perlocutionary, act which is instructional or advisory in nature getting the audience to from or attend to a belief –accepting these services, the nutritional value they render to the customers as superb. In other words, the speech act involved here is said to be commissive. Some slogans also accomplish the function of questions, in the illocutionary mode, and in so doing fulfilling the speech act of request as it commits them to curiosity. Examples are seen in slogans (11--13):

11“How far can you go for the ultimate satisfaction?”

-Gulder

12 “What can I ever do

Without the sun?

What can I ever do

Without the sun?

The sun, the sun, the sun

The sun Newspaper

13 “Tasty? pick a choice”

-Limca

Others also fulfilled the illocutionary roles of request, command, informing and so on which

if understood by the consumers effective communication can be automatically achieved.

Example:

14“Everything you want to know about information technology in digestible bytes, when you can get digital heart burn, infotech today can help you avoid that by keeping you effectively informed on happening in infotech world. Everything comes in digestible portions with enough to fill 48 pages with current and delicious information on computers, the internet, astronomy the environment telecommunication discovering the stock market etc.

Grab your copy.

The illocutionary act involved here is also assertive. The scriptwriter tries to get the customers informed or attend to a belief which he is committed to. Another example is seen in NAL Marchant Bank advertising the premium investment certificate (PIC).

15To be treated like a millionaire PIC like a “Millionaire”

These slogans (12-15) also fulfilled the illocutionary act of request and command and also informative. The modality of sentence employed in 13 is imperative. The subject of the sentence was deleted or implied. The speech act achieved here is instructive. The hearer is instructed or commanded to do something. Meanwhile the speech act achieved here is commissive.

16“Express yourself now move up to Hi-malt”

17“Have a multina today, so lively, so refreshing”

18 “Get it right... get sharp”

19 “You have arrived at the prime of life. You have seen the world, tasted of Its pleasure now tastes this.”

The speech act involve in the above slogans (16-19) are all instructional/commissive the slogans are compelling the consumers to go for those products.

Locutionary acts are utterance used to convey meaning at the literary level. That is to say that

the listener understands the language just as it is said without anchoring further on any extra linguistic attachment. For instance, there is no inclusion of figurative language. The statement is usually explicit and vivid. According to Ndimele, (2000, p.111) “Locutionary act is an act of producing grammatical and meaningful utterances recognizable from the point of view of the hearer” Example of this speech act is shown in the modern advertisement slogans (20-22) below:

20 “From generation to generation peak has always been there, giving you full nourishment and satisfaction, peak will always be there that’s peak, peak milk at its peak always be there for you, that’s peak peak milk at its peak, always be there for you that’s peak, that’s peak.

- peak milk

21“Every branch is your branch”

- Meridien Equity Bank

22“Another traditional flavor enjoyed nationwide wishmiak is a style of dark cherry soda which is rich, creamy and full-bodied”

-Wishiniak Black Cherry.

The above slogans do not feature figurative language and all meaning is simply arrived at the ordinary grammatical level. And as such makes interpretation easy and communication more effective.

Findings and recommendations

Slogans are embodiment of speech acts that are used to control the actions and responses of the consumers. These speech acts are used to persuade and convince the consumers. The consumers’ inability to interpret the slogans has often times mislead them. It is also worthy for the consumer to note that one slogan can share more than one speech act. Most importantly, the mutual understanding and the background knowledge shared between the interlocutors helps so much in understanding the speech acts in the slogans. Above all, meaning is effectively communicated

literarily than pragmatically. However, the copywriter intentionally manipulates the language pragmatically in such a way that the hearers (consumers) are expected to decipher the message as employed in those slogans. Other researchers who may be interested in this area are encouraged to investigate the pragmatic elements such as inference, reference, implicature, presupposition and maxims in the slogans of the advertisers that make their language of the advertisers unique and effective.

Conclusion

In this paper we concluded that advertisement copywriters exploit the various speech acts available in the language through the various sentence modalities to render their language effective and unique though not easily interpreted by the consumers. The choice of language in advertising goes beyond the literal level of language use. Moreover, the participants and the context play vital roles in the choice of language use in advertisement. It was noted that meaning is easily communicated in advertisement literarily than otherwise. However, pragmatically, certain messages are better communicated through a proper understanding of the speech acts performed by the utterances (slogans). On this backdrop we concluded that language users should be cooperative enough to communicate and understand one another.

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