

## **Towards an Understanding of the Discourse of Advertising: Review of Research with Special Reference to the Egyptian Media**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the nature of the discourse of advertising. The focus is on consumer advertising, which is directed towards the promotion of some product or service to the general public. The study, however, is not meant to exhaust all the aspects of this particular discourse, or present an answer to all the problems it poses. Rather, it aims at uncovering the basic elements of the most pervasive, influential and inescapable discourse of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; the advertising text. It focuses on the interaction of language, image and layout, and examines advertising persuasive strategies. In doing so, it draws on various linguistic (particularly pragmatic, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic) theories. In addition this study provides analyses of some ads, using different ways of interpretations; and ends with a discussion on the interrelationship between culture (schemes) and advertising discourse. In this connection, instances from the Egyptian media, and their analyses are provided, with a view to clarifying some rhetorical categories in Arabic Advertising, and showing that texts construct meaning through interaction with other types of discourse, and inseparable from the culture of the advertising text

### **Introduction**

Advertising is so familiar to modern readers that it may seem odd to ask what an advertisement is. Although advertising is all around us, we do not often pause to think about its nature as a form of discourse, as a system of language use whereby, on a daily basis, huge numbers of readers 'fleeting conversations' with the writers of countless texts (Goddard, 1998: 5). The term 'advertising' comes down to us from the medieval Latin verb 'advertere' to direct one's attention to. It is any type or form of public announcement intended to direct people's attention to the availability, qualities, and/or cost of specific commodities or services. Advertising can be seen to fall into three main categories: (1) consumer advertising, which is directed towards the promotion of some product or service to the general public; (2) trade advertising, which is directed to dealers and professionals through appropriate trade publications and media, and (3) public relations advertising, which is directed towards society by citizens or community groups, or by politicians, in order to promote some issue of social concern or political agenda. The focus of this paper is on the first category; namely, consumer advertising.

### **Statement of the Problem and Purpose**

Many studies of advertising do separate out components of ads, concentrate on one or a few and ignore the others. There are also studies which describe the pictures of advertising without paying any attention to language. Describing advertising as discourse is both more complex and more difficult than any of these approaches. It must be borne in mind, then, that there is a danger of dilution in analysis which attempts to tackle too much. Discourse, especially discourse as complex as advertising, always holds out more to be analyzed, leaves more to be said. But this need not to be a cause for despair. As Cook (2001: 5) points out, it

would be both depressing and self-deceptive to believe that one could exhaust all the aspects of the genre, and presents an answer to the entire problem it poses. This study examines the nature of the discourse of advertising. The focus is on the consumer advertising, which is directed towards the promotion of some product or service to the general public. The study, however, is not meant to exhaust all the aspects of this particular discourse, or present an answer to all the problems it poses. Rather, it aims at uncovering the basic elements of the most pervasive, influential and inescapable discourse of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; the advertising text. It focuses on the interaction of language, image and layout, and examines advertising persuasive strategies. In doing so, it draws on various linguistic theories. In addition, this study provides analyses of some ads, using different ways of interpretations; and ends with a discussion on the interrelationship between culture (schemes) and advertising discourse. In this connection, instances from the Egyptian media, and their analyses are provided, with a view to clarifying some rhetorical categories in Arabic Advertising, and showing that texts construct meaning through interaction with other types of discourse, and inseparable from the culture of the advertising text.

### **Advertising: A Social Discourse with Rhetorical Force**

Advertising is referred to as a form of discourse in the sense that it has influenced not only the structure of language and the modality of lifestyle, but also the content of routine daily acts of communicative exchanges. The messages of advertising have permeated the entire cultural landscape. Printed advertisements fill the pages of newspapers and magazines. Commercials interrupt TV and radio programs constantly. As Beasley and Danesi (2002: 1) pointed out, "brand names, logos, trademarks, jingles, and slogans have become part and parcel of the 'mental encyclopedia' of virtually everyone who lives in a modern-day society" (See Wodak, 2006a, 2006b; Wodak, 2007).

Advertising has progressed beyond the use of simple techniques for announcing the availability of products or services. It has ventured into the domain of persuasion, and its rhetorical categories have become omnipresent in contemporary social discourse. Because of the growing effectiveness of its persuasion techniques, advertising has become entrenched into social discourse by virtue of its wide spread diffusion throughout society. Everywhere one turns, one is bound to find some ad message designed to persuade people to buy a product. All this leads to the inescapable conclusion that advertising has developed, since the first decades of the 20th century, into a privileged form of social discourse that has unparalleled rhetorical force. With the advent of industrialization in the 19th century, style of presentation became increasingly important in raising the persuasive efficacy of the ad text. Accordingly, advertising started to change the structure and use of language and verbal communication. Everything from clothes to beverages was being promoted through ingenious new techniques. As the 19th century came to a close American advertisers in particular were, as Dyer (1982: 32) points out, using more colloquial, personal and informal language to address the customer and also exploiting certain effective rhetorical devices to attract attention to a product. So persuasive had this new form of advertising become that, by the early decades of the 20th century, it started becoming a component of social discourse, starting to change some of the basic ways in which people communicated with each other and in which they perceived commodities and services. From the 1920s onwards, advertising agencies sprang up all over, broadening the attempts of their predecessors to build a rhetorical bridge between the product and the consumer's consciousness (See Sayer, 2006; Saussure & Schulz, 2005).

The language of advertising has become the language of all, even of those who are critical of it. As Twitchell (2000: 1) puts it "language about products and services has pretty much replaced language about all other subjects". It is no exaggeration to claim that today most of our information, intellectual stimulation, and lifestyle models come from, or are related to, advertising images. Since the 1920s, positioning and image – creation have become the primary techniques of what has come to be known as the era of persuasion in advertising. This is an era in which advertising messages have moved away from describing the product in itself to focusing on the consumer of the product, creating product imagery with which the consumer can easily identify (Woodward and Denton, 1988: 192). Ads and commercials now offer the same kinds of promise and hope to which religions and social philosophies once held exclusive rights: security against the hazards of old age, better positions in life, popularity and personal prestige, social advancement, better health, and happiness. To put it simply, the modern advertiser stresses not the product, but the benefits that may be expected to ensue from its purchase. In this regard, Beasley and Danesi (2002: 15) points out that the advertiser is becoming more and more adopt at setting foot into the same subconscious regions of psychic experience that were once explored only by philosophers, artists, and religious thinkers. However, not all advertisements make perfect sense. Not all of them promote or imply acceptance of social values that everyone would agree are what we should hope for, in an enlightened and civilized society. Some advertisements appear to degrade our images of ourselves, our language, and appear to move the emphasis of interaction in our society to even more consumerism. In this regard, Sells and Gonzalez (2002: 166) points out that there is no doubt that advertising promotes a consumer culture, and helps create and perpetuate the ideology that creates the apparent need for the products it markets (Iten, 2005; Jarczolt, 2005; Ang et al., 2007).

In a discussion of what kind of benefit an advertisement might offer to a consumer, Aitchison (1999: 49) provides the following quote from Gray Goldsmith of Lowe & Partners, New York: "I do not think you need to offer a rational benefit. I think you need to offer a benefit that a rational person can understand". Relatedly, Sells and Gonzalez (2002) argue that it is often said that advertising is irrational: but this is where the crossover between information and persuasion becomes important. An advertisement does not have to be factually informative but it cannot be factually misleading. In addition, Cook (2001: 1) points out that in a world beset by social and environmental problems, advertising can be seen as urging people to consume more by making them feel dissatisfied or inadequate, by appealing to greed, worry and ambition. On the other hand, it may be argued that many ads are skillfully crafted and amusing, and that it is unjust to make them a scapegoat for all the sorrows of the modern world. Thus, to ask someone their opinion of advertising in general, or of particular ad, can be to embark upon an emotionally and ideologically charged discussion, revealing their political and social position. With the above in mind, it can be argued that attitudes to advertising can be indicative of our personality, or social and ideological position. Advertisements are forms of discourse which make a powerful contribution to how we construct our identities (Ang et al., 2006; Musolff, 2005; Toncar et al., 2001; Van Mulken et al., 2005; Widdon, 2004).

### **Linguistics and the Discourse of Advertising**

Studies of the discourse of advertising with a linguistic focus remain relatively rare. In the sense that they constitute departures from the study of more elaborated linguistic form, they are all indebted, directly or indirectly, to Straumann's (1935) pioneering work on the unusual

syntax of telegrams and headlines, for which he coined the term 'block language' (Bruthiaux, 1996: 24). Crystal and Davy's (1969) analysis of the language of newspaper reporting is primarily a taxonomy of major linguistic features found in just two contrastive news articles on the same topic but published by two different newspapers in much the same tradition but much more narrowly focused is Mardh's (1980) analysis of the language of headlines in two British newspapers from opposite ends of the spectrum, from low-brow to high-brow. In addition to providing a comprehensive review of previous studies of the syntax of headlines, Mardh describes in some detail the use made in headlines of familiar linguistic features such as nouns and nominal groups articles, and verbs. She also considers the number and length of words, the number and type of clauses, and the number of modifiers in noun phrases. In addition, she discusses the readability of headlines by discussing such factors as reader familiarity and text visibility.

Turning to studies of the language of advertising itself, we see that there are occasional examinations of the topic in more general works on genre analysis. Among scholarly examples of this type of treatment is Bhatia (1993). A useful pedagogical review of the subject can be found in O'Donnell and Todd (1991). Still of great value, however, is Leech's (1966) much – quoted study, which surveys the types of linguistic devices used by British writers and designers of display advertising. Like Straumann (1935) in relation to the language of headlines, Leech is primarily concerned with analyzing the specialized grammar of advertising. He notes the disjunctive nature of much of this language, and he details some of its salient features. Among these are the low frequency of function words such as articles, auxiliaries, and pronouns; a preference for nouns over verbs and adjectives; and heavy nominalization over predicative constructions. Working within a tradition of literary criticism, Leech also describes advertising language as a "subliterary" genre, arguing that, as in literature, the advertisement writer often relies on unexpected strategies of novel and creative exploitation of language within predictable linguistic patterns and techniques. Thus the writer's rhetorical aim (attracting and sustaining the reader's attention; making the advertisement memorable, and prompting the reader into appropriate action) is met by systematically setting off a familiar pattern against inventive use. Even today, Leech's study continues to provide a useful catalog of the defining features of this language variety. As Bruthiaux (1996: 26) argues, it [Leech's study] is one of the first attempts to explicitly link in a full-length study the functional parameters of the advertising genre with its linguistic manifestations, or in other words, to apply the notion of systematic register variation to the language of advertising".

In a more extensive study, Geis (1982) concentrates on the linguistic devices favored by producers of television commercials. He reviews some of the linguistic features that recur in the language of TV advertising in the United States. This includes a detailed study of comparatives similes, noun compounds, and count versus mass nouns. Geis addresses not only how advertisers use language but also how consumers are expected to interpret it. While this allows him to claim that his focus is essentially psycholinguistic in character, his study could be more appropriately described as pragmatic since what offers is primarily a theory of communication rather than actual psycholinguistic experiments that might test the comprehensive of TV commercials. Goleman (1983) goes beyond a description of the language of advertising itself. She sets out to address psycholinguistic aspects of the interaction between the encoder and the decoder in an attempt to explain how consumers of advertising come to understand what they do. What makes her study especially noteworthy is her examination of the role played by phonology and prosody in conveying the advertiser's intentions. But like Geis, she mostly addresses issues of comprehension from a pragmatic

angle. In particular, she argues that viewers need to make two distinct but complementary types of inference. One type of inference, which might have been termed linguistic, is based on the audience's knowledge of the structure and conventions of the advertising genre. The second type of inference, which might be described as pragmatic requires a willingness to abide by a Gricean Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975) in assuming, for example, that content will be favorable to the product.

Vestergaard and Schroder (1985) bring an explicit ideological agenda to their analysis of the language of advertising. Their work comes close to analyses of the language of journalism by exponents of critical linguistics such as Van Dijk (1988) or Fowler (1991). They aim to go well beyond a formal description of the medium. But they stay largely clear of pragmatic considerations and set out instead to expose "the individualized collective deceit of advertising" (p.174) and to reveal "the really insidious ideological processes which treat a phenomenon as so self-evident and natural as to exempt it completely from critical inspection and to render it inevitable" (p. 145 ) Thus, while advertising can be an agent of change, it is also a means to prevent social change or even to assume that change is impossible. In another study, Toolan (1988) follows Leech (1966) in concentrating on the stylistics of conventionalized and formulaic aspects of the language of advertising in the British press.

Like Leech, Toolan sets out to uncover the recurrent structural patterns of the variety, without which, he argues, advertising language would not be recognizable as a distinct variety. Nair (1992) examines a corpus of personal ads drawn mostly from the Indian press. She justifies her attempt to combine the study of form with that of ideology in the classified advertising on the grounds that both overt and covert ideologies associated with particular literary forms and gender, genre and grammar intersect in especial ways in culturally specific varieties of the "matrimonial column" (p. 231). Tanaka (1994) proposes to explain how consumers come to understand advertising messages. Using as her data a selection of display advertisements from the British and Japanese press, she argues against purely semiotic accounts of communication, which regard the polysemous nature of linguistic and nonlinguistic messages as a misfortune and an obstacle to communication. Instead she notes that the normal process of utterance interpretation involves potentially problematic reference assignment, disambiguation, and enrichment. The question, Tanaka argues, is not whether but how preexisting bodies of knowledge play a role in determining the way in which advertisements are understood. In other words, how decoders recognize encoders' intentions. To answer this question, she appeals to "relevance theory".

Sperber and Wilson (1986), which proposes a maxim of relevance as the single principle of real importance in disambiguating messages. In addition, Bruthiaux (1996) provides a detailed analysis of linguistic forms and communicative functions in four types of ads: automobile sales, apartment rentals, job vacancies, and personals. Besides similarities among diverse 'simple' registers, he notes differences in the kinds of simplicity characteristic of ad types and links them to communicative functions. In a more broader survey of British advertising in the printed press, billboards, and television, Cook (2001) expands the narrow linguistic formulations of the discourse of advertising in general. His aim is to show that texts construct meaning through interaction with other types of discourse. He examines the interface of linguistic form with visual, musical, and paralinguistic features. But the most original aspect of Cook's work is his analysis of the social implications of advertising language. He shows how texts can create, evoke, and reinforce dominant social types, especially sexual ones; and he argues that a sense of self as both an individual and participant

in social activities is to be found within the form of discourse, not outside it and independently from it, in the language of advertising as in all language use (Blommaert, 2005; Bara, 2005; Cutica et al., 2008; Koller, 2005; Saussure, 2007).

### **Linguistic Concepts and Analyses of Advertisements**

An extremely useful and relevant survey of concepts from linguistics that can be used in the analysis of advertising can be found in Vestergaard and Schroeder (1985). Among the most important concepts are (1) cohesion and coherence in text; (2) given and new information; (3) presupposition; (4) the sign: a signifier and a signified, and (5) icon vs. index vs. symbol. Cohesion is a term from the work on textual structure by Halliday and Hasan (1976), given to the logical linkage between textual units, as indicated by overt formal markers of the relations between texts. Each piece of text must be cohesive with the adjacent ones for a successful communication. However, readers are very creative interpreters, and formal properties of cohesion are typically not marked overtly. Vestergaard and Schroeder (1985) introduce the notion of coherence as a way of talking about the relations between texts, which may or may not be indicated by formal markers of cohesion. Advertising language tends not to use clear markers of cohesion, but is interpreted as being coherent. As with all the other linguistic concepts surveyed here, the notion of coherence extends to the relation between text and image.

It is commonplace in the analysis of the meaning contribution of a linguistic unit such as a sentence to split the information into Given information and New information. It is possible for a sentence to be all - New, but all - Given sentences are (by definition) uninformative, and therefore have only specialized or restricted usages. Each sentence has an opportunity to present New information, or at least highlighted information. A common strategy in advertising language is to use very short potential utterances as sentences, to maximize the amount of highlighted information that is being presented. In addition to these linguistic concepts, there are two key concepts that can be used in the analysis of advertisements from modern - day linguistic theory, namely 'presupposition' and 'relevance'. These two concepts are important because they allow us to see the primary means by which advertisements can communicate much more information than what is explicitly presented in them.

The pragmatic interest in the implicit meaning dimensions of language use has been extended to include meanings which are logically entailed on the language use by the user of a particular structure. Presuppositions are implicit meanings which are subsumed by a particular wording in the sense that its interpretation is conditional upon the tacit acceptance of the implicit meaning (pre-supposition = 'an assumption that comes before'). For example, a sentence such as "The cold war has ended" presupposes that the existence of the entities it refers to, in this case the 'cold war'. Therefore the study of presuppositions often concentrates on meaning dimensions which are 'taken for granted' in an utterance or a text and hence this area of pragmatic research offers an instrument which is well-suited for examining the links between language and ideology (Elison et al., 2009; Belinda, 2010; Francis, 2008; Buccarelli, 2010; Kimmel, 2010; Fetzer, 2008).

Presupposition is a kind of pragmatic inference "based more closely on the actual linguistic structure of sentences" (Levinson 1989: 167). It is classified as a type of pragmatic inference by Strawson (1952). It must be emphasized, here, that the notion of presupposition required in discourse analysis is pragmatic presupposition, that is, defined in terms of assumptions the speaker makes about what the hearer is likely to accept without challenge (Givon, 1979: 50).

The notion of assumed 'common ground' is also involved in such a characterization of presupposition and can be found in this definition by Stalnaker (1978: 321). Presuppositions may be even more critical in television advertising (Geis 1982) than in print advertising. However, even in print advertising, presuppositions are an important component of the overall message. As the name implies, a presupposition is a necessary precondition for the processing of any communication. Presuppositions typically involve the existence of some object or idea.

To summarize, presuppositions are a crucial part of advertising as they can cause the reader to consider the existence of objects, propositions, and culturally defined behavioral properties: for example, "Have you had your daily vitamins?" presupposes that you take or need "daily vitamins", thereby creating and perpetuating the idea that the behavior of taking vitamins daily is part of our culture. Similarly, "What's great about Chuck Wagon dog food?" (Geis 1982, 45) presupposes that there is something great about the dog food though exactly what is left open.

Relevance is a key concept in understanding advertisements, because it is a primary component of all aspects of human communication. The term was introduced by Sperber and Wilson (1986), building on earlier work in pragmatics, in particular the work of Grice, Sperber and Wilson's approach to communication is based on the observation that much natural communication does not involve sequences of totally directly informative utterances, or questions followed by literal answers. However, speakers and hearers in a conversation each assume that the others are rational and cooperative participants, and therefore conversation moves forward as each hearer finds the relevance of what was just said. The idea of Relevance goes back to the foundational work on pragmatics by Grice (1975), who proposed four "Maxims of communication"; guidelines which hearers presume that speakers are adhering to. Simplifying slightly, they are: (1) Quantity: make your contribution just as informative as is required, (2) Quality: do not give false or unsubstantiated information; (3) Relation: give relevant information, and (4) Manner: be perspicuous. Grice showed that communication proceeds by a hearer using these guidelines to interrupt what a speaker is presenting, possibly creating implications (or, the formal term, "implicatures"). For example, "there were a million people in that room!" is blatantly false, but assuming that the utterance meets the maxims of Quality and Relation, we can understand that the speaker means that there was an unusually large crowd in the room relative to the known size of the room. Most importantly, the utterance need not be rejected, but is interpreted as being rationally conceived and presented as relevant to the ongoing conversation.

Sperber and Wilson (1985) argued that every aspect of rational and cooperative behavior ascribed by the hearer to the speaker can be thought of in terms of relevance. Relevance has to be calculated, through assumptions and inferences. This has the consequence that there is no definite amount of information that the hearer can calculate, with that part of the conversation then considered to be over. By adding more contextual assumptions further relevant implications can be derived. So, a rational speaker will provide enough information for the hearer to be able to calculate the main points that are intended. But it is important to note that there is no such thing as "the meaning" of any utterance, when that utterance is presented in context. Rather, there are some aspects of meaning that are directly asserted, some which are fairly straightforwardly deducible, and others which are more esoteric or context-specific. Needless to say, any kind of communication, including an advertisement, is unsuccessful if the hearer or reader cannot grasp the implied primary components of

meaning.

There are varying degrees of relevance. Sperber and Wilson claim that there is an inverse correlation of effort and relevance. In other words, the more processing it takes to work out what a speaker intends by an utterance, the less relevant that utterance is. As various critics have pointed out, this begs the question "relevant to what"? (Clark, 1987) and "relevant to whom?" (Wilks, 1987). In 'Relevance', human beings are viewed as information processors with an inbuilt capacity to infer relevance. This single capacity is assumed to be the key to human communication and cognition. In addition, the human mind is conceived to be a 'deductive mechanism' which has the capacity to manipulate the conceptual content of assumptions from a range of sources. Sperber and Wilson's favorite metaphor for the human mind is the computer. They limit their object of enquiry accordingly to how the human mind functions as a computer (Talbot, 1994: 3526). For example, in 29 Range Rover (Dunhill, Rolling Stone, 2002: 16) the text is "Work hard. Be successful. Go someplace where none of that matters". The meaning of this advertisement is as follows: Work hard. And if you do, you will be successful. And if you are successful you can buy a Range Rover. And then you can go in it to someplace where none of that matters. The question, now, is where do the parts of meaning shown above come from ?. In this case, Coherence provides the links between the sentences (e.g. and if you do ..... "). Relevance is what determines that we can buy a Range Rover and go in it to somewhere, for the context of the whole advertisement including image for a Range Rover. And the presupposition here is that there is somewhere out there where none of that matters. In other words, that some utopian place exists for us to aspire to travel to, in our Range Rover. There may be any such actual place "rational" communication, though in this particular advertisement, it is implied that there is.

### **The Semiotic Approach to Advertising**

The term Semiotics (spelled originally 'semeiotics'), from the Greek "Semeion" which means mark, sign, was coined by the founder of Western medical science, Hippocrates. In this sense, medical science is basic semiotic science, since it is grounded on the principle that the symptom is a trace to an inner state or condition. The fundamental thing to notice about the semeion is that it is interpretable in terms of two dimensions, namely the discernible symptom itself, with all its physical characteristics, and the probable condition it indicates, with all its predictable consequences. The two are inseparable; that is, there is no symptom that is not caused by some bodily conditions, and vice versa, there is no condition that does not produce symptoms. The semeion is a natural sign; that is, it is produced by Nature. Humans, also, produce their own signs such as words gestures or symbols. These signs are called "conventional signs". Like natural signs, conventional signs consist of two dimensions: (1) a physical dimension such as the sounds or letters that make up a word; and (2) the object that the physical part has been created to stand for whether it be real or imagined. The physical dimension is called the signifier in Saussurean semiotics and representation in Peircean semiotics. The conceptual dimension (2 above) is called signified and "object" in the two methods respectively. The particular kinds of meanings that the association of a signifier with a signified (or set of signifieds) generates in social situation is called "signification". Conventional signs are classified as verbal and nonverbal. Examples of verbal signs are words and other linguistic structures, whereas drawings, gestures, etc. are examples of non verbal signs.

It is obvious that the use of signs to create messages and meanings entails an interpretation of what they mean. The problem is that the range of interpretations always varies from



individual to individual. There is no one meaning that can be extracted from a human-made text. In addition, the sign's primary meaning is called its denotation. This is the meaning or referential connection established between signifier and signified. But this meaning can be extended freely to other domains of reference. This extensive process is known as connotation. The French semiotician Ronald Barthes inspired the first true semiotic works analyzing the implicit messages of advertising. The semiotic investigation of advertising and marketing has become widespread. And, some interesting studies have been produced such as Harris (1995); Goldman and Papson (1996); Berger (2000), and Danesi and Perron (2000). The major theme that stands out from this line of inquiry is that many brand names, logos, ads and commercials are interpretable at two levels; a surface level, and an underlying one. The surface level involves the use of specific types of signs in a highly creative manner to create a personality for the product (images, words, colors, etc.). These are 'reflexes' of, and 'traces' to, the underlying level. Relatedly, the goal of semiotics in the study of advertising is to unmask the arrays of hidden meanings in the underlying level, which form what can be called "signification system". As Bell (1990: 1) has observed, the semiotic notions used in the study of advertising are powerful because they allow us to bring to the surface the hidden meanings of advertising texts. The word "text", as it is used in semiotic theory, means something very specific. It literally designates a putting together "of signifiers to produce a message, consciously or unconsciously. The text can be either verbal or nonverbal, or both. In the modern theory of texts, the underlying, connotative meaning on which a text is anchored is commonly referred to as its subtext. The incorporation of other textualities present in the culture, through direct citation or indirect allusion, is called intertextuality.

The process of uncovering a subtextual meaning in an ad text is commonly referred to as decoding. It encapsulates what is involved; namely, the identification of the code or codes utilized to generate a signification system in the ad. The use of several codes to create the subtext can be called intercodality (Beasley and Danesi, 2002: 71). Product textuality is one of the persuasion techniques used by advertisers to promote product and service recognizability. It works on two levels; a surface and an underlying one. Finally, let us examine the magazine ads used in various countries to promote fashionable high-heel shoes for young women. The original purpose of shoes was to protect the feet and to allow people to walk on hurtful and injurious terrain. But high-heel shoes seem to contravene this function. They are uncomfortable and awkward to wear. However, millions of women wear them. The thousands of ads for expensive high heel shoes that are published in magazines almost weekly are usually constructed through the process of mythologization. Typically, some attractive young woman is portrayed as wearing the shoes. She is shown with an expression that commonly conveys a kind of sensual rapture that comes from wearing the shoes. The way in which such ads have been put together is strongly suggestive of a "sexualization" of the female body. But semioticians would not stop at this fairly straightforward analysis of such ads.

As Beasley and Danesi (2002: 28) point out, they would go one step further. The world of sex has a long-standing tradition of portrayal in western mythology. In representational sense, therefore, these ads are the modern-day advertiser's versions of ancient sexual myths. Many evoke the myth of Persephone, the Greek goddess of fertility and queen of the underworld. Persephone was the daughter of Zeus and Demeter. When she was still a beautiful maiden, Pluto seized her and held her captive in his underworld. Though Demeter persuaded the gods to let her daughter return to her, Persephone was required to remain in the underworld for four month because Pluto had tricked her into eating a pomegranate (food of the dead) there.

When Persephone left the earth, the flowers withered and the grain died, but when she returned, life blossomed anew (Beasley and Danesi, 2002). With the above in mind, the wearing of high heels as a sexual prop has become an entrenched signified in western culture. High heels force the body to tilt, thus emphasizing the female's sexuality. They also accentuate the role of feet in sexuality. As Rossi (1976: 54) explains, across many cultures feet are perceived as sexually desirable. Putting on stockings and high heels on feet is everywhere perceived to be a highly erotic act. To a male, high heel shoes are erotically exciting. Therefore, in terms of the signification systems that such ads attempt to tap into, the high heels worn by ad models send out powerful and highly charged sexual signals (See Rader et al., 2002; Hart et al., 2007; Johnson-Laired et al., 2004; McQuarrie et al., 2005).

### **Advertising from a Psycholinguistics' Perspective**

Psychologists have been extremely interested in the persuasion techniques used by advertisers. The school of psychoanalysis, founded by Sigmund Freud, has been particularly active in studying advertising. The main contribution of this field has been that it has exposed how the persuasion techniques used by advertisers are directed to the unconscious region of the human mind. This region contains our hidden wishes, memories, fears, feelings, and images that are prevented from gaining expression by the conscious part of the mind. In addition, this unconscious region, as the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung suggested can be divided into two regions: a personal unconscious, containing the feelings and thoughts developed by an individual that are directive of his/her particular life schemes and a collective unconscious, containing the feelings and thoughts developed cumulatively by the species that are directive of its overall life pattern (Beasley and Danesi, 2002: 32).

Psychologists and social scientists generally ask questions such as the following: Does advertising influence attitudes and behaviour? Is it a valuable contributor to the efficiency of a free market economy? Is it a form of artistic expression? Such questions have led to a spate of studies that have examined advertising from the broader psychological and cultural perspectives that such questions presuppose. Advertising has also been the target of numerous major analytical, critical, and technical investigations (Beasley and Danesi and Perron, 2000; Quin, 2005; Oakley, 2007; Pragglejazz, 2007). The implicit question that most of such studies have entertained is whether advertising has become a force molding cultural mores and individual behaviors, or whether it constitutes no more than a "mirror" of deeper cultural tendencies within urbanized contemporary societies. Although this question was not answered in any definitive fashion, it may be safe to say that the one thing which everyone agrees is that advertising has become one of the most recognizable and appealing forms of social communication to which everyone in society is exposed. The images and messages that advertisers promulgate on a daily basis delineate the contemporary social landscape. Relatedly, the question that imposes itself here is that "Is advertising to be blamed for causing virtually everything, from obesity to street violence?"

There is no doubt advertising plays a definitive role in shaping some behaviours in some individuals. The highly inflated amount of consumption of fast foods, tobacco, and other media - hyped substances is probably related to the slick promotion plays utilized by magazine ads and television commercials. However, even though people mindlessly absorb the messages promulgated constantly by advertisements, and although these may have some subliminal effects on behaviour, we accept media images, by and large, only if they suit our already established preferences. It is more accurate to say that advertising produces images that reinforce lifestyle models. Advertisers are not innovators. They are more intent on

reinforcing lifestyle behaviors than in spreading commercially risky innovations. In this sense, advertisements are not in themselves disruptive of the value systems of the cultural mainstream; rather, they reflect shifts already present in popular culture. And if they are really psychologically effective, it is primarily because they tap into deeply-ingrained mythical and metaphorical structures of the mind (Johnson-Laired, 2004; Mothersbaugh et al., 2002). Moreover, advertising has affected not morality but the cognitive style with which people process and understand messages. Cognitive style was defined as the mode in which, and the degree to which, the senses are used in processing information (McLuhan, 1964). Advertising has rendered our cognitive style of information processing much more visual based on visual images and, thus, more compact and holistic. Since the embedding of advertising as a form of social discourse, people have much more inclined to process information quickly and unreflectively.

### **The Psychology of Advertising**

The major purpose of this section is to shed some light on the psychology of advertising. As Seglin (1989: 22) explains, "there is a new hunger to understand what advertising does". Relatedly, "the psychology behind the work you produce is even more important than a well turned phrase or a nifty new television optical ... That is what it is all about: getting inside people's heads and getting them to act" (Bailey, 1987: 1). It should be kept in mind that different ads do different things; so not every ad works the same way. However, most advertising works its way through the same general process. The steps in this process can be referred to as perception, communication, learning and persuasion. While these are steps in a process, they also identify the primary effects of an advertisement on a view. In other words, certain features of an ad are there to aid in the viewer's perception, communication learning and persuasion. First, perception is the process by which the viewer receives messages through the various senses, interprets the message, and files them away in memory. There are three concepts that are important in the perception of advertising: (1) attention, (2) interest, and (3) memorability.

Attention is a mental state indicating some level of awareness, that the mind is engaged, and that it is focused on something; in other words, tuned in. Advertising that grabs attention is intriguing, novel, unusual or surprising. Relatedly, the biggest perceptual problem for advertising is inattention. Many advertising messages simply wash over viewers without any attention being paid to them. Another problem is divided attention, when the audience is doing something else and is only half listening or half watching the ad. Many ads get half the mind and one eye. Accordingly, if the ad does not give noticed, it is very difficult, then for the message to make any impression. As Scorse (1987: 18) points out, "you can not save souls in an empty church". Therefore, most advertising is designed to be intrusive. In advertising an intrusive message is one that is hard to ignore. Two points should be considered in this regard: (1) the amount of intrusiveness needed varies with the medium, the product category, and the interest level of the consumer; (2) an ad can be intrusive without being bold and brash. Moreover, when more messages are presented to people than they are able to concentrate on, they have to sort out the messages some way. Selection Perception is the term used to describe how we sort those messages, according to what interests us or what we agree with. We filter out the items that do not interest us and that we do not agree with, and we simply do not pay any attention to those messages.

The next level of perception is interest, which can be defined as a state of absorption in the

message. It differs from attention in that there is an element of curiosity, concern, or fascination bonding the viewer to the message. Interest, therefore, occurs when a message is relevant to people; that is, it addresses them with something that they care about. The problem, however, is that interest is a momentary thing and it dies easily as attention shifts. A message that is interesting is one that has 'holding power' rather than stopping power. It stimulates curiosity in order to maintain interest and make the viewer want to know more (Gibbs, 2002; Given, 2005; Svanlund, 2007; Philips, 2000; Mc Quarrie et al., 2003). The last level of perception is memorability. It is very important to advertisers not only that their messages are heard, but also that they have "sticking power"; the power to lock into the mind. Ads are effective when "they get in your head and stay there" (Editor's Galley: 1988: 2).

Psycholinguistics research has shown that the human memory is like a filing cabinet. Advertisements are filed according to some personal pattern of organization using slots, or files, that contain related information. Ad messages are usually compressed and restructured to fit into the individual filing system. Sometimes the message is changed beyond recognition. In this connection, Bernbach (1980: 206) points out that "most readers come away from their reading not with a clear, precise detailed registration of the contents on their minds, but rather with a vague, misty idea". Sometimes, most information is filed as fragments or traces. These fragments are pulled back to the 'top' of the mind by the use of cues; which are certain words or visuals that will elicit previously learned information. Accordingly, in order to be memorable, the message has to be easy to compress for filing. That is why writers develop key phrases like slogans and key visuals for television. Also, psychologists know that it is easier to remember things that are grouped rather than separate elements. This is important for advertising designers who use the graphic principle of grouping to bring things together physically that belong together, by using placement and space. In addition, repeating an advertisement helps reinforce the message and locks it into the mind. As psychologists argue, people need to hear something three times before it crosses the threshold of perception and enters into memory. The ad that gets through the perceptual process is described as having impact. Impact refers to an advertisement's ability to control the viewer's perceptual process overcoming audience indifference, grabbing attention, maintaining interest, and anchoring the product firmly in memory.

The second element of the advertising process is communication. As mentioned before, an advertisement is a message about a product, service or an idea that attempts to motivate or persuade people in some way. Next, I will discuss three characteristics of communication that works: clarity, completeness, and organization. If advertising is to communicate effectively, it must present its message clearly. This is harder than one might think because clarity can be compromised both at the sending end and the receiving end. Clarity is measured by the level of understanding of the viewers. The ad is clear if it is free from impediments and obstacles to communication, such as undefined terms, unfamiliar references, poor organization, and faulty logic. One way to strengthen the clarity of an advertisement is to make it single-minded. Many ads suffer from a kitchen sink strategy with too many points crammed into too little space. As Stauderman (1985: 4) explained, "it is virtually imperative that we take just one aspect of the product (the most important one) and talk only about that. It is hard enough job ... getting just that one point into the viewers head". In addition, one of the most difficult problems in communication is to know how much to say and when to quit. If you say too much, you may bore your audience. If you say too little, you over simplify the topic until it does not make sense. The amount of completeness needed varies with the message. Finally, the way a message is put together, both words and visuals, determines how the viewer proceeds through it. Ineffective communication can result from poor order.

The third element of the advertising process is "learning". To advertising professionals, learning means becoming informed or gaining knowledge about the product or service being advertised. That is, advertising provides information; it teaches people about products and services. There are two primary schools of thought in psychology about how society acquires knowledge. The connectionists believe people learn things by making associations for which they receive rewards; the cognitive theorists believe people learn by acquiring insight, understanding, or comprehension of the whole picture. As for advertising is concerned both schools are right. Advertising seeks to develop both associations and understanding. The process of making connections and linking ideas, called associations, is particularly important to how advertising works (Preston 1982: 5). Advertising frequently tries to link a product or service to a certain situation, activity, lifestyle, or type of person. Image transfer occurs when a product takes on characteristics of these associations. The idea is that when people think of these situations, they also think of the product. Some products, like BMW and Rolex watches, are linked with successful executive lifestyles.

On the other hand, cognitive learning explains how understanding is developed from pieces of information that serve as cues. It focuses on comprehension and understanding based on insight. In other words, people acquire little pieces of information until all of a sudden they see the big picture. Advertising uses cognitive understanding to follow the logic of an argument, make discriminations and see differences, compare and contrast features, comprehend reasons, and, in general make sense of important ideas. When something is learned, that means the information or experience has been anchored in memory. Consumers who have tried a product and linked it have learned something positive from the experience. They likely will use it again. That how "brand loyalty" is built up from a series of satisfactory experiences. As Caples (1975: 47) points out, "people who buy once are best proposals for buying again".

The last element of the advertising process is "persuasion". Persuasion is defined as a conscious intent on the part of one person to influence another. More specifically, persuasion affects the structure of people's beliefs, opinions, attitudes, convictions and motivations; these, in turn, motivate people to act. An attitude is a state of mind that is positive, or negative, or neutral. Changing an attitude is very difficult. Attitudes are entrenched deep in people's psyches and are interwoven with lots of other related values and opinions. When people's emotions are touched, they experience a strong personal feeling or some other kind of passion. Ads use appeals to the emotions. In addition, a successful persuasive message builds conviction a strong belief in something. Conviction usually results when proof is provided or an argument is delivered effectively. Advertising is believable when product claims are proved. Also when an advertisement provides reasons to buy a product or service, it is meant to develop conviction (Bucciarelli, 2007; Barsalou, 2003).

### **Strategies of Advertising**

The ultimate goal of creating an appropriate image for a product is to embed it into social consciousness. The three primary strategies used today to enhance product recognizability are known generally as repetition, positioning and image creation. Repetition is a basic marketing technique. An advertiser for example, can capture the attention of prospective customers by repeated appeals to buy some product. Positioning, on the other hand, is the placing or targeting of a product for the right people.

Creating an image for a product is fashioning a personality "for it with which a particular type of consumer can identify. The idea behind creating an image for the product is, clearly, to speak directly to particular types of individuals, not to every one, so that these individuals can see their own personalities represented in the lifestyle images created by advertisements for certain products. Two techniques can be used to entrench the image associated with certain kinds of products; the first can be called mythologization, and the second is 'logo' design. Mythologization is the strategy of imbuing brand names, logos, product design and commercials intentionally with some mythic meaning. As Beasley and Danesi (2002: 12) explains, the quest for beauty, the conquest of death, among other mythic themes, are constantly being woven into the specific textualities that advertisers create for certain products? Another way in which advertisers entrench product image effectively is through logo design. For example, the McDonald's golden arches logo. Most people today go to fast-food restaurants to be with family or with friends, so as to get a meal quickly, and /or because the atmosphere is congenial. Most would also admit that the food at a McDonald's restaurant is affordable and so the service is fast and polite.

Indeed, many people today probably feel more "at home" at a McDonald's restaurant than their own households. This is, in fact, the semiotic key to unlocking the meaning that the McDonald's logo is designed to create. The arches reverberate with mythic symbolism, beckoning good people to march through them triumphantly, into a paradise of law and order, cleanliness, friendliness, hospitality, hard work, self-discipline, and family values. In a sense, McDonald's is comparable to an organized religion. From the menu to the uniforms McDonald's exacts and imposes standardization, in the same way that the world's organized religions impose standardized interpretations of their sacred texts and uniformity in the appearance and behavior of their clergy. The message created unconsciously by the golden arches logo is therefore that, like paradise, McDonald's is a place that will do it all for you, as one of the company's slogans so aptly phrases it.

### **"Schemas" and Advertising (Cultural Background)**

"Schemas", or "schemata" as they are sometimes called allow us to identify immediately the type of text we are dealing with. In Widdowson's view (1983: 34) they are "cognitive constructs which allow for the organization of information in long-term memory". Thus we are able to relate the general (and specific) type of language used in a given discourse, such as advertisements, to a general schematic framework. We can relate this to the Arabic situations by saying that when we see the endline Daz yaghsil akthar bay adan "Daz washes whiter" (for "Daz" washing powder), our schematic knowledge confirms that we are dealing here with language of advertising, since in conventional discourse the comparative form should be linked to a following noun phrase, which is absent here. In this particular example we may ask: Daz washes lighter than what ? Of equal interest with regard to schematic knowledge is the (sociocultural) aspect of behavior in the target culture. In other words, we should not just be able to identify and interpret certain facts about the information conveyed in an advertising discourse but we should also "be aware of a range of different attitudes to them, even if we do not personally share those attitudes" (Wallace, 1987: 38). As an example of this we may cite the Egyptian television commercial for a brand of tea called al-Arousa "(the) bride", in which there is neither a dialogue nor a voice-over presentation. The scene is one of a young woman dressed in white representing purity, that is, of the tea. Whereas in a Muslim culture the impact of a bride dressed in white connotes absolute purity, this connotation has been partially lost in many Western cultures as a result of contemporary social values. In this commercial, the following caption which finally unfolds on the screen

lends further credence to the view that the meaning we derive from texts are "largely socially determined" (ibid.: 38):

yasil ila haythu la yasil ayy shay akhar

"It reaches the parts other teas cannot reach"

By elevating the quality of this brand of tea above all other brands, one is left in little doubt about the importance of tea in (in this case) Egyptian society. The advertising technique employed in this example leads us to think immediately of the concept of intertextuality which was introduced earlier. Intertextuality has been described neatly as texts [which] are recognized in terms of their dependence on other relevant texts. Essentially it amounts to the relationship between text and the various language or signifying practices of a culture and its relation to those texts which articulate for it the possibilities of that culture. Therefore, one reason for the success of an advertisement or commercial may well be the underlying relationship between its presentation and a literary association familiar to the target audience.

In summary the context of situation, that is, the social situation in which a statement occurs, is a vital element in our interpretation of the message of advertisements. The addresses must "draw on different levels of contextual knowledge to interrupt them" (Wallace, 1987: 29). Indeed, advertisements are one of the most prominent culture-specific (ibid: 17) forms of discourse. But it is not only the situational context of a statement that determines its form, and the way it is interpreted, as Foucault (1992) has shown. The verbal context, that is, the position of a given statement in relation to other statements which precede and follow it, is also a fundamental consideration in this regard. In the words of Fairclough (1992: 47-48), "one must take a step back to the discursive formation and the articulation of discursive formations in orders of discourse to explicate the context-text-meaning relationship". This relationship will be born in mind in the next section of the paper which deals with some rhetorical categories in Arabic advertising.

### **Rhetorical Devices in Arabic Advertising**

Leech (1966: 175) selects rhyme, alliteration and parallelisms as "special patterns of regularity" in advertising language. This section will examine the occurrence of a number of rhetorical devices in Arabic advertising, in particular those of rhyme and rhythm. It seems especially appropriate to discuss these "schemes" (ibid : 186) with regard to Arabic, since the language boasts such a rich tradition of oratory dating back to pre-Islamic times.

**Parallelism:** Parallelisms, or "formal schemes" (ibid: 190), appear to be as much a characteristic of Arabic advertising as they are of English. In Leech's view (ibid: 146) parallelism is one of the devices of co-ordination at group rank "level which he considers to be" an especially cohesional factor in advertising language", particularly in disjunctive language situations where "the group tends to be the largest unit to play a significant role in communication". The main effect of this device would seem to be a reinforcement of the qualities of a product in an almost mnemonic fashion through a repetition of linguistic patterns. There are many examples of parallelism to be found in Arabic television commercials and press advertisements. As in English, this device is normally assisted by layout. Examples of parallelism in Arabic are exemplified by the following phrases taken from the advertisement for "Sparkle" shampoo:

M. El-daly, An Understanding of the Discourse of Advertising

<u>li-I-shaar al-duhni</u>	“for oily hair”
<u>li-I-shaar al-jaaff</u>	“for dry hair”
<u>li I-shaaral-aadi</u>	“for normal hair”

A similar example was found in a press advertisement for "Toyota" vehicles. The technique is enhanced by the printing of the adjective iqti sadiyya - “economical”

<u>Iqti sadiyya hina tashtarehaa</u>	“economical when you buy it”
<u>Iqti sadiyya hina tastakhdimuhaa</u>	“economical when you use it”
<u>Iqti sadiyya hina tab ouhaa</u>	“economical when you sell it”

Parallelism may take a number of forms. Consider, for instance, the following example taken from an advertisement for a hair removing appliance called "Feminin":

Jawda la tuqaaran ... siar la yunafas “in comparable quality ... unbeatable price”

In this example, the parallel effect is created less by repetition of a key attribute of the product than by rhythm and parallelism of the two passive verbs and the negative particle (1a).

The following example of parallelism is taken from a television commercial for "Milkyland" yoghurt :

<u>Miya f I-miyya haei</u>	“one hundred percent real”
<u>Miya f I-miyya tabii</u>	“one hundred percent natural”
<u>Miya f I-miyya tazig</u>	“one hundred percent fresh”

The placing of two adjectives in succession with similar forms, (hae ei and tabii), is important for the continuity of rhythm and rhyme. Moreover, what can only be appreciated from listening to the voice-over is the rhythmic effect created by the precise staccato reading of each line.

**Rhyme and Rhythm:** When assessing rhyme and rhythm in Arabic advertising, two possible associations immediately come to mind. First, the rhyming effect in many advertisements is created by a combination of long vowel plus consonant at the end of each line or each half of a two part slogan. One of many such examples can be seen in a press advertisement for "Braun" food processors: Kull al - taqdir fi jawdat al-tandir - “[your guests'] appreciation comes entirely from the quality of preparation”

Of particular interest here is not just the rhyme created by the long "i" vowel plus final syllables of taqdir and tandir, but also the assonance occasioned by the morphological symmetry of the verbal nouns. It was noted above that Arabic lends itself well to this type of scheme. A second technique used by the copywriters is based on rhyming and rhythmic prose techniques (saj) of the classical and neo-classical periods. In advertising we find examples such as two morphologically similar words occurring in close contiguity. An example of this can be found in the following press advertisement for "Si-Si" shampoo:



min al- in aya li I-him aya

"from care to protection"

Many examples of this kind can be found in both television commercials and press advertisements. Here is the signature line for the advertisement for "GMC" water heater:

kaamul al-ijaada ..... taani a I- riyaada

"total excellence has made us pioneers"

Another interesting example is taken from the commercial for a brand of butter called "Shahiyya":

shahiyya zibda taza ...miyya miyya

"Shahiyya is one hundred percent fresh butter"

zibda shahiyya ..... iz-zibda ill hiyya

"Shahiyya butter is the real thing"

Worthy of note here is that the word 'miyya' been pronounced in its SA form, namely, miea, it would not have been possible to create a perfect rhyme with the SA feminine singular free-standing pronoun hiya. However, the ECA variant 'hiyya' rhymes perfectly with miyya. In this connection, there are other occasions when the choice of ECA as the register for an advertisement may well have been influenced by the ensuing rhyme. It is clear that an effective rhyme can be important promotional device for a product. Consider, for instance, the following commercial for "Gawhara" tea:

sh ay ah ay ah ay ... shout taomuh kam l a zz ay

" tea, tea, tea ... see how wonderful it tastes"

An important aspect of this example is that very few appropriate words in SA would rhyme with the word 'sh ay', but the expression 'izz ay' provides the copywriter with a solution since it not only rhymes perfectly with 'sh ay', but it also fits neatly here in its normal post-posed syntactic position (Gully 2003: 14).

**Alliteration:** In its strictest sense alliteration only occurs where there is repetition of the initial consonant or consonant cluster, as in this example taken from Leech (1966: 187): "Built Better by Burco for you". Leech observes, however (1969: 92) that it is the main stressed syllable of a word which generally carries the alliteration not necessarily its initial syllable". Only one example of conventional alliteration was found in the material used for this preliminary study, a disappointingly low number compared to, say, English advertising where alliteration is a common device. The following example is from the endline for the television commercial for Snack "chocolate wafers":

snack ...il-vvayfir ish-shaeiyya ish-shahiyya min k adbir

"Snack ...the naughty, tasty wafer from Cadbury"

The alliteration here is created by the initial sh- phonemes of the words shaeiyya and shahiyya. Leech (ibid.: 92) calls this an example of "reverse rhyme", in which words share an initial vowel sound in addition to the sound of the initial consonant or consonant cluster.

## Concluding Reflections

This paper adopts the view that discourse, especially discourse as complex as advertising, always holds out more to be analyzed and leaves more to be said. It has been argued that advertising must be looked at as a social discourse with rhetorical force. That is, it has influenced not only the structure of language and the modality of lifestyle, but also the content of routine daily acts of communicative exchanges. It has ventured into the domain of persuasion, and its rhetorical categories have become omnipresent in contemporary social discourse. And, because of the growing effectiveness of its persuasion techniques, advertising has become entrenched into social discourse by virtue of its widespread diffusion throughout society. Everywhere we turn, we are bound to find some ad message designed to persuade people to buy a product. What needs to be emphasized is that even though we absorb the messages transmitted by ads and commercials, and although these may have some unconscious effects on our behaviour, we accept media images only if they suit our already established preferences. If we complain about the shallowness of our television and advertising culture, we really have no one to blame but ourselves. The language of advertising has also had an effect on the language of ordinary communication. Advertising language reduces thoughts to formulas, phrases, jingles, slogans and so on.

Accordingly, we must be aware of the subtexts that ads and commercials generate because when the human mind is aware of the hidden codes in texts, it will be better able to fend off the undesirable effects that many texts may cause. Accordingly, interdisciplinary approach may be of great value in reaching accurate understanding of the ads' messages. Ideas from the semiotic theory, pragmatics, psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics can help to demystify advertising creativity. Only in this way consumers can buy products, not for the magical qualities suggested by such advertising, but by relying on critical thought.

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