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FEATURES OF SOCIAL ADVERTISING DISCOURSE

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Abstract

The article dwells upon the main distinctive features of social advertising discourse. We aim at proving the existence of social advertising discourse as a separate type within the advertising discourse and analyse its features, functions and aims. The main distinctive features of a social advertisement are its addresser and addressee, channels, motives, tones and presuppositions of the addressee. Another feature of social advertising discourse is its unique speech strategies. We analyze examples of social advertising texts in three languages, English, French and Russian, and create a classification of speech strategies. The study has shown that speech strategies used in social advertising discourse differ from the ones used in commercial advertising discourse and cannot be applied within it. In conclusion, we summarise the main similarities of social advertising discourse with commercial advertising discourse and stress its main distinctive features, which make social advertising discourse a separate and independent type existing within the discourse of advertising.

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1. Introduction

Advertising is one of the most widely spread social phenomena. It can be seen on television and in the papers, in the streets and magazines, heard on the radio. In general, the aim of advertising is to inform the society about new products and services as well as to influence their behaviour.

Social advertising, on the other hand, does not advertise products, but rather attitude to life, which may (or may not) be seen in perspective. Social advertising discourse must have its own peculiar features as well as communicative strategies.

2. Problem Statement

2.1. Advertising discourse as a type of discourse

Social advertising appeared in the beginning of the XX century in the USA and became known during the WWI with the creation of the poster *I want YOU for U.S. Army*. Even though the message was partly political, it still can be considered a part of social campaigns taking part at that period. Today, the American Advertising Federation organizes the annual advertising contest, where one of the nominations is dedicated to social adverts

A.V. Olyanich (Olyanich, 2004) classifies discourse types according to the needs they satisfy (see Table 01).

Table 01. Types of discourse according to needs

| Need | Type of discourse |
|-------------------------|--|
| Reproduction | Common intimate discourse |
| Life maintenance, food | Gastronomic discourse |
| Material sources | 1. Business discourse 2. Criminal discourse |
| Information | 1. Information or mass discourse 2. Computer discourse |
| Power | Political discourse |
| Belief | Religious discourse |
| Equality | 1. Law discourse 2. War discourse |
| Transfer of information | 1. Pedagogical discourse 2. Scientific discourse |
| Transfer of skills | Professional discourse |
| Aesthetics | 1. Artistic discourse 2. Etiquette discourse 3. Gastronomic discourse in terms of table manners 4. Functional (fantastic, fairy tale) discourse |
| Health security | 1. Medical discourse 2. Preventive medical discourse |
| Social security | 1. Ritual discourse 2. Management discourse |
| Tense release | 1. Invective discourse 2. Humour discourse |
| Argumentation | Rhetorical discourse |
| Self-presentation | 1. Presentation discourse 2. Pedagogical discourse |
| Transfer of values | 1. Historical and cultural discourse 2. Pedagogical discourse |

Another classification by V.I. Karasik (2002) presents the following discourse types division:

- Institutional discourse
 - Pedagogical
 - Religious
 - Scientific
 - Political
 - Medical
 - Advertising
 - Mass-information
 - Sport
- Common discourse

The author defines institutional discourse as communication within social roles. This type has specific patterns, which make it different from the common type.

Other researches, such as N.N. Mironova, Y. Khabermas, A.V. Anisimova and others, do not identify advertising discourse as a separate type.

2.2. Features of advertising discourse

Before defining advertising discourse, we need to define advertising in general. We often perceive advertising as a social phenomenon rather than linguistic one (Baig, 2013). It can be viewed as a mass communication type where informative images are created. These images aim at groups of people and impel them to perform a certain action or choice. The main feature of advertising is anthropocentrism because each advertising text is made to serve human social needs. Advertising discourse is a means of social regulations and influence on social groups. What is more, advertising mirrors the current state of cultural development of the society.

The classification of discourse types by V.I. Karasik (Karasik, 2004) is based on such discourse features as:

- Typical participants
- Chronotope (time and place)
- Aims
- Values
- Strategies
- Precedent texts
- Discourse formulae

The communicator and the recipients are the two typical participants of advertising discourse. The communicator is the one who creates and transfers an advertising message; the recipient is the one who receives and interprets it. The chronotope differs according to the type of advertising, be that street adverts or television ones.

There are two main aims of advertising: getting attention and impelling to perform some action. A. A. Dedyukhin (Dedyukhin, 2006) determines 6 aims, which are:

- Information
- Assessment
- Argumentation
- Regulation
- Concept-forming
- Modelling

The values in advertising discourse correspond to the values of the society. These values can be real or impelled, and they are based on social needs. Advertising discourse has the power to regulate the way of thinking and lifestyle which are valued at the moment. Product description, assessment, argumentation, interest consideration and attracting attention are the main advertising strategies (Medvedeva, 2003).

Precedent texts are texts important to an individual educationally and emotionally. They are well known within the society and culture, both for predecessors and contemporaries. These texts may serve as basis for new texts. There are four types of precedent texts used in advertising: poetry and literature, idioms, films and cartoons, background knowledge of culture, history and science (Iliysova & Amiri, 2009). Texts can be both quoted directly or modified. For example, Russian electronics shop M.Video created a slogan *Любви вся техника покорна* (*Love tyrannises all the devices*), which is a modified version of A.Pushkin's *Любви все возрасты покорны* (*Love tyrannises all the ages* – translation by Charles H. Johnston).

2.3. Persuasion

Persuasion or the influence of speech is motivated and aimed communication (Issers, 2008). Persuasive discourse occurs in a situation when one of its participants does a conscious attempt to influence their opponent. Persuasion is a vital aspect of advertising as it the very essence of it. The mechanisms used in persuasion are called speech strategies. Speech strategy is a combination of speech tactics or steps which aim to fulfil the goal of communication; it is a system of choices and combinations of these steps governed by the strategic aim. For advertising, the aim is mostly about positive and memorable display of goods or services (Petrova & Chernikova, 2015). Another view on communication strategy is, however, that strategies appear only when there is a specific communication problem.

O.S. Issers proposes a classification based on their functions and wideness (Issers, 2008). The classification is presented in Table 2. The number of small strategies is numerous because of the number of possible situations.

Table 02. Types of communication strategies

| Main | | | Additional | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|------------|------|----------------|-------------------------|------|------------------------|-------------------------|------|-------------------|---------------|------|
| Semantic (cognitive) | | | Pragmatic | | | Diological | | | Rhetorical | | |
| Discreditation | Submission | Etc. | Image-building | Forming emotional state | Etc. | Control over the topic | Control over initiative | Etc. | Getting attention | Dramatization | Etc. |

Within each strategy exist smaller steps, or tactics. Each tactic aims at achieving the purpose of communication.

However, the existing classifications of speech strategies in the discourse of advertising do not fully correspond to the discourse of social advertising. Thus, there is a need to classify

3. Research Questions

In this research we will focus on defining the features of social advertising discourse and analysing its communicative strategies. Our main research question is: Can social advertising discourse be viewed as a separate type? To answer this question, we need to focus on a range of subquestions, such as: What are the main features of social advertising discourse? Which speech strategies are used within it? Do they differ from the strategies of advertising discourse?

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to compare communicative strategies in English, French and Russian social advertising discourse and to prove the existence of social advertising discourse as a separate discourse type.

5. Research Methods

5.1. Sample

The sample consisted of 135 English, 123 French and 192 Russian social advertising posters. The posters were singled out from Google and Yandex search engines on *social ad*, *social advertisement*, *social advertising*, *publicité sociale (contre)*, *publicité sociale française*, *affiche sociale (contre)*, *социальная реклама*, *российская социальная реклама* queries.

5.2. Synchronic linguistic description and comparative method

Before analyzing, we proposed several strategies which could exist within social advertising discourse. Each sample poster was analyzed on several layers: text (linguistic means and grammatical constructions), graphics and their interconnection. We classified posters according to their message and singled out concepts and themes as well as 5 strategies.

5.3. Literature review

To help us contextualize the research, we have studied the existing information concerning social advertising and speech strategies. This information served as basis for further findings.

6. Findings

6.1. Features of social advertising discourse

Social advertising discourse differs from commercial advertising in all main aspects. However, it still does not have a strict definition either in research papers or in official documents (Danilevskaya, 2012; Terskikh, 2015). The communicator is an institution, governmental bodies or other non-commercial organizations. The recipient is, for most part, any representative of the society disregarding their social status. The channels are similar to those of commercial advertising: television, street stands, radio and press (the last two, however, are rare). Social advertising

aims to introduce positive social changes and does not aim at financial profit. Due to this, the recipient usually does not possess any presuppositions.

From the linguistic point of view, social adverts can be characterised as of high usage of imperative, interrogative and exclamatory sentences and unusual punctuation. Stylistic means include various tropes, both linguistic and extralinguistic.

6.2. Universal and culture-specific concepts

We have classified all texts according to the concept they represent. One poster can display more than one concept. Concepts help us single out the most burning problems and issues existing in the society.

Table 03. Percentage of concepts within the overlooked cultures

| Concept | Culture | | |
|----------------|---------|--------|---------|
| | English | French | Russian |
| Bad habits | 16% | 5% | 16% |
| Business | 0% | 0% | 3% |
| Children | 8% | 2% | 24% |
| Corruption | 0% | 0% | 2% |
| Culture | 0% | 1% | 16% |
| Discrimination | 7% | 19% | 0% |
| Health | 13% | 16% | 4% |
| Help | 1% | 0% | 7% |
| Law | 0% | 4% | 0% |
| Life standards | 1% | 31% | 0% |
| Nature | 24% | 0% | 12% |
| Pets | 1% | 0% | 3% |
| Politics | 0% | 1% | 0% |
| Safety | 27% | 11% | 24% |
| Violence | 10% | 2% | 1% |
| War | 1% | 0% | 0% |

6.3. Universal and culture-specific communicative strategies

We have identified five communicative strategies and counted their use rate.

Table 04. Communication strategies

| Concept | Culture | | |
|---------------------------|---------|--------|---------|
| | English | French | Russian |
| Intimidation | 51% | 46% | 23% |
| Action incentive | 29% | 22% | 27% |
| Dialog with the recipient | 18% | 11% | 19% |

| | | | |
|----------------|----|-----|-----|
| Mockery | 2% | 7% | 9% |
| Result display | 0% | 14% | 22% |

Intimidation strategy is based on fear. Intimidation uses fear as a tool for persuading people and changing their behaviour. *War, safety, bad habits, discrimination, violence and health* are the concepts, which this strategy is often used with. This strategy is pragmatic, and the essence of it is mentioning something dangerous or scary. The tactics used in the strategy are appealing to statistics, demonstration of consequences, comparison, usage of scary words and negation of the obvious. Here is an example of comparison.



Figure 01. City of Milwaukee Health Department social advert

Action incentive strategy implies, for the most part, the use of imperatives. Its main aim is to directly show the recipient what to do. It usually goes with such concepts as *children, safety, culture* and *help*. The tactics within the strategy are ordering, demonstration of result and agitation. An example of an order can be the slogan of Volkswagen campaign *Drive carefully*.

Dialog strategy is of high importance as direct address to the recipient makes them more involved in the message. Direct addressing is realized with second person pronouns in statements and questions. They make a message more personal, almost as if the name of the recipient is used, which is considered the best way of addressing. The two main tactics within this strategy are addressing the recipient and asking questions.

Mocking strategy can be defined as an attempt to humiliate a person or an issue. On the other hand, its aim is not to humiliate but to present a negative aspect in a humorous light. It is a complicated linguistic phenomenon consisting of two components - humour and evaluation – and does not exist without one of them. It can not be considered as true humour, as humour is a combination of funny and kind, while mocking is funny and negative.

The fifth strategy is demonstration of the obvious. Its function is to demonstrate a well-known or obvious idea, which is lost among issues that are more important. This strategy is culture-specific for Russian and French contexts. This can be explained with the help of context theory of E. Hall and F. Trompenaars. According to them, there exist high- and low-context culture. In high-context cultures, there is a constant information exchange, and, in most cases,

people do not need extra communication and explanations, as they are familiar with the context. The example below represents a short phrase *They were born the third* and a photo of a famous Italian opera singer. The message of this advert is that abortions can possibly kill a genius child.



Figure 02. Russian anti-abortion advert

7. Conclusion

The study has shown that the discourse of advertising as a whole and the discourse of social advertising in particular is a complicated and versatile phenomenon. The main characteristic feature of this text type is that information is partly transmitted through non-verbal systems. During the research we have analyzed 135 English, 123 French and 192 Russian texts of posters belonging to social advertising. We have looked upon the concepts occurring in this type of discourse and have found universal and culture-specific concepts, as well as studied their frequency of occurrence. Five main speech strategies have been identified: intimidation, action incentive, dialog with the recipient, mockery and result display. Within each strategy, we have also looked upon the possible speech tactics. The last strategy can be considered as culture-specific within French and Russian discourse whilst the other four are universal as they occur in both cultural contexts. The question of speech influence within this type of discourse is open for further study

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