# Exploring the grammar of ads: a corpus-based study of grammar and meaning in discourse

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Mentor: izv.prof.dr.sc. Gabrijela Buljan

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# Exploring the Grammar of Ads: A Corpus-based Study of Grammar and Meaning in Discourse

The purpose of this paper was to explore how various grammatical devices can be effectively used to fulfil the primary purposes of advertising language. Earlier studies have shown that advertising language can be characterised by vagueness and syntactic simplicity, the use of metaphorical language, lexical innovation and special uses of personal pronouns. In this paper, the focus was on product and non-product print advertisements, which were explored with the view of establishing connections between the form - namely the grammatical constructions used in advertisements – and their functions. The main assumption underlying in this paper is that grammar may be strategically used in the discourse of advertising to help advertisements achieve their main functions – to persuade, to inform and to entertain, but also to catch the attention of the target audience. The corpus of data for this paper features 59 print ads chosen randomly by browsing through websites featuring advertisements. Due to its exploratory nature, this paper was not based on any statistical analyses, but solely on descriptive analysis. The results of this study largely support our expectation – the grammatical constructions used in ads affect the discourse of advertising and the allow ads to fulfil their functions. Therefore, the conclusion drawn in this paper is that advertisers can control the message(s) and meaning(s) by choice of certain grammatical, i.e. linguistic constructions, making advertising subject to advertiser's manipulation.

**Key words**: grammatical devices; advertising; sociolinguistics; language; discourse.

# Contents

# 1. Introduction

Advertising plays a great role in the capitalist society we live in. We are surrounded by various advertisements, be it in audio, visual or audio-visual form. The main mission of an advertisement is to persuade us to buy a product, take some kind of action or change our opinion about a certain matter. According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, the word *(to) advertise* is derived from Latin *advertere*, meaning 'to direct one's attention to; give heed'. This implies that another function of advertising is to inform the target audience. If we take into consideration the attention-catching role of advertising, we can say that an advertisement first has to get the audience's attention in order to actually advertise or promote something. This is when the third function of advertisements occurs – to entertain. Advertisements that are entertaining, funny or generally engaging are more likely to draw attention to themselves and possibly also to produce the desired effect – 'selling' the target audience on the advertised product. Advertisements seem to be a fruitful topic for a more socially engaged kind of linguistics; i.e. sociolinguistics. Sociolinguistics prioritizes exploring language with respect to its context of use (Biber & Finegan 1994) and has always laid emphasis on the social, communicative dimension of language. However, whereas in the middle of the 20th century sociolinguists mainly focused on exploring the patterns of variation as they correlated with the social characteristics of the speaker (Labov 1960s), interest in how language use varies from situation to situation, while existent (e.g. focus on the stylistic variation defined as the degree of formality in the Labovian tradition), has been less pronounced or has remained fairly unacknowledged (Biber & Finegan 1994: 5). Still, one cannot but agree that "speakers do not typically 'say the same thing' in conversation as in lectures, reports, academic papers, and congratulatory telegrams" (Biber & Finegan 1994: 6). In this paper we will focus on one type of a situationally-defined variety, viz. advertisments. Studies of advertising language are not too abundant (Bruthiaux 1994: 139), but the topic has attracted some interest in recent times (Vestergaard & Schroder 1985, Bruthiaux 1996, 2000, Rush 1998, Cook 2001, Simpson 2001 etc.).

In this paper, we will study a corpus of English written advertisements to see if any correlations can be found between the choice of particular grammatical constructions and the main functions of advertising language: viz. to draw attention, entertain and persuade. It should be noted, however, that our analysis will be of a preliminary, exploratory nature in that the correlations we propose should not be understood in the technical statistical sense. Further, by "grammar", we shall mean

any features of morphology, syntax, phonology, but also lexis and word formation devices whose (over-)use may be a feature typical of advertising language. This is based on the idea that the creators of ads make deliberate uses of particular constructions to make the messages conveyed in their advertisements stronger, funnier, thought-provoking or just more interesting. In sum, the aim of this paper is to bring to light the features of grammar in ads which presumably allow advertisements to fulfil their main functions.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 will cover the theoretical framework for the paper. In Section 3 we present the methodology of the study, focusing on the description of the corpus of data collected for the analysis. The analysis is presented in Section 4, and is organized into four subsections, each focusing on the type of features of advertising exemplified with authentic corpus data. We summarize our findings and conclude our study in Section 5.

## 2. Theoretical preliminaries

### 2.1. *On register in general*

In his work *Politics*, Aristotle wrote that social instinct is implanted in all men by nature. This means that an individual cannot survive alone. For the human race to survive and advance, we need to cooperate. In order to cooperate, it is essential that we communicate. For successful communication, we need a person who is producing the message - the addressor; and the person who is the intended listener or reader - the addressee (Biber & Conrad 2009). However, the transmitted message can have a different meaning in different situations. For example, there is a semantic difference between "Stay strong" said to a grieving person in a funeral and the same utterance made to your gym mate. The (re)shaping and the construction of language in the discourse of everyday life in different social and situational contexts is the target of study in sociolinguistics (Biber & Finegan 1994). Sociolinguistics is the "study of language in relation to society" (Hudson 1996: 4). As Biber & Conrad claim (2009: 4), "variability is inherent in human language: people use different linguistic forms on different occasions, and different speakers of a language will say the same things in different ways". Much sociolinguistic research in the middle of the 20th century was concerned with exploring systematic linguistic differences between different groups of speakers defined by their place of residence, ethnicity, socio-economic status or gender (Biber & Conrad 2009: 5). Thus, for example, a study carried out in New York City by Labov (1960) found

that the chance that an American speaker would use the statusful rhotic or 'r-ful' pronunciation of the non-prevocalic /r/ in words like *car*, *bar* etc. correlated predictably with their socioeconomic standing, such that speakers belonging to higher socioeconomic rungs, and interestingly, those belonging to the middle classes, used the rhotic pronunciation statistically significantly more frequently than working class speakers. Such varieties of language, i.e. those that differ based on the social category of the speakers are termed *social dialects* (on analogy with geographical dialects) (Biber & Conrad 2009: 5). However, an important aspect of language variation is that which occurs across particular situations and results in various types of text, like newspaper articles, sermons, novels, etc. In other words, next to social dialects, there are varieties of language known as *registers*, *genres*, and *styles*. The latter set of terms is "used to refer to language varieties associated with situational uses" (Biber & Finegan 1994: 4). The terminology is far from settled, and the terms above have sometimes been used in overlapping ways so we will focus in particular on the term *register* and will use it to refer to the variety under study here, viz. the language of advertising.

Interest in the study of situational varieties can be traced back to researchers like Malinowski (1923), Firth (1935), Hymes (1964, 1984), Giglioli (1972), etc. However, in this paper, we shall follow Biber & Conrad's (2009) perspective on registers and register analysis. According to these authors, a register "is a variety associated with a particular situation of use (including particular communicative purposes) (2009: 6)." The analysis of registers involves three components: the analysis of the situational context (whether they are given in speech or writing, whether they are interactive, what their purpose is), the linguistic features (their typical lexical and grammatical features) and the functional relationship between the two. The latter is based on the idea that particular linguistic features occur in a particular register precisely **because** they are suitable for the purposes and the situational context of the register. We should add that the linguistic analysis involves the identification of *pervasive* linguistic features, viz. those that may also occur in other registers but seem particularly common in the register under study. To illustrate the steps that would be involved in a register analysis, consider the three aspects of the register of face-to-face conversation (Biber & Conrad 2009: 7). In step 1 we consider the situational characteristics of conversations that make it a special kind of variety; they involve direct interaction between participant (usually two that occupy the same space and time). Both must speak (in turns mainly), and while there are no restrictions on the topic of conversation, face-to-face conversations normally

involve a discussion of the events, thoughts and feelings related to the conversants' personal lives or the immediate context. The second step involves looking at the linguistic features of face-to-face conversation. Previous studies have revealed the following linguistic features as being common in this register: first person pronouns, second person pronouns and questions. As a third step, one needs to connect the two aspects of the analysis to provide a functional explanation for why a variety characterized situationally as involving direct interaction in the here and now should have the linguistic features that it does. The functional explanation is quite simple: it is only natural that a variety where conversants communicate directly about their own feelings and thoughts, or events that mainly concern themselves in one way or another, should feature frequent first person pronouns (self-references by the speaker), second-person pronouns (references to the addressee) or questions (as a feature of directness). There are some problems involved in register analysis, viz. establishing the appropriate degree of granularity – i.e. we may speak of quite general registers like academic papers, but we could also go more specific and talk about the register of an academic paper in biomedicine or linguistics. In this paper, we shall focus on the register of advertising. We will focus specifically on random product and non-product print ads because exploring advertisements as diverse as lonely hearts ads and e.g. product ads would bring too much variability in our database.

## 2.2. On advertising and the advertising register

In the world of advertising, companies and business groups act as the addressors and their target audience plays the role of the addressee. Their relation refers to "relative status, extent of shared knowledge, and amount of interaction among participants" (Biber & Conrad 2009). For Keller and Kotler, advertising is "any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services. Advertisers include not only business firms, but also charitable, non-profit and government agencies" (in Romanenko 2014: 4).

According to Cook (2001), advertisements are divided into so-called reason and tickle adverts. Reason adverts specify the needs and motives for purchasing (Koteyko 2015). In contrast, tickle advertisements do not give any product placement or a reason to buy the product (Koteyko 2015). Cook (2001) also distinguishes between hard-sell and soft-sell advertising. Hard-sell advertising is direct and exhortative, thus letting us know that our life would be better with a certain product.

Soft-sell advertising forsakes exhortation and relies on mood instead, making us more willing to purchase.

The purposes of advertisements are to persuade, inform and entertain by making use of various symbolic forms. Biber and Finegan, for instance claim that "advertisements are marked primarily by their focus on persuasion, but they might also have secondary purposes of transferring information and entertaining" (2009: 44). In the domain of advertising, the task is to explore and explain just how advertisements fulfil the three purposes. However, there is one prerequisite to being able to fulfil the three functions. To breathe life into an advertisement by giving it a purpose, the advertiser first has to get the viewer's attention. Thus, it is very important to make advertisement fresh, innovative and creative. One symbolic means of making advertisements stand out, inform, persuade and entertain is, of course, language, i.e. specific linguistic forms and constructions.

The language and functions of advertising have been studied from a variety of perspectives. For example, Leech (1966) contributed to studies of media advertising by exploring linguistic features like clause types, verbal groups, nominal groups, lexis and cohesion in his work. He points out the most common linguistic features of advertisements. As for clauses, Leech (1966) states that advertisements often use minor and non-finite clauses as independent clauses to enhance comprehension and he also gives importance to the use of imperatives and interrogatives for creating an impression of a conversation between the ad and the recipient. It is further claimed that advertisers prefer positives over negatives and that advertisements abound in if- and when- clauses. Another feature is the simplicity of lexis and of the verbal group and a characteristic abundance of pre-modifying adjectives used to emphasize the products' good traits.

Geis (1982) explores "the persuasive lexicon, syntax and speech acts associated with television advertising". He relies on the speech act theory and claims that advertisements present a good example of indirect speech acts, whereby advertisers indirectly tell people what to do by persuading people to buy their products or to practice a certain idea. Geis also discusses the concept of presupposition in the context of ads, meaning that, as consumers of an advertisement, we presuppose – based on the context of an advertisement – some information that is not explicitly featured in the ad.

Vestergaard and Schroder (1985) focus on the persuasive elements of advertising. Among the linguistic elements that contribute most to achieving the purpose of persuasion, they propose the use of simple sentences and cohesion and coherence which are possible even without formal cohesive markers.

Bruthiaux (1996) writes about personal advertisements and their simple, conventional syntax, morphology and lexicon. He emphasizes the absence of subordinate clauses, copulas, pronouns, function words and inflections and marks all of these features as features with the function of linguistic simplification. Other notable studies include Simpson (2001), Cook (2001) and Sherry & Schouten (2002). Simpson (2001) found that the discourse of advertising is similar to the discourse of politics while comparing the heavy use of pronouns *we* and *you* and features of parallelism, linguistic innovation and verbal play. Cook (2001) describes the discourse of advertising as a parasite discourse, because it functions by using features of other types of discourse, whereby he emphasizes the use of intertextuality. Sherry & Schouten (2002) note the use of poetry in advertising, which also implies the use of rhetorical devices in order to fulfil the functions of advertisements. Goddard (2001) and Bruthiaux (1996) recommend Biber's and Conrad's (2009) model of register analysis as a model to be used for analysing advertisements. This means that we should first consider the situation the viewer and the advertiser are in, then the language used and ultimately seek to establish the connection between the two. This is precisely the procedure we are going to follow in our analysis below.

## 3. Methodology

Our analysis is conducted on the data obtained from the World Wide Web. The corpus of data consists of 59 print advertisements of various products and non-products (various ideas, issues or messages to society, like ads against deforestation), see Appendix. The advertisements were obtained by opening random websites featuring various advertisements and choosing each ad randomly (by moving the mouse randomly across the screen without looking, and stopping at arbitrary points).

Once the database was collected, we started the analysis by looking for what seemed to be characteristic linguistic features of advertisements. These were next explained in functional terms, i.e. how those features help fulfil the main functions of advertising – to persuade, to inform and to entertain, and also to catch the reader's attention. The results are discussed in relation to the theoretical findings presented in Section 2.2. While it would have been desirable to have carried out a quantitative analysis of the register, along the lines of Biber et al. (1999), due to the preliminary nature of this study, the analysis will be purely qualitative. The results may be verified using statistical methods in future.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1. *Syntactic and morphological features*

Syntax plays a major role in the world of advertising. Advertisers use syntax in various ways in order to enhance the effect advertisements have on the targeted audience. We will focus on the syntactic features most frequently used in the data collected for this paper.

Firstly, we have noted the use of **simple** sentences in advertisements. Today's world is a complex one, so people are searching for something simple, something comprehended easily and quickly. Because of information overload, companies tend to use short and simple sentences to make their ads 'lighter', catchy and more appealing to the consumer. When the sentence is simplified, it is very easy to read and remember, which makes the advertisement fresh and interesting, thus making the product more appealing, see examples (1–2)

(1)  *Have a Coke and a smile (Coca Cola).*

(2)  *My time is now (Nike football).*

However, it is also true that human beings are purpose-driven and curious by their nature. Therefore, a good ad may also need to be informative to drive the message home. Such ads may, therefore, feature slightly more complex, or longer, or more than one simple sentence (see example 3 and compare it to examples 1–2):

(3) *The average smoker needs over five thousand cigarettes a year. Get unhooked. (getunhooked.co.uk).*

Example (3) is an advert against the use of cigarettes. By informing people on how many cigarettes an average smoker consumes a year, advertisers attempt to make people think about how much it harms their body, especially if this verbal message is complemented with disturbing images. The advertiser may also be playing, albeit implicitly, on the financial aspect of this overconsumption; if people can be made to think about how much money five thousand cigarettes a year translates into, they are more likely to consider quitting. The *get unhooked* part of the ad prompts smokers to realize they are being controlled by cigarettes and to quit smoking. All of this is meant to make cigarettes repulsive to the customer.

Clearly, the informational role of advertising is accomplished most easily by using the **declarative** sentence type. We owe this to the informative character of declarative sentences, meaning that the choice of this sentence type contributes to the informative function of advertisements.

However, it is also true that advertisers capitalize on the idea that human beings are also not always aware of their needs or troubles. To stir the sleeping 'consumer' in us and yet leave us with a (false) sense of control over what we want – because the advertised product is not "pushed" onto us directly, advertisers use **interrogative** sentence types. When the focus is on interrogative sentences in advertising, it is noticeable that the questions asked are in fact rhetorical. Rhetorical questions do not require an answer (or the answer is obvious). Such was the case with all of the questions in the studied data. The purpose of rhetorical questions is to catch the audience's attention and to make them think about the question. By using rhetorical questions, advertisers can make the consumers connect the questions with their own life experiences and thus increase the chance of persuasion:

(4) *So now what's your excuse?* (*Nike Running).*

Occasionally, we need to be alarmed that we are doing something wrong or informed that we can improve our well-being. This is most easily accomplished by using **imperative** sentences in advertising. Our analysis of advertisements featuring imperative sentences revealed that there are two ways the imperative were used in the selected advertisements. First, it was used to achieve **diatyposis**. According to Dupriez (1991: 134), diatyposis is a figure "whereby one recommends to another certain profitable rules and precepts." The use of diatyposis creates an impression that the advertiser is giving the consumer good advice and it presents the product or the idea as a necessity for the consumer to improve themselves or the quality of their lives. Diatyposis creates an illusion of a conversation between the company and the viewer, thus giving them the roles of addressor (company) and addressee and transferring a certain message (advertisement) in a given situation (cf. Biber's & Conrad's communication model mentioned in Section 2.1.)

(5) *Get the respect you deserve (Oogmerk Opticians);*

(6) *Smell like a man, man. (Old Spice).*

The second, less frequent way of using imperatives in advertisements involves telling the addressee to do something that really should **not** be done. Such ads actually channel a very strong message **against** doing something, but without actually using the negative form of the imperative. Still, in the featured example below (7), the necessary interpretive "repair" is achieved by adding a second simple sentence to communicate the effect or consequence of the causal action coded in the first simple sentence. The goal of such ads is to make us come to a conclusion that we should to the exact opposite of what is written in the advert, possibly after first overcoming the shock of the literal interpretation of the coded message.

(7) *Cut a tree. Kill a life. (Malaysian Nature Society).*

This particular advertisement judges deforestation as an act which destroys not just the flora, but also the fauna of a particular area. To be more precise, this particular ad aims to raise consciousness about the destruction of the natural habitat of one of Malaysian animal species, namely – the Malayan tapir. The reason why the ad talks about killing a *life* and not the actual species it refers to may be because the advertiser wants to go beyond the individual and specific and send the message that whatever happens to the trees will affect not only the tapir but the entire Great Chain of Being.

Although there is a potential risk of misreading such ads, if successful, they will shock and therefore catch even more attention. Ideally, the function of persuasion will be enhanced as well. In our database, the negative imperative was attested only one time, the majority were used in the positive form. There was one ad where the positive and the negative imperative were combined:

(8)   *Don't run, fly (Asics Running).*

In this ad, the imperative is used to make the viewer perceive the product as something that goes beyond every expectation, thus leaving the impression that the particular product exceeds the quality of the products from the same group.

Another interesting syntactic feature of advertising is the reliance on what is called **grammatical parallelism** (Leech 1966)**.** Just as humankind generally strives for balance, so the advertisers respond with the placement of similarly constructed phrases or sentences next to each other to create the effect of rhythmic balance. This rhythmic balance strengthens the entertainment factor and even adds to the persuasive quality of ads due to the memorability of such rhythmic phrases. For example:

(9)    Better ingredients. Better pizza. (Papa John's Pizza)

There are also cases of **ellipsis** in our corpus of advertisements. According to Quirk et al (1985: 82), ellipsis is "a grammatical process … whereby elements of a sentence which are predictable from context can be omitted". It is used with the aim of making the slogans highly readable and comprehensive while retaining a high level of information for the viewer. The omitted words are provided in the brackets in the examples below.

(10)  *[It] Softens even the toughest (Sta-soft).*

(11)  *[Have you] Been missing out on your dreams? (The National Lottery).*

(12)  *Smoking. [It is a] Pleasure for you. (It is) Poison for your family (Mumbai Public Health).*

However, sometimes advertisers use ellipsis to simplify and reduce the advert to the bare minimum. They omit the key elements of the sentence, such as a verb, thus creating a very short sentence which is most often a noun phrase.

(13)    Absolut Paris. (Absolut Vodka)

The use of **adjectives** is another feature of the analysed advertisements, especially adjectives functioning as pre-modifiers. This is done in order to make the product more appealing to the customer by creating a positive product image. Also, these adjectives are a mean of enhancement for the attention-catching function of advertisements because one cannot but be interested in an advertisement which features superlative words like *best, ultimate,* etc.

(14)    *Probably the best beer in the world (Carlsberg).*

(15)    *The ultimate mouth protection (Colgate).*

Apart from adjectives, there is a number of advertisements containing **nominalizations**. According to Leech (1992: 69), a nominalization is "a noun phrase which has the underlying semantic structure of a clause". Biber, Conrad and Reppen (1999: 149) claim that (among other elements) the heavy use of nouns, i.e. nominalizations is typical of texts with a strong informational focus and a careful embedding of dense information into the text. Nominalizations are used for making advertisements brief and simple. When a nominalization is used, it does not necessarily require the original verb's arguments, like subjects or objects. Examples of nominalizations from the corpus of collected data are:

(16)    ***Precision parking*** *(Volkswagen)*

(17)    ***Liking*** *isn't* ***helping*** *(Crisis Relief)*

(18)    *Some things don't add up. Drunk* ***driving*** *(www.deptrans.co)*

(19)   *Smoking. Pleasure for you. Poison for your family. Quit smoking. Now. (Mumbai Public Health)*

The use of **personal and possessive pronouns** is a feature of involved personalized, usually face-to- face conversation. The fact that they regularly occur in advertisements, especially the pronouns *you* and *your*, only shows that the advertisers want to create the impression of direct personalized communication with the addressee. Also, if the addressee can be made to feel as if they have been addressed personally/directly, then the attention-grabbing function of the ad has been accomplished. This gives people the feeling they are important to the advertiser, and also increases the likelihood that they will create a positive opinion of the product. The persuasive function of advertisements is thereby more easily achieved.

(20)    *You're not you when you're hungry (Snickers).*

(21)     *Been missing out on your dreams? (The National Lottery).*

Other personal pronouns used are *I*, *it*, *we* and *she*. Interestingly *I* is sometimes used as a reference to the advertised product itself. This is a very powerful device for creating an intimate, personal and unique connection between product and consumer; it creates the impression that the product itself is talking to the customer (example 22)

(22)     *If it has a hair, I will groom it* (Gillette).

Interestingly, in example (22), *it* is used, somewhat uncharacteristically, to impersonate the customer and intrigue him – since, clearly, the neuter personal pronoun *it* is normally not used for human beings. Actually the fun-factor of this ad is the obvious reversal of animacy, where the razor takes on an animate persona, and the shaver becomes inanimate. Although this may at first seem dehumanizing, the light-hearted and humorous tone of an ad with the razor blade talking actually has the effect of making the addressee feel relaxed and complacent that all (i.e. the shaving) will be taken care of without him having to lift a finger.

Another interesting observation is the generic use of the personal pronoun *we*. Although pronouns like *they, you*, *one* etc. can also be used generically (cf. Quirk et al 1985: 353), the generic use of *we* is inclusive, i.e. the ad creator ingratiates himself with the addressee by building a shared space where– whatever they are advertising – applies equally to the advertiser and the addressee.

(23)     *Climate is changing. Why aren't we? (Endglobalwarming.com).*

 *We* is also used in this corpus of data to refer to the company itself, thus lending the company a more personalized profile:

(24)     *We're sorry (KFC).*

In February 2018, KFC ran out of chicken so a great number of stores closed. This is the slogan which they used to apologize. It shows the customers that the company values their loyalty, so they feel privileged because such a renowned company is apologizing to them – the common man.

There are a few cases of use of other pronouns, such as: *what, some, nothing* and *no one.* Their functions are listed below, along with examples.

*What* is a pronoun introducing a nominal relative clause but may also be used as an interrogative. In example (25), the "relative" *what* is used to refer to the photograph featured in the advertisement

(a woman covered in milk shaped as if she is wearing a dress). This makes the customer curious, and certainly increases the attention-catching value of the ad:

(25)     *Drink what she's wearing (Fairlife Milk).*

In example (26), the advertiser uses the interrogative pronoun *what* to form a question directed at the customer. The function of this rhetorical question is not to literally make people try to find a new excuse, but to present their product in such a manner that it removes every excuse for not running or exercising.

(26)     *So now what's your excuse? (Nike Running).*

*Some, no one* and *nothing* are used for expressing (partial) inclusion or exclusion of somebody or something, but in different ways. E.g.

(27)     *Some things don't add up. Drunk driving (deptrans.co).*

Example (27) is an advertisement against drunk driving. By using the pronoun *some* in this particular syntactic framework, the consumer is first invited to infer that there are many things that go together and should go together. But, then the advertiser builds an implicit contrast with this inference by stipulating more directly that drinking and driving are not such things. In other words, one can infer that although *some things* do add up (function together), drinking and driving are not among them; i.e. they are excluded from the group of entities which can function together. Also, by choosing the negative *don't add up*, the advertiser not only explicitly cancels any expectation that drinking and driving go together, but may also be putting emphasis on the result of this equation, which is never positive if you drink and drive.

*No one* and *nothing*, in turn, tend to express positive exclusion, i.e. the advertised product is singled out from the entire pool of equivalent products; what is emphasized is the effectiveness and superiority of the advertised product and its creators:

(28)      *No one grows ketchup like Heinz (Heinz Ketchup).*

(29)      *Nothing wakes you up as Nescafe (Nescafe).*

In example (28), the universal negative pronouns are coupled with the apparently illogical sentence semantics of 'growing' a product that cannot be naturally grown. The advertiser wants to convey the message that the company is unique (the only one) that creates ketchup in this particular

way. This illogical yet successful semantics, i.e. of 'growing ketchup' can be interpreted in two ways. One way is that the company wanted to say they make ketchup with such care and attention as if they are growing it, and the other way is that the company's aim was to show they use natural ingredients for making their ketchup, both of which supposedly makes the company like no other.

## 4.2. *Lexical and orthographical level*

With the previously mentioned use of simple and short sentences often comes the use of **monosyllabic** (one syllable) and **disyllabic** (two syllable) words. The simplicity of advertisements makes them appealing to the information-bombarded individual. Our database contains a great number of advertisements with monosyllabic or disyllabic words. The role of those words is to enable advertisers to create short, efficient ads. This makes the ads easier to comprehend, and increases the chance of persuasion while retaining the same level of information. The addressee may also perceive the ad as more entertaining, since it is less cumbersome. For example:

(30)     *Cheat death (POM Wonderful).*

(31)     *Run for Life (St. Mary's Women's Hospital).*

Another common feature of advertisements is the deliberate misspelling of words. This is called **divergent spelling** and it serves the function of attention-catching and entertaining the addressee. When (potential) customers see the ad, they have to put in more effort in order to decipher the meaning of the advertisement, which makes them think about the ad more than they normally would. The deciphering of the ad gives a feeling of solving some kind of a task or riddle, which is why this feature also contributes to the function of entertainment. For example:

(32)     *Snikcers. You're not you when you're hungry (Snickers).*

The advertiser intentionally misspelled the *word* Snickers in order to corroborate the message of the following sentence. If you are not you when you're hungry, this means that you will make mistakes you would not normally do, such as misspelling this brand's name.

Everything that is old today gets boring. Because people are always interested in something new, advertisers often resort to **coining** new, catchy words. This feature of advertising occurred in a small number of advertisements in our database. In the selected ads, the coinage of new words is

accomplished either by blending two words together, or by adding affixes to the existing word, thus changing its word class. There are two examples of blending:

(33)    *manscaping (Gillette)*

*(34)    Explore your **bathsculinity** (Axe)*

The word *manscaping* was coined by using the words *man* and *landscape* with the aim of equating a man's body with landscape, which means that you can make your body look better by shaving, much like we make our landscapes better by gardening. The word *bathsculinity* consists of the words *bath* and *masculinity.* Since this is an ad for men's shower gel, we can conclude that these words are used to bring masculinity into connection with personal hygiene. Basically, the customer will get the impression that you have to use Axe shower gel to be a 'real' man, which contributes to the persuasive function of advertising. Blending is an important way for word coinage because it makes the customer rely on their knowledge of the world to decipher the coined word and make out which words were used in its creation. This contributes to the function of entertaining and attention-catching.

There are two examples for the coinage of a new word using affixation:

(35)    *nutellable (Nutella)*

(36)    *hungerectomy (Snickers)*.

The coinage *nutellable* consists of the brand name Nutella and the suffix –able. *Nutella* is a noun and the added suffix changes it into an adjective. The coined, unknown word makes the customer wonder about *nutellable* means, or about the taste of something *nutellable*. This ultimately makes the customer try it. Concerning the noun *hungerectomy*, one can conclude that it is made up of the words *hunger* and the suffix -*ectomy* which signifies the removal of something. In this case, the removal of hunger. This Snickers ad, which juxtaposes the learned medical suffix –*ectomy* with an everyday word for a simple physiological state (rather than a medical condition with a similarly learned technical name), is humorous and eye- or ear-catching precisely because of this stylistic incompatibility of the two word components. When a customer feels hungry, this word might just pop into their mind and they decide to consume the product. In both these cases (*nutellable* and *hungerectomy*), the functions of attention- catching and entertainment are highly in evidence because the coined words make the ads fresh and original, therefore very desirable.

People are always on the lookout for something unusual. This is where the use of **idioms and other phraseological units** comes in. Their function is to draw the attention of the viewer by evoking their knowledge of the world and language and making them connect the advertisement to the idiom. Phraseological units are very useful and economical turns of phrase since they represent prefabricated chunks of discourse which summarize, often in vivid, figurative ways, typical life experiences and situations. This makes them more entertaining and appealing, and increases the chance of persuasion.  Some of the examples of idioms in analysed advertisements are:

(37)     *It'll blow your mind away (Burger King).*

(38)     *Put your money where your mouth is (AmnestyUSA.org).*

In their studies about idioms, Omazić (2002) and Delibegović Džanić (2007) talk about idiom modification. To put it simply, idiom modification signifies the process of changing idioms structurally and lexically in different ways (Delibegović Džanić 2007).  Advertisers sometimes decide to play with idioms, so they modify them. By doing so, the advertisement becomes even more thought-provoking (evoking the shared knowledge of the world), which strengthens the functions of entertainment and persuasion.  E.g.

(39)     *Curiosity killed the couch (Meowbox).*

This particular example is a case of idiom modification, the type being a lexical modification achieved by substitution (Delibegović Džanić 2007). Instead of using the idiom *curiosity killed the cat*, the copyrighter intentionally substituted the word *cat* with the word *couch*. This example is an ad for cat toys. *Curiosity* actually represents cats, since they are curious and playful beings. The advertiser reminds people that cats (*curiosity)* often destroy (*kill*) the couch with their claws and offers a solution – cat toys. The created impression that people just have to buy the toys to solve a problem makes the product more appealing and the chances of persuasion, and ultimately purchase, higher.

## 4.3. *Phonological level*

Advertisers tend to use **repetition** of elements to make their slogans catchy. This is why copyrighters use playful combinations of particular speech sounds to bolster their advertisements. McQuarrie & Mick (2014) claim that advertisers combine repetition with speech sounds to create sound figures such as **assonance**, **alliteration** and **rhyme**. This helps the advertisements become

more appealing to the customer, raising the chances for consumption of the product. The repetition of sounds can be exhibited through **assonance** (repetition of vowels) or **alliteration** (repetition of consonants). In the studied database, we unfortunately found no examples of assonance or alliteration, but here we will borrow, just for illustration two examples from McQuarrie & Mick (2017):

(40)     *No one knows the land like a Navajo (Mazda four-wheel drive).*

(41)     *Now Stouffer's makes a real fast real mean Lean Cuisine (Stouffer's frozen dinners).*

Example (40) exhibits alliteration, i.e. the repetition of the consonant /n/ and example (41) presents assonance because it features the repetition of the vowel /i:/ in the last segment of the ad.

Another phonological feature typical of advertisements is **rhyme**. Rhyme makes the advertisement and its slogan catchy so the customer could remember it more easily. The aim of the advertiser is to give the slogan a rhythm to make the advertisement more entertaining and attention-catching, which then also enables it to more easily inform and persuade:

(42)     *Global warming is an alarming warning. (stopglobalwarming.com).*

## 4.4. *Semantic level*

A number of analysed advertisements features **ambiguity**, which means the advertisers intentionally picked the words which can be interpreted in multiple ways based on one's knowledge of the world. This way, the customer can enjoy what often becomes the humorous effect of juxtaposing multiple messages simultaneously conveyed by a single ad text. Usually, it is the juxtaposition of the literal and metaphorical interpretation as in example (43):

(43)     Run for Life (St. Mary's Women's Hospital).

This could mean that people should run to gather a certain amount of money for charity, to run for their well-being or to make running their routine and do it for as long as they can. Also, this example could make people associate it with running for your life, i.e. from some kind of a life-threatening peril.

Another example of ambiguity is example (44), where a playful reference is made to the passage from the Old Testament of the Christian Bible. The locus of humour is in a deliberate play on the different meanings of the nouns *light* 'brightness' and the adjective *light*. Since this example

advertises running shoes, the customer may interpret the word as the adjective *lightest* as in 'the least heavy' or 'the fastest' (the speed of light), and not as the noun *light* in its original intended Biblical sense 'brightness'. This serves the attention-catching, but also the entertaining and persuading function of advertisements.

(44)     *Let there be lightest (New Balance)*

Example (44) features ambiguity that crosses word class boundaries. Other cases of ambiguity may involve multiple senses of the same word, in which case one sense may be metaphorical**.** It is a word or a phrase used for denoting something that it is not literally connected with (examples 45 and 46):

(45)     *Draws a crowd (Jack Daniel's)*

(46)     *Don't run, fly (Asics)*

In example (45), Jack Daniel's drink is an inanimate object and it is therefore incapable of literally drawing something towards itself. *Draws* is a metaphor for attracting (a crowd in this case). In example (46), the customer will not literally fly when using Asics running shoes. To *fly* here means to enjoy so much while running that it is comparable to flying. Possibly, this is also meant to imply that running is made so easy in the Asics sneakers that it feels as if there are no obstacles along the way (ground included). These metaphors put the product on the pedestal. They portray it as an object which does incredible things, and contribute to its positive appeal. Needless to say, with this amount of implicit praise, persuasion is all but guaranteed.

Romanenko (2014) notes the use of **personification**, i.e. the attribution of human-like properties to animals and inanimate objects.  This is also a form of metaphor, where an inanimate object or an animal is given human-like properties. Personification has already been featured in some of our earlier-discussed examples (e.g. 22, 40, 45) where the advertised product is presented as an agent designed, capable and willing to accomplish its mission, e.g. the Gillette razor. Of course, personification is something that can grab our attention, entertain and possibly ultimately also persuade us to buy a product. Another good example is (47):

(47)     *Gatorade always wins (Gatorade sports drink).*

## 5. Conclusion

We live in a consumerist society and advertisements play a great role in our lives. The creators of advertisements use specific grammatical, i.e. linguistic devices more or less deliberately in order to catch our attention and allow the advertisements to fulfil their main functions: to persuade, to inform and to entertain. In our study of a selected corpus of advertisements we have attested most of the linguistic features of advertising that have been discussed in earlier studies on the topic, predominantly, the use of simple declarative sentences, syntactic parallelism, lexical innovation, metaphorical language and personal pronouns. We have also attempted to provide a functional explanation for these findings by linking up these grammatical features with their intended functional goals. Some of the features usually discussed in the literature have not been attested, like assonance and alliteration, however, this may only be due to the limited size of our database. Future studies should address the quantitative aspects, i.e. which of the features can be predictably correlated with the advertising register, mainly in the manner of Biber, Conrad and Reppen (1999). Future studies should also tackle the receiving end of the advertising communication, i.e. how advertisements are received by their intended audience and whether their presumed intended functions have been accomplished or not.

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## Appendix: Database (list of advertisements included in the study)

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6. *Smell like a man, man (Old Spice).* https://akshaymasters.wordpress.com/2014/07/06/old-spice-the-man-your-man-could-smell-like-2/
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