

## Levels of meaning: figurative contents of modern advertisement slogans

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Date of Submission: 01-11-2020

Date of Acceptance: 15-11-2020

**ABSTRACT:** Language can be manipulated in diverse ways to achieve a particular purpose. This research investigated the figurative contents of the modern advertisement slogans as used by copywriters. It discovered that figurative elements as used in the slogans facilitate and captivate messages in advertising. In their use of figurative elements meanings were distorted, vague, and at times ambiguous; nevertheless those elements served as advertising strategies for marketing products. The ability to interplay suspense and surprise helped in giving their language vitality and credence. This choice of language helped in persuading and convincing the customers. We found a sort of linguistic deviation which is associated with the language of advertisers and that the copywriters also use language in unorthodox idiosyncratic manner. We adopted the qualitative research method and used the descriptive survey method since the population of study was infinite; this method enabled the researcher infer and generalized the findings of the study. The population of study was heterogeneous and the proportionate random sampling was used in selecting the sample size. The population consisted of billboards, handbills, Newspapers, Magazines and electronic adverts. Our data were collected through hand interview. The responses enabled the researcher conduct a constructive, valid interpretation and analyses of the data generated from the study. And our data analyses were premised on observation.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Meaning is not stable; it depends upon the speakers, hearers and contexts. Context as we were meant to understand by some philosophers is a matter of semantics. Semanticists have tried immensely to investigate the meaning of meaning. This has been done from different perspectives. However, there seems not to be any best approach to the study of meaning, but we can opine that meaning refers to ideas, intentions and

purposes associated with any lexical item or linguistic text. A word has its denotative and connotative meaning. A denotative meaning of a word is its literary or dictionary meaning while connotative meaning is one usually portrayed emotionally. Words do not mean in isolation though English language has what we call the content words, which we described as having meaning of their own. In absolute truth, words rarely mean in isolation. Polysemic words have supported this claim. Examples abound – bear, free, bank, head, foot, feet etc. there are meanings that have nothing to do with contexts. Such meanings are purely linguistic or literary meaning. We talk of contextual meaning when we consider the meaning a lexical items and expressions have in relationship with other lexical items/expressions in a particular context or environment of use. Moreover, in pragmatic study we found out that the interpretation of utterance is more correctly achieved by taking into consideration the circumstances that inform its making a consideration of its literal structures.

As stated by Ogbulogo (2005, p.73) “in semantics, figures of speech operates from the point of extension of meaning resulting in polysemy or transfer of sense. Thus, the figurative language is often perceived to be metaphoric. In a more general sense, figurative language covers different devices, which are semantically or grammatically marked or unusual”. Furthermore, Platt (1977) insisted that “figures of speech depart from the linguistic forms of everyday language in some ways, perhaps semantically or syntactically: The deviation may not always be in form of rule breaking. It can result to over-regularity in structure as in repetition”(7). In addition to these, Leech (2008) observes that “figurative meaning; a literary metaphor is a semantic oddity which demands that a linguistic form should be given something other than its normal (literal) interpretation”.(30) Figurative meaning has been associated with art of advertising as to structure

and elaborates an argument for the sheer purpose of motivating the emotions of the audience. The inability of the consumers to understand and effectively interpret the manner with copywriters manipulate language has become a major challenge among consumers. Hence the copywriters derive their creativity from the following strategies: Grammatical construction, Sound effect, Similarity, Contrast, Association, Indirectness, and Analogy

There are accepted rules in the construction of the sentence of any language. This is otherwise known as the grammatical rules. In advertisement, some of these rules are broken or in a more subtle sense applied in special ways so as to achieve particular purposes. Such are the figures of grammatical effect, figures of sound effect, figures of indirectness, figures of imagination, figures of association, figures of similarity, figures of contrast (figures of analogy) which are analyzed below.

## II. FIGURES OF GRAMMATICAL EFFECT

### Rhetorical question

Naturally, questions entails answers but rhetorical questions are asked show the emotional disposition of the speaker or writer, these questions expects no answers since they really assert something already known to the addresser, and cannot be denied.

There are numerous rhetorical questions in most modern adverts. Examples:

1) "How far will you go with ultimate satisfaction"

-Gulder

2) "Tasty? Pick one"

-Limca

3) Have you got the calling?...own a Church's Church England shoes

### Climax

Climax is the act of presenting ideas or information in ascending order of importance or placing the least importance before the highest. This is used to keep the audience in suspense until the very last word. The intention is to engage the customers' interest as to persuade them. Climax may be objective or subjective. Examples are:

4) You have arrived at the prime of life! You have seen the world, tasted its life's pleasures.

Now taste this: Old mac Deluxe whisky was created by NDL to fit your image

- Old mac Deluxe Whisky

5) We've strengthened our BACKBONES to give you support.

-COMPAQ computers

### Anti-climax

Anti-climax is the opposite of climax, but while climax achieves suspense, anti-climax achieves special focus as it makes the audience abreast with the information immediately. While in literary writing it is usually used to achieve humorous and satiric effect but it is used by the copywriters to immediately surmount interest in the customers.

Example:

6) Hanks premium Root Beer is a rich creamy, incredible flavorful brew, Reminiscent of the old style root beers of yesteryears.

- Hanks Root Beer

7) The Bournvita way is the best way to say enjoy your day. Bournvita is the favorite beverage with Nigerian families. The first choice of mothers who value the rich nourishing and energy giving foods – egg-malt, milk, milk, glucose, sugar and cocoa that go into it

- Bournvita

## FIGURES OF SOUND EFFECTS

As observes Ogbulogu (2005,p.76) "The basic level of language organization is the sound system. Indeed, words are created from sound (vowels and consonants), sentences are created from words. The sounds of different words can be used to achieve particular effects in the literary work".

## III. TYPES OF FIGURES OF SOUND IN THE MODERN ADVERTISEMENT SLOGAN

### Alliterations

This is achieved through the repetition of similar consonant sounds in a line. The copywriters deliberately highlight initial consonant sounds in the slogans to achieve emphases for retentiveness in the consumers. Examples as seen in adverts are:

8) People, Power, Possibilities

- Global Comm

9) Pure, mild and gentle, gentle, gentle

- Pears Baby Lotion

10) Good health, Good life

- Emzor

11) Nothing compares with you except sunshine Lipton Yellow, yellow, yellow, yellow

- Lipton

12) What would fancy food be without fancy wine to drink with them?

- Placido wine

### Exclamations (Imperative)

- 13) Open your eye, drink pasteurized!  
 - Le nature's fruit drinks
- 14) Decisive moments when so much depends on energy fast!  
 - Locozade Boost
- 15) You have arrived at the prime of life!  
 -Old MacDeluxe Whisky
- 16) Rich, full bodied and flavorful you won't believe it's a diet soda!  
 - Hank's Diet Root Beer
- 17) Have you heard...about the new maggi chicken flavor, the new secret of good cooking...!  
 - Maggi Chicken

The exclamatory posture of these sentences gave credence to the wonderful qualities, which these products carry. This style of writing has severally been used to enhance meaning in advertisement. These styles fall under grammatical construction, which express the sense of the aesthetic discovery the target audience made by gaining access to information relating the products having accessed the emotional disposition of the copywriter.

### Inversion

Inversion is a sort of change in the natural order of words to achieve emphasis. This is very rampant in adverts. Examples are:

- 18) For that close up appeal  
 - Close-up
- 19) Active and successful men and women are savoring the real coffee taste. The distinct natural quality blend...The unique satisfying richness of Nescafe, Welcome to the Nescafe world  
 - Nescafe

The copywriter has invented these constructions so as to achieve emphasis, which helps to facilitate meaning in the slogan. For Crystal (1997,p.11), "there are many situations where the only apparent reason for a certain use of language is the effect the sound has on the users or listeners. In advertising, sound effects will not only include prosodic features of stress, intonation, tempo spasmodic effects such as laughter, breathings and whispering but also natural sounds such as recorded sound of rain and wind or artificial sounds produced with the computer, even music. In most cases, sound effects act as a stimulus and it is meant to arouse a response in the listener. For instance, a hair dye for old people could be introduced with a song from the 1960s. This song will create in the elderly listener the longing for youthfulness".

Goddard (1998,p.42) opines "the features such as stress, intonation and tempo add to the overall melody and rhythm of the advertisement language:hence adding beauty to the language".

### Onomatopoeia

This is an act employed by creative writers whereby meaning is achieved through the sounds suggested by the word. Examples are:

- 20)GLO with pride  
 - Global Comm
- 21) Da Bombs  
 - GLO
- 22) A refreshing splash of lemons, lime and orange enhanced with gurarama berry and Ginseng. The only flavor in the Hank's line to contain caffeine  
 - Citrus variant

### 5. Pun (Paronomasia)

This is a play on the homonymic or polysemic words. It is the use of these types of words to create a striking effect or humorous effect. It is a play on the meaning of words that have similar sound or spelling but different meanings. Pun is very effective in adverts It is focus and attention capturing. Wales (1989,p.98) Points out a special kind of pun known as antanalasis – the repetition of the same word or form of sound but in different sense in 'co-text' examples:

- 23) "In the spirit of the season, with the spirit of the season".  
 -Chelsea Dry Gin
- In this slogan, the word 'spirit' was used twice but with different non-related meaning
- 24)"Elegant cars, powerful cars, rugged cars, stylistic cars"  
 - From Peugeot company
- 25) "Every branch is your branch"  
 -

### Meridian Equity Bank

- 26) "Let's get happy, c'mon let's start a brand, let's hand out in the garage, let's do something new. Let's show them we are different. That we are young let's live life to the full, because we are Legends".  
 - Legend Extra stout
- 27) "Chewy chocolate chunks of fun"  
 - Cadbury's chocomilo
- 28) "Peak at its peak"  
 - Peak Milk
- 29)"Rich LAGER within REACH...the clear leader"  
 -33 Beer

We have noted that alliteration is the repetition of the initial consonant in two or more

words in close succession. This figure of sound effect is associated with literary language, tongue twisters, idioms and advertising language. Its effect in adverts remains the ability to make the message easily assimilated. Consider the last two adverts. In the Chocomilo advert, the voiceless palatal alveolar affricate /tʃ/ was repeated three times at the beginning of three successive words to give rhythm to the slogan. The Peak milk, the /P/ sound, the voiceless bilabial plosive /P/ was used two times at the onset and at the beginning of the last word to give rhythm to the slogan so as to make it attractive, captivating, flowing, easy and quick to remember.

## 2. Assonance and consonance

Those are also kinds of repetition of consonant or vowels sounds in a sentence. Assonance is a kind of phonological reoccurrence in juxtaposition. Its rhyme depends on the reoccurrence of similar vowel sounds while consonance is the repetition of the consonant sound in the initial, middle or last position of the word in a sentence. Example

30) "What can I ever do without the sun  
What can I ever do with but the sun, the sun, the sun, the sun"  
- Sun Newspaper

As observes Judith "These are of great importance to advertisement writing. The communicative power of advertisement is conveyed through the use of sound effect".

## Rhythm

Rhythm is a pattern produced by emphasis and duration of the notes in music. It is also stressed and unstressed syllables in words. However, the modern advertisement slogan, headline, or body has features of rhythm, which makes for smooth flow of the message. This has been achieved in advertisement through some elements of punctuation marks, phrases, and short sentences. In most cases, unique sentences patterns are seen as an attempt of the copywriter to achieve rhythm. Examples:

31) "I love good things of life  
Like cars

Elegant cars, powerful cars, rugged cars, stylish cars – cars with superb engine One car has got all these qualities – the new Peugeot 406, the new car has reinforced suspension system designed with the rhythm of our terrain in mind. The new Peugeot 406 – there's nothing quite like it. The air-conditioning system makes my life easy. For my appointment, I am always right there in style, with

the new Peugeot 406 I've grown several years younger in spirit.  
Peugeot 406...incomparable class".

## IV. FIGURES OF SIMILARITY

In recent times, figures of similarity have been employed so much in advertisement slogans to compare items, ideas and situations that are present or not present. The most prominent is simile and metaphor. According to Adindu and Adindu, (2005,p.271) "Simile relates to an unfamiliar object of concept of a familiar one for purpose of clarification. There is no doubt that things share similar qualities even though they can never be a total likeness between them. In this sense, simile compares what is not clear to the reader or the hearer with what is known to him." It is a kind of imagery. The meaning of the word 'spirit' refers to the characteristic quality of mood of something. In the second sentence, the word 'spirit' refers to a distilled alcoholic drink.

### Simile

32) Your write choice  
- Bic

The word 'write' is a verb, which is punned upon with adjective 'right' because they share the same pronunciation.

33) GLO with us

34) GLO with pride

In this slogan also, the acronym GLO is punned upon with 'glow', which means 'to give out heat or soft light without flames or smoke'

35) "To be treated like a millionaire

Pic like a millionaire"

- NAL Merchant Bank PLC

This slogan is used in advertising the Premium Investment Certificate (Pic) in the subsequent line, the copywriter played on the name of the product. The acronym pic /Pik/ is used as 'pick' /pik/.

"IF YOU HAVE GOT A Reason. This is the Season to celebrate. In the spirit of the Season. With the spirit of season."

-CHELSEA LONDON DRY GIN

### Rhyme

According to Crystal (1994,p.332), this is a correspondence of syllables, especially at the end of the lines of the verses. In other words, it is the repetition of the same pattern at the end of two or more lines in verses. When words rhyme with a single line or verse, it is known as internal rhyme and when there is a repetition of the same initial and final consonants in different accented words, or

of the final consonant(s) only, it is known as Pararhyme

36) If you have got a reason, this is the season  
- Chelsea dry gin

Another attempt for rhyme is seen in Peak advertisement

37) "From generation to generation  
Peak has always been there  
Giving you full nourishment and satisfaction  
Peak is always there

That's peak, peak  
Milk at its peak so full and rich for you  
That's peak, peak  
Milk at its peak

Always been there for you  
That's peak, that's peak"

Another rhyme is seen in Hi-malt advert  
38) For high satisfaction we no get limitation  
Hi hihhi malt

The product compared with something in an imaginative way and henceforth highlights the attributes of the product as the message is relayed effectively. Simile makes use of such word as 'Like or as'

Example:

39) "I love good things of life  
Like cars

The new product 406 – there is nothing quite like it".

There is an obvious direct comparison in the two slogans above. The first one compares cars with the good things of life and the second the new Peugeot stood out as something that cannot be compared with anything.

### Metaphor

As stated in Ogbulogo (2005,p.79) "Just like simile, the metaphor expresses the comparison between entities and events. However, while the comparison in simile is overly stated, in the metaphor, the comparison is implied". There are usually three major parts for both simile and metaphor, the tenor, the vehicle and the ground. Ogbulogo (2005:79) calls the three parts Topic, illustration and the point of comparison. Tenor is that object which is actually under discussion. Vehicle is the thing compared with; the thing that supplies the actual definition of the metaphor while the ground is the point of contact between the objects being compared. Metaphor is associated with a particular rule of transference of meaning. A metaphor is wider in scope because the ground for comparison is not always specifically stated, so several interpretations are possible. It is easier to pin point meaning in "I wondered lonely as a cloud" than "I am a cloud" Leech (2008)

emphasized that "metaphor frequently manifest itself in a highly unpredictable collocation, or sequence of lexical items"(30). For instance, in the advert (40) ISUSU TiGER there is a collocative clash between ISUSU car (inanimate object) and tiger (animate object) .To make sense out of this we will have to map or transfer an attribute from tiger -animate object to inanimate object- ISUSU.

Examples are:

40) ISUSU TiGER

In this slogan, ISUSU pick-up is referred to as tiger. Though there is no use of like or as. Let us illustrate claims with these letters.

X – The tenor – ISUSU

Y – The vehicle – Tiger

Z – The ground – Agility, smartness, fastness (strength of performance which ISUSU and Tiger share in common.

The general formula for simile and metaphor X is like Y in respect of Z. The simplest type of metaphor is based on the clause structure with the verb 'to be' e.g.

41) Life is ...

MTN

42)Taste is everything  
-Maggi

## V. FIGURES OF CONTRAST

These figures of speech are created from ideas of contrast in thought or in structure, Examples:

### Oxymoron

It is when sharply contradictory words are placed side by side in a sentence to achieve an aesthetic, witty or striking effect, which is beyond imagination. It is a Greek word, which means "sharp dull". According to Wales (2001,p.280)"Oxymoron is from Gk 'a sharp-dull' a figure of RHETORIC which juxtaposes apparently contradictory expressions for witty or striking effect". Ideas and expressions that are semantically incompatible are yoked together so that in their combination they have no conceivable literal reference to reality. (see Leech 1981 and Onwukwe 1994). This is used to achieve emphases. Such figures of contrast are frequently employed in modern advertisement slogans.

Examples:

43) "Quiet footprints

Loud impression"

- Eternal Oil and Gas PLC

44) "Panadol...tough

Yet gentle on you".

- Panadol

**Paradox**

As noted Ogbulogo (2005,p.81) “it is a statement that sounds absurd and false at the first thought but which proves to be true on a second and more reflective consideration. Indeed, the truth of a paradox is proved by apparent contradiction”. Let us look at the Rothmans Cigarette advert that reads:

45) “The best tobacco money can buy  
 The federal Ministry of Health warns that tobacco smoking is dangerous to health. Or smokers are liable to die young”

-Rothman Cigarette.

This slogan is highly paradoxical; the copywriter acknowledged the danger in smoking but nevertheless the product must be sold. And this is the best strategy to advertise such a product to achieve the desired effects of attracting attention implying uncertainty and at the same time misled and deceive the customers.

**VI. FIGURES OF ASSOCIATION**

This kind of speech is come by as a result of the relationship existing among words. The relationship may be those of part and whole, an item and its accompaniment or a member representing a group.

Example:

**Allusion**

This is an expression that refers to a well known event or person. One can allude to reference or events in the Bible or books etc. For Abrams and Harpham (2012,p.12) “Allusion is a passing reference without explicit identification, to a literary or historical person,place or event or to another work or passage.” Many advertisers have made reference of sorts in their advertising business

Example

45)”Nothing can be compared  
 With you except sunshine  
 Lipton yellow yellowyellow”

Lipton yellow label

46) “What can I ever do  
 Without the sun  
 What can I ever do  
 The sun, the sun, the sun” -SUN  
 Newspaper

47)“Quiet footprints  
 Laud impression” -Eternal Oil Gas

**VII. FIGURES OF INDIRECTNESS**

This kind of figure of speech shows some indirect references to the idea or things expressed.

Such indirect references help a lot in sharpening effects of literary composition. Examples of figures of indirectness are euphemism, hypallage, innuendo, irony, satire and zeugma but the most commonly used in adverts is euphemism.

**Euphemism**

Adindu (2017,p.47) affirms that” some words or expressions are repulsive to the ear. Some words are considered taboo(profane) and vulgar and as such forbidden. However, these unpleasant words are used in a mild way to evoke the sense of decency. Hence, euphemism is a mild word or expression used in place of the offensive or profane ones” Some words and terms are as revolting as the things they depict. Human sense operates in such a way as to tilt towards the beautiful and pleasant while abhorring the ugly and awful. This is perhaps why most people enjoy clinical terms to reduce the effect of an unpleasant impression. The sense of decency and propriety demands that we avoid taboo words or at least express them in such a way to give the least offence. Euphemism can therefore be seen as a mark of decency.

There has been a fervent use of euphemistic expressions in most modern advertisement slogans.

Examples:

48) “Play it smart”

- Seagram’s extra dry Gin

In this slogan, the copywriter tries to inform the audience that the Gin has the potentials or abilities to smarten one that takes the drink. The assurance that the society abhors laziness or dullness is seen in the choice of the word ‘Smart’. It tries to proudly express the strong belief that this brand of gin can arouse or stimulate people from slumber and inactivity while hiding its negative effects. In this act, he has manipulated in his ingenuity what is ordinarily accepted by the entire society as a bad quality. Another slogan from the same product reads:

49)“Controls the night”

The Seagram’s dry Gin has been euphemistically ascribed the potentialities of granting relaxation in the night. Thus customers who desire relaxation from hard work are recommended to go for such drink. Another euphemism is seen in Rothman’s advert,  
 50) “The best tobacco money can buy”

**VIII. FIGURES OF ANALOGY**

This figure of speech ushers out the use of the imagination in drawing ideas from things outside the realm of the immediate literary context

– These figures include hyperbole (exaggerations) apostrophe and personification.

### Hyperbole (Exaggeration)

Let's consider this slogan from MTN

51) "My life is beautiful  
When I am speaking with you  
It is an unending rainbow  
A non-fading rose  
That's why I am spending it with you"  
- MTN

52) "Nothing compares with you except Sunshine"  
-

Lipton Yellow label

53) "The wholeworld drinkcafenol"  
-

Cafenol

54) "World competition winner good taste"

55) "Sow the seed of security  
Cultivate the savings habit  
With Mercantile Bank that never fails"  
- Mercantile Bank

56) "Enjoy delicious Nasco biscuits anytime, anywhere you'll love your distinct flavor and oven freshness, Nasco biscuits are the best in the world, specially prepared with high value nutritional ingredients – eggs, milk, glucose, flour and sugar. Nasco biscuits are peaked under extremely hygienic conditions".

The above slogans seems to magnify things more their normal proportion. They heighten tension, arrest interest and achieve emphasis. All the exaggerated things created impression of the totality and unlimited dimension.

### Apostrophe

It is an act of turning away from the immediate context of literary communication to address a present or absent person. Examples are seen in modern advertisement slogan:

57) "Good morning Mr. Oat"

### Personification

This is the act of giving animate qualities or attributes to inanimate things or abstract ideas. In most modern advertisement slogans, ideas and products have been personified so as to create certain effects in the mind of the consumers.

Examples

58) "Caresses and refreshes your skin"  
- Joy beauty soap

59) "Maltina cares for you"

60) "Computers that will never become orphan"  
- Tulip computers

61) "The brain behind the service"

- IDT Telephone company

62) "We've strengthened our  
BACKBONES.

To give you the right support"

-COMPAQ computers

In the above slogans, each product is been given a human or animate attribute to lay emphasis. The Tulip computer, orphan denotes a child without parents. Parents take adequate or proper care of their child or children. The Tulip computer is personified as hail and hearty parents who cannot afford to die prematurely leaving its products defenseless, Tulip computers are ready to cater for their products as parents would to their children. In the brain behind the service, the company is also personified as possessing a 'brain'. COMPAQ Computer is portrayed to have a backbone as possessed by animate things.

### IX. CONCLUSION

This work structurally analyzed the figurative contents of modern advertisement slogan and in so doing brought out the linguistic peculiarities in inherent in the language of the modern advertisers. While ordinary language users use language to reinforce, explain and fortify what they say or write; the copywriters use it to mainly persuade. The copy writers use figurative expression to discover similarities and differences in life. In deviating from this literary meaning they also try to discover, quantify and qualify human existence fully. That is to say that the customer's strengths of understanding were enhanced by the copywriter's act of deviating from the normal order of construction of words. Meaning in advertisement seems to be smartly communicated through figurative language. The catchy and captivating figurative expressions seem to move the consumers' emotions. We conclude that certain messages are more effectively communicated through figurative language. Moreover, figurative language plays some vital roles in modern adverts and also appeals to our aesthetic sense than otherwise.

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