Elements of intertextuality in advertising discourse

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Abstract

In this paper we aim at pointing out that intertextuality plays an important part in the advertising discourse, as the most common intertextual practices, such as quotation, allusion, cliché, parody, pastiche, are also the most frequent means of expressing intertextuality in advertising, commercials, advertising posters, etc. Moreover, an approach to advertising discourse that is capable of allowing us to identify intertextual references aims to distinguish the main discursive levels in a text, namely the syntactic, the semantic and the rhetorical levels.

1. Intertextuality – theoretical approaches

The actual term of intertextuality was first introduced in French specialized vocabulary in the late 1960s thanks to Julia Kristeva, who defined it as "the clue based on which a text is able to read history and integrate into it" (our translation)[1]. She was also the one to speak about the writings and ideas of Mikhail Bahtin (a Russian literary theorist whose name remained attached to the concepts of dialogism and polyphony). Unlike Saussure, who removed language from real-life situations (the linguist was rather interested in language than speech), Bahtin considered any statement to be dialogical. We are therefore referring to interpersonal linguistic relations, not to the abstract system of language, nor to the individual psyche of those who communicate with each other. Thus, all statements are said in response to other statements and are addressed to potential speakers. Every place and every position in language is a space of dialogue rather than a space of monologic truth. By extending it to the entire cultural field, intertextuality projects onto history, society, culture the image of a huge production of texts, engaging in complex relations of distribution and permutation.

Currently, world-class linguists such as M. Bonhomme, L. Lugrin, D. Maingueneau, P. Charaudeau, Jean-Michele Adam, are interested in intertextuality in the context of advertising discourse. Advertising is a relatively new form of discourse compared to literature, for example, and yet there is plenty of practice to talk about the significance or history thereof. Just as modern literary authors build their stories around folk heritage, authors of advertising texts can likewise turn to this cultural background or, why not, older advertising messages.

Text is, therefore:

- a significant practice (groundwork, processing and transformation work related to some pre-existing texts);
- a production scene, and not a finished product or an output (it is an ongoing process of structuring, not a finished structure);
- text is productivity, an infinite process of deconstruction and redistribution of language;

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[1] Haulica, C. (1981). *Textul ca intertextualitate* (p. 19). Bucharest: Editura Eminescu.

- the social dimension thus penetrates the text, encapsulating the overall preceding and contemporary language;
- the fundamental opposition text-world is cancelled out, the reality itself being textualized (a mosaic of representations and signs).

According to Gerard Genette, intertextuality expresses the presence of a text in another text. He uses the concept of transtextuality to define everything that puts a text in relation to other texts, intentionally or unintentionally.

Genette's classification includes five types of relationships:

- intertextuality: the relationship between two texts according to the co-presence which includes quotation, plagiarism, and allusion;
- metatextuality: denotes the status of a text which acts as a commentary of another earlier text;
- hypertextuality: the relationship uniting a text B to an earlier text A, without making it look like a commentary thereof;
- architextuality: designates the generic status of a text, establishing the reader's expectations;
- paratext: consists of all accompanying elements, such as title, prefaces, footnotes, acknowledgements, illustrations, etc.

Intertextuality goes beyond the notions of fount or source, establishing a relationship of literary filiation between texts that is favoured by the doctrine of imitation. An intertext is not a reproduction, but a production, as the earlier text A is transformed, being turned into one of the signifiers of text B, which ends up integrating it; in other words, "the intertext encompasses recurrent discourse, the latter being a form of intertext" (our translation)[2]. The way in which intertextuality works opens up the perspective of a whole literature in the second degree. The most common intertextual practices in the narrow sense include quotation, cliché, allusion; these are also the most frequent means of expressing intertextuality in advertising.

2. Advertising discourse structure

An approach to advertising discourse that allows us to identify intertextual references (the mosaic of texts in a text) aims to detect the main discursive levels in a text, namely the syntactic, the semantic and the rhetorical levels. Each of these textual levels allows us to establish structures, meanings, rhetorical interferences from the wide theoretical field of intertextuality. Thus, the syntactic level (the narrative syntax of advertising discourse) often makes use of structural schemes that are characteristic of fairy tales or other storytelling; the semantic level recycles meanings that have gained their place in the cultural consciousness (i.e. they have turned into clichés), whereas the rhetorical level has a whole repertoire of images and figures at hand.

1. advertising discourse syntax: makes use of an interesting overabundence of structural schemes, namely, the sequentially organized narrative scheme, featuring a global pattern of action, and the argumentative scheme, featuring reasoning, valorisation, opposition, inference relations. The isotopy of advertising discourse, euphoric par excellence, determines the use of a product's symbolic value by means of a narrative discourse such as a fairy tale or a myth. The main narrative models recycled by advertising are:

a) the rescue model: where the setting consists of a trivial assertion, followed by a difficult situation which is evoked right after, and this is when the rescue agent jumps in through a grand performance (baseline assertion: Solidarity does exist; challenging situation: It is difficult to overcome challenges alone; rescue agent: This is when I opted for a cooperative bank, i.e. Banque Populaire, bottomline: Trade unions have taught me that we are stronger together);

b) the paradox model: where a paradoxical statement is put forward to introduce the rescue agent, the solution and the moral into the discursive syntagmatic (assertion of the paradox: We can't appoint you the CEO, but we can triple your salary; enunciation of the solution: Need money for a car? An IRCC

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[2] Ungureanu, E. (2010). *Intertextualitatea și obiectivul unei gramatici dialogice* (p. 171). In *Buletin de lingvistică*, 11.

account opens up a whole range of possibilities; resolution: If you do need this money, an amount three times your salary will be made available into your account; Quickly and discreetly, general statement: We are more than just a bank, we are your ally and our chequebook is always open up to you);

c) the riddle model: which overlaps with the previous model, the only difference being the fact that the baseline is now a riddle;

d) the singularity model: which works by the rule-exception opposition to ascribe value to the beneficial agent (enunciation of the problem: few investments meet this requirement; exception: only one meets it though, and it is called Silvam; generalization: you can buy and sell just as easy using any Silvam share).

In general, we can speak of an archetypal syntagmatic in advertising discourse, which recycles and values intensely the narrative structures of myths, fairy tales and other storytelling of universal value.

2. Advertising discourse semantics: is carried out through an ameliorative semantic project that involves transition from non-knowledge to knowledge, from one opinion to another, from nonaction to action, a transition based on the exemplarity of the action and the uniqueness of the name. From a semantic (but also pragmatic) point of view, the advertising message sets up a particular naming practice, but also a going into action practice in order to obtain euphoric semanticisms. Advertising discourse has two dimensions: a denotative semantic meaning, on the one hand, and a connotative semantic meaning, on the other hand.

3. The rhetoric of advertising discourse is twofold:

a) Rhetoric of the image, with the following structure:

- the linguistic message (brand name, etc.);
- the symbolic message (or connoted image);
- the literal message (or denoted image);

b) Linguistic rhetoric, which is achieved through a repertoire of figures of speech, such as: polysemy, antonymy, word composition, etc.

Advertising discourse recycles structures, semantics, rhetorical figures that have an impact on recipients and redistributes them according to product promotion strategies, packaged, semantically and rhetorically, at narrative level (in a story); it redistributes cultural values to trigger symbolic attachment to the product, or interest and fascination.

3. Intertextual processes in advertising

Intertextuality involves complex mechanisms and procedures that can intervene at all levels of the advertising discourse.

Advertising is informative, explanatory and laudatory at origin, which is taught to be perfectly normal, considering its primary function: to be able to sell the advertised product. Nowadays, since the market is oversaturated with offers, the advertising of a product should no longer be carried out using classical advertising methods, and this is the main reason why it has resorted to a new style, favouring the spectacle, the seduction, the incitement.

Nowadays, advertising is all about offering the receiver a suggestion to arouse his curiosity, leaving him to do everything else all by himself. At the moment, advertising does not provide ready-made information; instead, information is presented to the target audience in an argumentative and ambiguous way, as Angela Goddard also stated: "the new take in advertising is for commercials to be nothing else than enigmatic and this is useful: people will be forced to ask others what it is all about"[3].

Most commercials include the following elements:

• Title, which is meant to: engage the reader, boost his/her attention and curiosity, indicate the target group, highlight the benefits, present the products or services and urge the public to buy them out.

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[3] Goddard, A. (2002). *Limbajul publicității* (p. 106). Iași: Editura Polirom.

- Slogan/catchphrase, which is a very important element of an advertising poster, because it is an essential part of the message to be conveyed. It is made out of a word, an expression or a sentence and it is designed so as to associate the image with the product or the company being advertised. The words used have a positive meaning almost always, to such an extent that they can even be considered hyperbolic.
- Informative text, which is also based on conciseness and conventional language. It contains just a few punctuation marks and has an inner coherence. The text usually includes the following type of information: technical data, company or product brand, performance, the advantages of using the product, advice on how to use the product, its status on the global market, guarantees of quality, country of origin of the product, etc.
- Trademark, which is either a name, a sign, a symbol, a drawing or any other combination of these elements. The trademark is used for differentiation and identification purposes.
- Logo, which is used for the purpose of identifying the company or the organization as regards print advertisements.

Out of the most common intertextual practices used in advertising, we mention a few such as quotation, allusion, cliché, parody, pastiche. It turns out that parody is extremely effective in many commercials due to the fact that the hilarious and parodic by nature aspect thereof is able to capture consumer's interest.

One such example is the mobile phone launch campaign by Connex, which used parody that targeted national mythologies or aspects of everyday life.

- the fact that their network covered more and more areas of the country was featured as a battle for conquest and unification, which made Connex resort to the historical figure of Michael the Brave for this purpose. The text underpinning the image is nothing else than the voivode's answer back to the unification of the Romanian states – "Pohta ce-am pohtit-o [My forever longing]", followed by "a cucerit deja patruzeci şi şapte de oraşe [has already conquered forty-seven cities]" (our translation);

- the same mobile phone company, namely Connex, used parody to portray the legend of the master builder Manole, translated into a hilarious domestic setting: "Alo, Ana? Sunt eu, Manole, meşterul. Trimite-o pe mama soacră cu haleală pe şantier. [Hi, Ana? It's me, Manole, the master builder. Send mother-in-law with some grub on the building site.]" The main idea behind this is to showcase the perks of using Connex as a mobile phone company in a pretty funny way: "Când vrei să-ţi salvezi căsnicia foloseşte Connex. [When you want to save your marriage, use Connex.]" (our translation);

- Connex made another parody using the national myth the Mioriţa ballad: "Stăpâne, baciul ungurean şi cu cel vrâncean / Vor să mi te-omoare la apus de soare. [My Lord, the Hungarian shepherd and the Vrancean shepherd / Are plotting to kill you at sunset.]". Connex's commercial reads: "Un bărbat care nu utilizează Connex GSM este un om...mort. [A man who doesn't use Connex GSM is a... dead man.]" (our translation).

Jidvei's campaign used Caragiale's work as a source of parody advertising.

The company used an iconic parodic line of Caragiale's "friends", included in the cross talk between Jidvei's wine bottle and a glass, which sounds like this:

- bottle: "Să-i spui când s-o întoarce că l-am căutat [When he's back, tell him that I've been looking for him]"
- glass: "Cui?[To whom?]"
- bottle: "Mă cunoaşte dumnealui, suntem prieteni. [He knows who I am, we're friends]" (an allusion to Caragiale's work, Căldură mare).

In another picture, a bottle of Jidvei wine is partially unveiled by the consumer, who is mimicking the winking gesture:

- the parodic line originating in Caragiale's work is: "Uite, vezi, asta e cusurul tău. Eşti curios... [Look, you see, this is your flaw. You're curious...]" (our translation).

In conclusion, we can state that intertextuality has a persuasive role in advertising, hidden under the playful mask of words, and we support Adam Bonhomme's idea that, out of all the argumentative

strategies of advertising, "intertextuality generates the most ostentatious, aggressive and radical form of persuasive communication"[4].

Intertextuality has become increasingly widespread, and we can identify it in any type of discourse, including in advertising discourse.

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[4] Cvasnii Cătănescu, M. (2003). *Discursul publicitar actual. Aspecte teoretice (I-II)* (p. 322). In Gabriela Pană Dindelegan (ed.). *Aspecte ale dinamicii limbii române actuale*. Bucharest: Editura Universității București.