

**A SPEECH ACT ANALYSIS OF SELECTED ENGLISH-BASED
CONSUMER GOODS ADVERTISEMENT MESSAGES IN THE
ELECTRONIC MEDIA IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

In the awake of the revolutionary shift in interest by linguists, from language form to language functions, several attempts have been made by scholars to investigate what people are doing whenever they use language, and the basis upon which the meaning of an utterance can transcend the conventional meaning of the words the speaker uses in a given conventional message. The current study is one of such attempts, and seeks essentially to investigate the act contained in the selected consumer goods English-based advertisements in the electronic media using J.R. Searle's model of Speech Act Theory. The paper analyses six (6) adverts selected from radio and television in Ekiti State. The goal of such analysis is to find out the acts contained in such adverts with the conditions necessary for the successful performance of such acts. The findings revealed that assertive is predominantly used in consumer goods advertisements in electronic media. It also discovered that the hearer or the viewer needs to bring his experience in the world into use before fully internalizing the content of such adverts.

Keywords: Speech Acts, Advertisement, Electronic Media

Introduction

Ever since the post humorous publication of Austin's post ground breaking work "How to Do Things with Words" in 1962, the attention of linguists have shifted drastically from language form to language functions. Thus, unlike earlier linguists such as Halliday (1975), Palmer (1952), Quirk (1962) and Chomsky (1965) whose aim in language study was basically dissecting the system and conventions embedded in human language,

modern linguists are increasingly becoming pre-occupied with what users of language, do when they use language and the conditions necessary for valid and authentic interpretation of their utterances.

Although this new functional approach to language studies has been variously used by scholars in such areas as classroom conversation, commercial advertisement, radio interview, among others, little or nothing exists to this researcher's knowledge on how consumer goods advertisers manipulate language in advertising their products via electronic media.

The electronic media, since their inception in Nigeria, have played a significant role not only in the dissemination of information but also as veritable means through which adverts of products, services as well as propaganda of government policies are relayed. Despite the fact that the development of electronic transmission of advertisement message is sound to the invention of printing in the history of advertising, it has great advantage of making reading ability unnecessary for a great number of uneducated Nigerians.

Some of the works that have been done on the language of advertising include that of Leech (1966) and Adegbija (1982). Adegbija in his work, "A Speech Act Analysis of Consumer Goods Advertisements" applies speech act theory to advertisement message in the electronic media. This can be achieved by relating the form of the utterance to the functions they are expected to perform.

In this study, our aim is to apply J.R. Searle's model of Speech Act Theory to selected advertisement messages in the electronic media. The paper will therefore serve as complement to the work done by Adegbija. This study shall be undertaken with a view to describing the illocutionary force of each of the messages presented for analysis. Contributing to the field of study, Ogunrinde (2012) and (2016) worked on "A Stylistic Analysis of Consumer Goods Advertisements in selected Newspapers". His works were linguistics in nature. His main focus was the graphological and syntactic analysis. A Pragma-Stylistic analysis of selected English-Based Pentecostal Gospel Print advertisement in Ekiti State.

Statement of the Problem

It is a known fact that an advertisement message creates in the consumer the desire for a particular product or service. By providing vital information about a product or service, an advert enables the consumer to

make informed choice. There are, however, adverts which employ, styles which are at best metaphoric and at most meaningless to the uninitiated. For example, the advert of one mobile telecommunication company in Nigeria says.

BIZLINK

MTN... *Your passport to reach the world.*

MTN... *Welcome to the new world*

This kind of advert could create confusion for the hearer or viewer because it contains additional conveyed meaning. The hearer or viewer needs to understand the fact that the word “passport” in this context does not necessarily mean an official document you may have to show when you enter or leave a country. In contrast, the word has got more meaning than what is exhibited in the linguistic context of the entire message.

The implication of the example above is that very many Nigerians are using their hard-earned money to buy what may turn out undesirable for them. This is due to their inability to comprehend the message contained in the adverts related to the products bought. It is for this reason that we shall carry out in this paper a speech act analysis of selected advertisement messages in the electronic media.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this paper is to carry out a speech act analysis of selected advertisement messages in the electronic media in Ekiti State. However, the analysis shall be based on J.R Searle’s model of Speech Act Theory. Specifically, the paper serves to:

- i. Identity the predominant speech act used in each message.
- ii. Explain how each advert constitutes a speech act on its own.
- iii. Consider what constitutes the illocutionary force of each message.

Scope of Work

This paper will carry out a speech act analysis of selected advertisement messages in the electronic media in Ekiti State. In terms of scope, it will deal with some selected adverts in the electronic media i.e. television and radio. All other ways of advertising like the newspaper, billboards, catalogues, and the like, are not examined. However, only six advertisement messages shall be examined in this paper. This is to permit a detailed study on the selected few. The messages were selected from the four electronic media in Ekiti State. They are: Ekiti Television (EKTV),

Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) EKITL, PROGRESS FM AND Broadcasting Service of Ekiti State (BSES).

Background to the Study

Advertising in Nigeria has undergone significant improvement since the attainment of political independence. This is mostly in line with massive growth and development in the social-economic system, but has not only become an integral part of our social and economic system, but has grown in such a way that the society as a whole feels the impact.

The language of advertising is indubitably different from everyday language. Everyone living and working in Nigeria today is under the influence of advertising. Every day of our lives we see and hear many adverts, even if we do not listen to the radio or watch television, we still find it impossible to avoid some forms of advertisement.

There are various ways through which adverts could be carried out. Some of these include the use of publications of all kinds on the television, radio and almost an endless list of miscellaneous signs and displays, posters, mailings, package enclosure, catalogues, films, billboards, newspapers and so no.

Taking a cursory look at the above, we realize that adverts need not have the selling of a product as its primary objective. There are instances when it serves as promotion of goods and services like those of the banks, insurances and at times, for the promotion of government policies.

However, despite the conspicuous nature of adverts, it has not been given the necessary attention it deserves by linguists. This study in its own little way will contribute its quota to whatever has been achieved.

Methodology

In the study, all advertisement messages on both radio and television in Ekiti State advertised between May 2014 -July 2014 represent the target population. However, because it is not possible to carry out a study of all messages due to a number of constraints, there is a need to delimit the population and focus on a few of them. The four government owned electronic media in Ekiti State radio are: Progress FM, EKTU, NTA, BSES. Progress FM and EKTU were selected to represent Federal and State respectively. The total adverts gathered were twelve but because of time and space only 50% would be used. Three consumer goods adverts were cast in the period of study by each station.

The researcher has decided to study only six advertisement messages in this paper. The researcher employed two different types of sampling techniques in selecting the data for study. The techniques employed were stratified sampling and random sampling.

The stratify sampling was used to further stratify the advertisement into different characteristics. This was done by grouping the adverts into groups. The random sampling was then used by writing the name of each other advertiser on sheets of paper which were then folded into pieces. Anyone picked at this stage represented the data presented.

Speech Act Theory

Speech Act Theory was developed in the 1960s. It has its proponents in scholars like Austin, Searle and a host of others. The theory is one of those early frameworks used to describe language used in the context.

As it is, each sentence taken as a whole is designed to serve a specific function See Austin(1962), Searle (1969), Clark and Clark(1972), Osisanwo (2003), Dada(2004). In other words, every time a speaker utters a sentence, there is an attempt to accomplish something with the words. Thus Clark and Clark (1972) commenting on the function of utterances say "It may be meant to inform listeners, warn them, order them to do something, question them about a fact or thank them for a gift or act of kindness." The implication of the above is that speakers expect listeners to recognize function of the sentences as they speak and to act so accordingly (Ogunsiji 2009:209). Whenever they ask question for example, they expect their listeners to realize that it is a request for information. If the listener fails to appreciate this intention, they are judged as having misunderstood, even though they may have taken in everything else about the utterance.

There are a number of distinctions in the speech act theory. One of which is dichotomy between 'performatives' and 'constatives'. Perfomative utterances are used to perform actions and they cannot be subjected to a truth value test. Kempson (1977:51) citing Autin (1962:70) says that it is these types of utterances that Austin says it makes no sense to talk of their being true or false because such utterances are not descriptions but actions. Utterance like "I hereby sentence you to five years in jail" and "I pronounce you as husband and wife" are performatives in Austinian sense.

A constative utterance, on the other hand, States a fact, reports or describes something (Ogunsiji 2002:209). A constative utterance can be

subjected to a truth value test. In other words, the truth or falsehood of a constative utterance can be verified. Hence, utterance like "I am happy," "Oil floats on water" and "She is beautiful" are constative utterances.

Engaging in a speech act means performing three complementary acts. These are locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act. Thus, the locutionary act is the act of producing a meaningful utterance of a certain grammatical order, the illocutionary act is that which we perform in uttering certain words. This can be regarded as the force with which an utterance is employed. The perlocutionary act is the consequent effect on the hearer which the speaker intends should follow from his or her utterance.

Every illocutionary act can be either "happy" or "unhappy", "felicitous" or "unfelicitous". This means in order to be "happily" or "felicitously" performed, the illocutionary act must be uttered under the necessarily appropriate conditions. These conditions, known as the appropriacy condition or the felicity condition, are the propositional content rule, the preparatory rule, the sincerity rule and the essential rule.

Austin (1962) classified speech acts into five categories. The five classes are: *verditives*, *exercitives*, *commissives*, *behabitives*, and *expositives*. Searl (1969) criticizing Austin's classification on the basis of overlapping came up with his five categories of *assertives*, *directives*, *commissives*, *expressives* and *declaratives*.

The Language of Advertisement

There appears to have been a timeless consensus among linguists that language exists primarily for the purpose of communication. This communication essence of language is reflected in virtually every department of human activity, and remains one of the most cohesive pillars of the human society. In each of its sphere of communicative influence, language wields a powerful influence over people, especially in relationship to the decisions they make *vis-à-vis* the choices they have. One area in which the fore-going has had an unqualified application is in the use of language within the field of advertisement. This being so, however, a sufficient grasp of the dynamics of the language of advertisement is not unconnected with the field of advertisement itself, since it is within the domain of the latter that the former derives its distinctiveness, especially in contrast to the registers of other fields, such as politics and medicine for instance. Consequently, an attempt is first

made here to examine the views of few scholars, on advertisements generally.

Advertisement is a type of communication and therefore language use within its domain has generated considerable intellectual attention among linguists. For instance, Leech (1996) attempts a comprehensive study of the language of advertisement as it relates to such aspects of linguistics such as grammar, vocabulary, rhetoric, discourse and rhyme, with particular focus on how these areas of language are manipulated in advertisement on television. Leech (xx) also demonstrates how the use of words, phrases and clauses constitute a unique characteristic of advertising language. In their study of the language of advertising in the commercial press, Vestergaard and Schroder (1985) analyse how the expressive, informational, contextual and directive functions of language are manipulated in advertisements to encourage consumers to patronize a particular product. In Jefkin's (1985) view, the language of advertisement is characterized by a number of preferred linguistic techniques and patterns, some of which include simple, personal and colloquial style with a familiar vocabulary having such phonological devices as rhyme and alliteration to sustain consumers' attention, and a generous use of superlatives and hyperbole in characterizing products with often indirect reference to rival products.

Theoretical Framework

It is implied in the title of this paper that the Speech Act Theory will be used in this study. However, the tool we shall employ in the analysis of data is J.R. Searle's model of Speech Act Theory. Based on Austin's Speech Act Theory, Searle developed a schema in line with Austin's speech performative and constative dichotomy. Searle also identified the distinction between the direct and indirect speech act.

Searle posits five illocutionary points which are the main intentions behind an illocutionary act. The five illocutionary points are:

- a. **Assertives:** The speaker in uttering an assertion, conveys his belief that something is true.
- b. **Directive:** By uttering a directive, the speaker attempts to get the listener to do something. Results and questions are two main types of directives.
- c. **Commissives:** By uttering a commissive, the speaker is committing himself to some future course of action.
- d. **Expressives:** If the speaker wishes to express his psychological state about something, he utters an expressive.

- e. **Declarations:** when the speaker utters a declaration, his very words bring about a new state of affairs.

Also, according to wale Osisanwo (2006:58) an illocutionary act can be said to be a non-linguistic act performed through a linguistic or illocutionary act. A hearer listening to an utterance made by a speaker perceives him (the speaker) to be doing certain thing with the utterance(s). The speaker might be “asserting”, “informing”, “predicting”, the “listing of something”, “requesting”, “questioning”, “promising”, “advising someone”, “deducing”, “commending”, “condemning”, etc. Hence in making an utterance, a speaker is seen to have performed an act. This act is an ILLOCUTIONARY ACT. A force normally accompanies the act, ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE. ILLOCUTIONARY Act can be effected through performative sentences, even when they do not contain performative verbs. When somebody says. “The man is very strong now.” This is an implicit performance of stating. Kempson (1775:51) puts the distinction among the three speech act types succinctly thus: *a speaker utters a particular utterance (locutionary act) and with a particular intention (illocutionary act) in order to achieve a certain effect (perlocutionary act) on the hearer.*

Data Presentation and Data Analysis

There are six advertisement messages interpreted in this paper. Their mode of selection has been explained earlier in the study. The adverts analysed are:

1. MTN
2. Sunlight
3. Closeup
4. Golden penny food
5. Vaseline
6. Royco

The interpretation of the above adverts shall be done based on J.R. Searle’s model of Speech Act Theory.

MTN MTN BIZLINK

Utterance: Your passport to reach the world. Welcome into the new world. Your passport to profitable business.

Introduction

The above utterances are contained in the advertisement messages as put up by “MTN Communications Limited. The company is Nigeria’s

foremost and largest mobile operator. At present, MTN covers all states of the federation.

Analysis

This kind of advert could create confusion for the hearer or viewer because of the expended use of metaphor. The hearer or viewer needs to understand the fact that the word "passport" does not necessarily mean an official document that you may have to show when you enter or leave a country. In contrast, the world depicts an avenue through which Nigerians can communicate with people in other climes via mobile telecommunication system. The phrase "new world" does not mean heaven but a new life.

The above message is a constative utterance. In other word, the utterance is the act of stating and, at the same time, describing the effectiveness of the service rendered by MTN. The illocutionary intention of the utterance is to persuade or appeal to Nigerians to patronise the mobile telecommunication company.

Sunlight

Utterance: Buy any of the sunlight products

The more sunlight you buy the more airtime you get
Smell and clear all days.

Introduction:

The above utterance is contained in the advertisement message as put up by Unilever Nigeria Plc. The company is the maker of sunlight detergent.

Analysis

The hearer or viewer of the above utterance begins his interpretation based on the mutual beliefs that exist between him and the speaker. The hearer must be one who recognises the significance of adverts in the society as a means through which information on new products are passed to the consumers, and also as a means through which old consumers, attention is sustained. What this means in essence is that, the hearer or viewer is one who realises the proposition which the speaker has in mind before marking the utterance.

The inherent speech act in the utterance is assertive. The speaker performs the act of stating and describing the effectiveness of the advertised detergent. In the alternative, the act performed will be that of directive and declarative as the speaker of the utterance is informing the hearer on the gains of buying the soap and also requesting the hearer to carry out an

action by uttering a directive, the speaker attempts to get the listener to do something. Therefore, the illocutionary intention will be a request from the speaker to the hearer to carry out an action. The gain of buying this product is also attached to the volume or quantity bought. Many people who do not have money to buy airtime will take advantage of this advert. Introduction of airtime into this kind of advert is to induce the prospective buyers.

Closeup

Utterance: the closer, the better

Introduction

This utterance is contained in the advertisement messages sponsored by Unilever Nigerian Plc. Closeup toothpaste is endorsed by Nigerian Dental Association.

Analysis

The first thing that the hearer or viewer considers in the interpretation of this advert is the fact that the speaker has a proposition in his mind which is arrived at through locutionary and illocutionary acts. He is also aware that the utterance is made so as to create awareness about the advertised product.

This advertisement message is a constative utterance. As it is, the truth or falsehood of the utterance can be verified. The act performed in this utterance is assertive. It is assertive because the speaker performs the act of stating flatly his belief about the propositions.

The illocutionary intention of the utterance is to persuade the hearer or viewer to buy the advertised toothpaste (close up). It can be deduced from the utterance that the new close up active gel gives the consumer the confidence of a dazzling smile and fresher breath. The reason might be that the toothpaste has a unique formula with active clean mouthwash that reaches all over your mouth to help remove germs and plaque, giving you a clean mouth and fresher breath for hours. As a result of this the consumer does not need to exercise any fear of foul breath oozing out of his mouth after the usage.

Golden penny food

Utterance: We have provided quality food for your family.

Golden Penny, the home of good food.

Introduction

The above utterance is contained in the advertisement message as put up by Flour Mills of Nigeria Plc. The corporation was set up by the Federal government but became privatised some years later.

Analysis:

The speaker posits the utterance based on the proposition that he has in mind, as well as the type of relationship that he has with the hearer which is purely transactional in nature. The hearer is also aware of the fact that the advert is relayed to influence and persuade him as an old customer, or even as an intended customer who is not aware of the value of the product.

The above message is a constative utterance. The utterance can be assessed as true or false because it is description. The hearer will need to activate his linguistic knowledge to arrive at the meaning of the most functional words in the message. This knowledge enables him to know what such words as "quality" "home" and "food" mean literally.

The act that is performed in this utterance is assertive. The speaker utters the assertion to convey the strength of his belief in the truth of the proposition. The hearer or viewer also knows that the speaker presupposes his awareness of some food companies in Nigeria that have no quality product like this. For example, there are instances where customers buy some foods product and resulted into misfortune or do not enjoy the value as advertised.

The illocutionary intention of the utterance is to persuade and influence the hearer or viewer to patronise Golden Penny Food. The hearer realizes the fact that the speaker wants him to consider the advantages and the benefits that he can derive from the food.

DATUM 5: Royco

Buy new Royco Maggi Cube

New Royco Cube gives real chicken taste

Introduction:

The utterance above is contained in the advertisement sponsored by Unilever Nigeria Plc. Royco cube is endorsed by Nigeria Food and Nutrition Association (NFNA).

Analysis:

The hearer or viewer, through the mutual he beliefs shares with the speaker, realizes that the primary aim and objective of the speaker is to make him buy his product. The speaker believes that the viewer or hearer is not aware of the instance of the new Royco product. He is willing to inform him so that he can buy and use it.

The act that is performing is directive. By uttering a directive, the speaker attempts to get the hearer or viewer to do something. In other words, the speaker of this utterance is requesting the hearer or viewer to carry out an action. The speaker likens the taste of the Maggi to the real taste of chickens. Every cook likes using chicken to prepare delicious soup because of the delicious taste. The advertiser is now trying to convince cooks that they will derive the real taste of chicken in the new advertised Maggi.

However, the illocutionary force of the advert is to persuade prospective buyers and influence the hearer or viewer to patronize the new Royco Maggi cube. The hearer realizes the speaker wants him to consider the advantages and benefits that he will derive from the product.

DATUM 6: Vaseline

Utterance: Now back, the new Vaseline is bouncing again

Dry skin restored

The restoring power of Vaseline

Introduction

This utterance is contained in the advert message sponsored by Unilever Nigeria Plc.

Analysis

The first thing that the hearer or viewer considers in the interpretation of this advert is the fact that the speaker has a proposition in his mind which is arrived at through the locutionary and illocutionary acts. He is also aware that the utterance is made so as to create awareness in him about the advertised product.

This advertisement message is constative. As it is, the truth or falsehood of the product can be verified. The act performed in the utterance is assertive. It is assertive because the speaker performs the act of stating flatly his belief about the proposition. Another act perform in the utterance is expressive. The speaker is informing the viewer or hearer about the value and power of the new Vaseline.

The illocutionary intention of the utterance is to persuade and convince the viewer or the hearer to buy the advertised cream. It can be deduce that the new Vaseline can restore freshness into any dry skin by removing the various skin problems or diseases.

Findings and Recommendation

The findings of this study revealed that first, assertive is predominantly used in consumer good advertisement in electronic media. This is done to persuade the hearer and the viewer that the product advertised in true. Occasionally, declarative is used to bring a new state of affair so that more action will follow.

It is also observed in the interpretation that the cultural settings are not only taken into consideration when an advert is made, but they also enable the hearer or viewer to give right interpretation to the advertised message. For example, in the advert of "aromatic schnapps", attention is forced on the traditional way of using hot drink to pray.

Another observations made in this paper is that in all the advertisement messages interpreted, it is discovered that the hearer or the viewer needs to bring his experience in the world into use. For example, in the interpretation carried out on "MTN", the hearer or viewer needs his world experience to know that the world "passport" does not necessarily mean an official document that you may have to show when you enter or leave a country. In contrast, the word depicts an avenue through which Nigerians can communicate with people in other climes via the mobile telecommunication system. "New World" does not also mean "new heaven" but new life and new enjoyment.

Concerning the linguistic competence of the hearer or viewer, it is revealed in the interpretations that this is of utmost importance. The reason is that English, being a second language in the county, does not easily lend itself to quick understanding, especially to the uninitiated. The hearer or the viewer needs to be versed in the language to actually comprehend the adverted message.

Finally, the language of advertisement provides good opportunities for research work like this. This explains why a number of researches have been carried out in the area of language of advertisement. It is the opinion of the researcher that whoever will like to work in the area of pragmatics and advertisement should pay special attention to other areas that this research could not cover because of time and space.

Conclusion

The conclusion that can be drawn is that advertisement is aiming at achieving a persuasive goal. There is no doubt that this study has succeeded in revealing the significance of advertisement to every facet of our lives. If advertisement plays such an important role, it is only fair that it should be objectively studied in such a way that all the extra-linguistic and intra-linguistic factors that the hearer needed to be equipped with are pointed out.

From the study, we have noticed how important research is to the testing of the suitability or comprehensibility of a particular advert. In other words, researches on advertising can help in deciding what to say, and through creative research, how to say it. It also revealed, if what is said is actually communicated and understood as planned.

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