"BABES-BOLYAI" UNIVERSITY FACULTY OF LETTERS CLUJ -NAPOCA

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS IN ROMANIAN PRINT ADVERTISING

SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

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INTRODUCTION

Languages emerged due to the human need for communication. People have also learned to communicate through drawings and paintings. The painted walls in caves or on rocks all around the world stand as evidence for that. And then, there was music, which took communication to a higher level.

Today, people still communicate using words, pictures and music but they have turned the process into art. The messages people send nowadays are very often thoroughly encoded but adequate skills have also been developed to interpret them. This thesis aims to decode the message of a widely spread form of communication, which is advertising. It will, however, considerably reduce the area of study by focusing on print advertising in Romania.

The thesis aims to show that, as a specific type of discourse, advertisements both are influenced and influence the social context in which they occur. Their meaning arises from a combination of multiple factors that are deeply interconnected such as language, pictures, paralanguage, participants, co-text, intertext, etc. while their function extends from conveying information to persuasion and manipulation and even to imposing ideas and modes of behaviour.

Advertisements reflect social aspects such as political and economic issues or genderrelated issues but also have the power to maintain and further spread social issues among the audience. This thesis does not only analyse the potential social impact, it also aims to actually verify it.

1. METHODOLOGY

This chapter covers major trends of analysis in linguistics aiming to underline the importance of corpora even today, despite various criticism related to its reliability. It presents possible models of linguistic analysis and largely deals with the approach taken in this thesis, which is a social linguistic approach from the discourse analysis perspective. It further elaborates on the methods applied to the case studies, namely the empirical research method and the semantic differential.

This thesis applies the empirical research method to the study of print advertisements during and after the communist regime in Romania. The empirical research method allows a thorough analysis of data and the drawing of hypotheses as follows:

- 1. the social and economic context will be reflected in advertisements
- 2. the communist regime stopped the development of advertisements
- 3. the communist regime censored eroticism
- 4. in a socialist society women are equal to men therefore they should not appear in traditional roles as housewives and mothers but as independent working women
- 5. there is a new image of women in Romanian print advertising
- 6. the capitalist society of our days discriminates women

While the first two hypotheses are proved throughout the thesis, since they are more general, the third hypothesis is dealt with in Chapter 4 and the last three are covered in Chapter 5, where the semantic differential method is applied to verify the validity of the results provided by the empirical research.

2. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

This chapter aims to show that discourse is connected to three inseparable terms, namely: language, action and knowledge, where knowledge refers to social contexts. Advertising also includes these terms, adding the visual element with its characteristics as an important part of the context, thus proving to be a specific type of discourse.

The chapter also provides a pragmatic approach to discourse analysis, mentioning relevant theories such as the speech acts theory, the conversational principle, the politeness principle and the structure of discourse in the work of Austin (1962), Searle (2000), Grice (1975), Leech (1983), Brown and Yule (1983), Halliday and Hassan (1976).

3. LANGUAGE IN ADVERTISING: LINGUISTIC TECHNIQUES

Although advertising discourse establishes complex relations between textual and visual components of ads, Chapter 3 focuses on textual aspects and their function, emphasizing on the power of language and its resourcefulness as it attempts to fulfil the final purpose – get a customer buy the product. This chapter provides an analysis of the language of advertising from a linguistic point of view and specifies the linguistic techniques used in advertising texts for the purpose of drawing and keeping the audience attention before and after the revolution

of 1989 in Romania.

Moreover, this chapter applies to the analysis of advertising Johnstone's discourse theory (2002) according to which any linguistic choice will reveal a way of thinking, a view of how the world is organized. She groups the choices a discourse producer needs to make as follows:

- choices related to the representation of actions, actors and events
- choices about the representation of knowledge status
- choices about naming and wording
- choices about incorporating and representing other voices

This chapter attempts to show how the structure of the discourse of advertising can manipulate meaning and interpretation and how the social context can influence the structure of discourse.

4. PICTURES IN ADVERTISING: SEX AND EROTICISM

It is in Chapter 4 that more attention is given to the visual component, to its increasing importance in advertisements and to its powerful impact on readers. Just as the written words, pictures can draw attention and be persuasive, especially if people accompany the product advertised. It is because advertisements appeal to our emotions and senses, and eventually create new fictional worlds for people to identify with. A wide range of emotions are displayed in advertisements yet none is more frequently used than the sexual emotion, which will be largely explored in this chapter, aiming to show that what was taboo some decades ago is now quite common.

This chapter deals with the hypothesis according to which the communist regime censored eroticism. It tries to determine to what extent eroticism was present in Romanian advertisements of the period selected by identifying the sexual stimuli Reichert (2003) claimed would arouse sexual feelings. There is a close analysis of the advertisements that appeared in the women's magazine 'Femeia' over a period of 45 years, between 1960 and 2005, most of the years representing the communist regime until the Revolution of 1989. The aim is to see if it is really possible to completely wipe out all traces of eroticism as communist constraints required.

5. SOCIAL IMPACT OF ADVERTISING

This chapter aims to analyze the image of both men and women as depicted in print advertising, trying to show that advertisements, as a reflection of our society, are still governed by traditional gendered stereotypes where women are still discriminated against.

This chapter also aimed to find out whether traditional stereotypes in advertising were at work in our country as it was elsewhere in late 20th century and whether they are still valid today. Therefore, advertisements that appeared in the women's magazine 'Femeia' between 1953 and 2005 are analysed as well as advertisements from other magazines for women that appeared after 2000 such as Cosmopolitan, Avantaje, Unica and Tabu since they manage to complete the image of women at the turn of the century.

The hypotheses according to which there is a new image of women in advertisements but they are still discriminated needed to be further verified, therefore, the semantic differential method was applied to a group of 100 male and female respondents at Dimitrie Cantemir University of Tg.Mures to verify their perception of gender stereotypes as they are reflected in advertising. Students were instructed to state their opinion on the image of women and men in Romanian print advertising by using binarily opposed concepts on a scale from 1 to 5. The results were processed by means of the SPSS statistics program. By applying the semantic differential method, this paper verifies the extent to which aspects of traditional gender stereotypes in advertisements are reflected back to the society that produces them thus raising awareness on the power of advertisements to maintain and spread social concepts and ideologies.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has attempted to decode the message of a widely spread form of communication, which is the discourse of advertising. This thesis focuses mainly on the code but also analyzes the other elements that complete the meaning of the message. Although this paper emphasizes mostly on language and pictures, it hopefully has managed to show how the other constitutive elements intertwine and influence each other. Thus function cannot be separated by language and pictures, paralanguage is present at graphic level but also in participants' behaviour while participants are seen in pictures and are also felt beyond words.

Advertisements have proved to be a specific type of discourse having special purposes: attract and keep attention of customers as well as directly or indirectly persuade

them to take action – buy the product advertised. In order to show how these purposes are met, this thesis focused mainly on language and pictures, which represent the code that needs to be interpreted. Eventually, it will have managed to prove that the meaning of the message conveyed by advertisements relies on a combination of factors such as language, pictures, participants, co-text, substance, etc. while adequate interpretation relies heavily on readers' ability to decipher the code. Thus, meaning is a continuous process of encoding and decoding since people construct structures out of words that are not only aimed to make sense but also to serve more specific purposes. They chose from the multitude of available structures those that will determine a specific interpretation to ensure the achievement of their objective. Since more often than not people mean to say more than what first meets the eye, they have come to master these choices and use them, consciously or not, to manipulate their interpretation so as to convey other meanings.

It was eventually shown that the political and economic context was indeed reflected in the discourse of advertisements. Whilst the communist regime did not completely stop the development of advertising, it certainly controlled its development. The number of advertisements present in the women's magazine 'Femeia' during the communist years are considerably reduced as compared to those that appear ten years after the change in the political and economic context. This can be easily explained by the fact that a socialist economy does not encourage competition; all companies were state- owned and many had monopole in the country, therefore advertisements were not really needed. Despite the political and economic change following the Revolution of 1989, which marked the fall of communism in Romania, it took years for advertisements to reappear in the magazine, the first one being in March 1994. It seems that the slow process of turning to a capitalist economy and society was also reflected in the media.

The analysis of advertisements during communism showed that sensuality can be found in the most apparently non sexual advertisements and can easily pass censorship. When ads were allowed, sensuality somehow found its way into them, yet not as aggressively as it does today. In other words, sexuality has always been present in an ad whenever a woman was depicted: it was just more subtle, less explicit but still there. Apparently, socialist ideologies could not completely wipe out all traces of eroticism in the few advertisements published but managed to keep a line of decency that was characteristic to the advertisements of the early 20th century. The communist regime did not only stop the economic development of the country, it also tried to stop sexual liberation, which it did, but only up to a point; it didn't manage to completely eliminate sensuality and sexual innuendoes but it surely controlled its outburst.

Romanian culture has traditionally promoted the patriarchal model according to which women are assigned to the private area and are mostly seen as submissive, dependent mothers and housewives while men are assigned roles in the public area, being seen as strong, hardworking and independent. The communist period extended these representations by imposing the idea of a working mother and housewife. Women were expected to be equal to men by joining them in the workforce. It appears that traditional gender roles were and are still present in Romanian advertising, which shows that changes in social attitudes and believes do not occur overnight.

Today, there are significant changes in the portrayal of women in Romanian print advertising. Women are portrayed as more powerful, independent and confident, although, most often than not, they are discriminated by being treated as sexual objects while men have generally kept their traditional position as powerful and independent. However, there are instances when women seem to be in control of their body, sexuality and social status, even dominating men. This could be the new woman, assuming her new status, confident to show that nakedness can be perceived just as it is, natural and beautiful, and not as an erotic appeal. Although the image of women has definitely changed, it still has to come a long way until it becomes consistent.

Changing traditional stereotypes deeply imprinted in men's anima might have seemed impossible to change, however, the results of the semantic differential method showed that both male and female respondents perceive women to have changed their status and admit to instances of discrimination against them. Apparently, taking a stand and trying to raise men awareness on the new woman, equally strong and independent, seems to have already made a difference.

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