

Language Deviation in English Advertising

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Abstract

Nowadays, advertising is becoming an integral part of our daily life and is playing an increasingly significant role in modern society. It appears we are living in an advertising world. Many studies have been carried out in this field, and among them the study of advertising language has attracted particular attention from social linguists.

As a way to promote the sales of products, advertisements must conform to the AIM principle—to grab readers' attention, arouse their interest, and construct their memory to achieve the ultimate goal of triggering their action. Thus, the advertisers seek for attention-attracting strategies. The application of language deviation technique is an efficient way.

Deviation refers to the special or unusual expression that deviates from normal norms and it appears in various forms such as deviation of phonology, lexicon and grammar. This paper attempts to give a description of language deviations in English advertising including phonological, graphological, lexical, and grammatical deviation.

Key words: Advertising; Deviation; Attention

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INTRODUCTION

Advertising, with its increasingly important role in today's society, is becoming a so common social phenomenon that a French advertising critic once said that the air we live in

was composed of hydrogen, oxygen and advertising. Due to its prominent role in society, advertising has become a popular subject of study for researchers in various fields such as marketing, sociology, psychology and linguistics. Among all the studies, the one of advertising language has attracted particular attention.

As the well-known AIDA principle (proposed by E. S. Lewis) indicates, a good and successful advertisement must have four basic standards, namely, Attention, Interest, Desire and Action (Sun & Zhai, 1997). How to attract people's attention and distinguish the target product from others? Deviation is one effective way. Thus it really makes sense to analyze this language phenomenon for enlightening the creative writings of advertising.

So this paper tries to give a detailed discussion of various deviations in advertising with up-to-date English ads so as to provide advertisers with better knowledge of deviation in advertising and also attract more scholars' attention on this issue.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 What is Advertising?

Advertising originates from the Latin word "advertere", meaning "a means used to draw attention from the public to something and lead them to some direction". Nowadays advertising of various forms can be seen at any time and in any place. Before the detailed study of advertising, it is worthwhile to know some essential features of advertisement.

• Public/Nonpersonal

Unlike the face-to-face personal selling, advertising exists all the time, not on-the-spot. While personal selling is extremely labor-intensive, dealing with only one customer at a time, advertising deals with hundreds, thousands, or millions of customers at a time.

• Information

To provide complete information is time consuming and difficult, so for advertising, information of necessity is always incomplete; not discussing everything there is to know about a subject. In advertising, what appears is everything the writer thinks the customer must needs to know about the product in order to make a decision. And that information will generally be about how the product can benefit the customer.

• Products, Services or Ideas

Products, services or ideas mean not merely functions; they actually carry a bundle of values or images, including social, psychological, economic or whatever other values important to the consumer. How closely a product or service approximates an individual's proportion of values will often determine whether the consumer will buy that or not. So a good advertisement should show how its product satisfies the customers' bundle of values better than competitors' products.

• Promoting/Persuasive

For advertising to make sense, at least a portion of the population must live above subsistence level; and it is also necessary for the producers of materially "unnecessary" goods to make people want to acquire their commodities. Thus, advertising is aiming at identifying and differentiating one product from another in order to persuade the consumer to buy that product in preference to another. But how can an ad achieve this? As has been mentioned above, one way of making it is deviation. So the following part will talk about the theory of deviation.

1.2 What is Deviation?

Deviation/variation is opposite to norm, it refers to a selection of a linguistic item outside the range of normally allowed selections. When people use a language, they must obey some rules (i.e. norm). For example, an "s" or "es" must be added to the verb of the third singular present tense or a preposition must be followed by a noun or gerund. But in reality, the using of language is not that stiff or formalistic. Qin Xiubai (1997) pointed out that "man will choose the most suitable language form to express their ideas according to the subjective or objective factors during the communication. This raises the issue of using language creatively. Each style has its extraordinary or unusual language characteristics and each writer tries to display their extraordinary style in their creation." The special expression which deviates from norms is called deviation.

Geoffrey Leech made a systematic summary of deviation. In his book, *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry* (1969), he categorized deviation into eight types, i.e. lexical deviation, grammatical deviation, phonological deviation, graphological deviation, semantic deviation, dialectal deviation, deviation of register and deviation of historical period.

• Lexical Deviation

The most common usage of lexical deviation is neologism (the invention of new "words"). When the new words are made up "for the nonce", i.e. for a single occasion only, rather than as serious attempts to increase the English word-stock, we call them NONCE-FORMATIONS. Leech (1969) thinks neologism is not merely a "violation of lexical rule", but rather "an existing rule is applied with greater generality than is customary: that the usual restrictions on its operation are waived in a given instance." The most common processes of word-formation are affixation and compounding.

• Grammatical Deviation

Leech distinguished between MORPHOLOGY and SYNTAX. Deviation of the former, as Leech suggested, is rare enough in English poetry, so he pays much attention to deviation of syntax. In syntax, Leech discussed deviation of surface structure and that of deep structure. Deep structure may be characterized as the "semantic end" of syntax, which directly reflects the meaning of the sentence, whereas surface structure is characterized as the "phonological end" which relates to the way in which a sentence is actually uttered. The surface structure specifies the actual forms which are uttered, and the sequences in which they occur.

• Phonological Deviation

Leech mentioned some of this category like aphaesis (the omission of an initial part of a word or phrase, e.g. 'tis for it is), syncope (the omission of a medial part, e.g. ne'er for never), apocope (the omission of a final part, e.g. oft for often) and special pronunciation for the convenience of rhyming, as when the noun "wind" is pronounced like the verb "wind". Or some word stresses are placed in unusual places, like ba'luster (Tennyson), ba'stard (Browning) and 'July (D. G. Rossetti).

• Graphological Deviation

As spelling represents pronunciation, any strangeness of pronunciation will be reflected by strangeness of the written form. But there are also some graphological deviations that have nothing to do with speech, such as discarding of capital letters and punctuation, jumbling of words, eccentric use of parentheses.

• Semantic Deviation

Semantic deviation may be translated into "nonsense" or "absurdity". Thus we often find some ridiculous sentences in some works. But "the very face-value oddity lends it abnormal power of significance" (Leech, 1969). That means the seemingly meaningless and ridiculous sentences have specific meanings in a certain context.

• Dialectal Deviation

Generally speaking, most works are expected to write in the generally accepted and understood dialect known as "Standard English", but for some certain purposes, some may borrow features of socially or regionally defined dialects. For example, in *The Shepherdes Calender*,

Spenser's use of homely provincial words like rontes (young bullocks) and wynnble (nimble) evokes a flavor of rustic naivety in keeping with the sentiments of pastoral (Leech, 1969).

• Deviation of Register

According to Leech (1966), register refers to varieties of English distinguished by use in relation to social context. In other words, registers are identified by taking the speaker as the invariable element in overlapping situations, and discussing how he adjusts his language to a situation. In a formal situation, for instance, a person might say, "You are requested to leave", whereas in an informal situation the same person might say, "Get out!" What's more, different use domains will have their distinctive frequent used words.

The theory of deviation is mostly used to analyze poetic language in the western linguistic field. Also there are some linguistic studies on deviation of advertising. Bruthiaux (1998) analyzed the linguistic characteristics of classified advertising, and Wu Dongying (1994 & 1996) concerned the specialties of Chinese display advertisements. In China, some scholars like Bai Haiyu (2003), Cai Hongmei & Dong Yan (2002) adapted Leech's classification of deviation to analyze advertising.

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper deals exclusively with magazine advertising. There may be three reasons for this: first and also the simplest reason is that it is more convenient and easier to get authentic English magazine advertisements than TV or newspaper ones; second, printed advertisements are easier to study than TV advertisements: since TV ads extend in time and make use of the combined and complicated effect of sound and picture, it is only possible to give a very incomplete reproduction of them in a paper; third, this concentration on magazine advertising may not be a very great disadvantage, since there is no reason to believe that TV and press advertising differ in their persuasive methods in a basic way. All examples in this paper are from two representative magazines with close time scope: *Time* (a weekly English magazine) and *Fortune* (a biweekly in English).

3. DEVIATION IN ADVERTISING

To know a language completely, one must know how to pronounce (phonology) and write the forms of the language (graphology), that is, how to give them physical realization; one must memorize a vocabulary in that language (lexicon) and learn a set of rules (grammar) showing how the items of the vocabulary are to be used in constructing sentences, that is the formal aspect of the language. When deviation happens, it must violate

the norm from one aspect or another. So in this paper, classification of advertising deviation is based on this model and also absorbs the essence of the different classifications mentioned in the above.

3.1 Deviation of Phonology

Leech mentioned aphaesis, syncope, apocope, and special pronunciation for the convenience of rhyming and also some unusual word stresses as examples of phonological deviation. Just as Alexander Pope said "the sound must seem an echo to the sense", different pronunciation will produce different effects of hearing. "The sound of 'w' makes people feel the sense of wave; the sound of 'b' indicates that of blow; 'd' is related to durable; while 'o' is that of simplicity and sorrow" (Zhu Wenjun, 1994). For example, "Pringles Potato Chips" uses three "p"s to present the crispness of the chips, while the two "T"s in "Tough as Tiger" (a man's watch) emphasize the steadiness of the watch (Bai, 2003).

Phonological deviation is represented by the frequent appearance of alliteration, end rhyme, rhyme of the beginning and the end, homograph, etc. in advertisement. For instance,

(1) The *passionate pursuit of perfection*. (Lexus, *Fortune*, July 12th)

(2) Giving your ideas more *room to roam*. (HP, *Fortune*, July 26th)

(3) Levitra Quality *counts, count* on Levitra. (Levitra, *Fortune*, July 12th)

Example (1) is an illustration of alliteration of "p" in a car advertisement, from which we can feel the strong determination to make the car perfect. In example (2), room and roam are similar to each other both in pronunciation and form. By associating these two together, the reader's mind is also rambling. It is worthwhile to give some special attention to example (3). This is what Feng Guangyi (1992) called deviation of homograph. The two "count"s are identical in form but different in meaning. The first "count" refers to "be of value and importance", while the second means "rely on something (here Levitra, name of a kind of medicine)". These two "count"s combine the sentence coherently and also enhance the good effect of the medicine.

3.2 Deviation of Graphology

The simplest way (and also an effective way) to attract readers' attention is to change the form or size of a word, phrase or even the whole discourse. As Tang Xiangjin (2002) mentioned, English is rich in deviation of word spelling. For the sake of being emphatic, vivid, associative and conspicuous, spelling deviations come into wide and frequent use by repetition of morphemes, words and punctuations, capitalization, misplacement, deletion, addition, substitution and malapropism. I take a post at the Time's Square of Hong Kong for example. It creatively puts the letter "i" in the phrase "city's super" upside down to become "city's super". This deviation not only keeps

the original meaning of the phrase but also increases the information, as the exclamatory mark “!” will attract more people’s attention than the normal.

• **Putting Brand Into Words and Making it Stick Out**

A typical example of this is a series of advertisements for CNN in *Time*.

(4) *Comfort, Design, Function*. (CNN, *Time*, Sep 20th)

(5) For peace of mind, stay *connected*. (CNN, *Time*, Sep 6th)

(6) Every *perspe_tive, dime_sion, a_gle*. (CNN, *Time*, Sep 6th)

In real ads, the italic letters of the first two examples are marked with red color, while the third one uses underlines to leave out several letters in the words. Whatever methods it uses, it is for foregrounding the brand—CNN.

• **Using Numbers and Symbols**

(7) With Telekom Malaysia, it is always Good 4 Business. (Telekom, *Time*, Aug 9th)

(8) ACN-2-ACN free calling. (ACN, *Fortune*, July 26th)

In this group, the two examples use numbers to replace words: 4 instead of “for” and 2 for “to”, which has been very popular in today’s daily life since the spread of the internet language and text messages. Numbers are more convenient to transfer the relevant meanings and attract more attention than the common words.

3.3 Deviation of Lexicon

Using unexpected letters is also an easy way to call attention to the printed form. They can be unexpected in two ways—they are either coinage/nonce-formation or they appear in a seldom showing situation (in the aspect of collocation or part of speech).

• **Coinage/Nonce-Formation**

Coinage appears most frequently when making up names of a product. Take the suffix “-ex” as an example. “-ex” is the suffix of top frequency in advertising copy, which is regarded as the clipping form of excellent. It is often used to describe precision instruments or products, such as “Rolex”, “Memorex”, “Pentax”, etc. But nowadays many articles of everyday use benefit from it, like Kleenex (a facial tissue), Cutex (a nail polish), Purex (a decolourant), etc (Bai, 2003). By adding “ex” to form the name, the advertiser or manufacturer wants to emphasize the high quality of the product.

The changing of the normal spelling is also a kind of coinage. For example, a kind of quick dissolving chocolate is called Quik Chocolate. It seems that if we add the aphonic “c”, the dissolving speed of the chocolate will be slowed down (Bai, 2003). Another example, “It makes impossibel impessible!” (An advertisement for an electric typesetter). By misspelling the word, the advertiser shows us that it is “impossible” to for their products to typeset “impossible” to “impossibel” or “impessible” (Hu, 1998).

• **Functional Conversion**

Functional conversion is to change a word’s common part of speech, such as to use a verb as a noun or vice versa. Feng Guangyi (1992) thinks the change of part of speech is of course for certain purposes. To use a noun or an adjective as a verb is to combine the static state with a dynamic one for better linguistic appeal, while to change a noun into an adjective or vice versa is to emphasize the properties or state of the person or object and to make the language more vivid.

(9) Eat *smart*. Be fit. Live well. (Cooking Light, *Fortune*, July 26th)

(10) With solutions that are *plat formed* and system friendly, but more importantly, business-strategy friendly, too. (IBM, *Fortune*, July 26th)

Example (9) changes the adjective “smart” to an adverb, and the purpose is most possibly for rhyme. The other example applies the noun form “platform” to a verb, which means to make a platform for the customers; it is not only for economy but also makes the meaning more concrete.

3.4 Deviation of Collocation

Deviation of collocation refers to the combination of some words together which normally cannot be collocated. For instance, an advertisement of tomato juice says, “You will enjoy different tomato juice made from aristocrat tomatoes.” “Aristocrat” originally means a member of a ruling class or of the nobility or a person having the tastes, manners, or other characteristics of the aristocracy. But here the advertiser uses it to modify tomato, which deviates its original matching. The aim of that deviation is to emphasize the good quality of the tomato juice and the person who chooses it will have the taste as an aristocrat (Yuan, 2003).

Another example is (11) *Serious* business. *Serious* fun. (IBM, *Fortune*, Aug 9th). “Serious” can be connected with a person, an accident, etc, but we seldom see it with “fun”. However, this advertisement is reasonable. IBM is for the IT technology, each trivial part of which should be taken into account seriously. So with the products of IBM, you can assure everything will be perfect, even your entertainment is better than others, just as “serious” indicates.

3.5 Deviation of Grammar

It has often been observed that advertising tend to chop up sentences into shorter bits by using full stops where ordinary prose would use commas or no punctuation at all. Leech (1966) referred to this phenomenon as “disjunctive syntax”. For example:

(12) It’s. Difficult. To. Stay. Competitive. If. You’re. Always. Stopping. To. Upgrade. Your. HR. Technology. Outsourcing to Hewitt can help. Period. (Hewitt, *Fortune*, Aug 23rd). In this case, almost every word is followed by a full stop, which will cause some trouble for readers to

go through the ad. By doing this, the advertiser wants to convey to readers that if you don't choose their products, your HR technology will not be efficient and will prevent your company from competing with other companies, just like the difficulties you meet to read this sentence. The last word "period" again stresses the completeness of the sentence.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper is to make an as comprehensive as possible analysis of various deviations used in advertisements. So first it reviews the nature of advertising and the theory of deviation. Then based on some scholars' classifications, the author classifies different deviations in advertising (deviation of phonology, graphology, lexicon, and grammar) and illustrates each deviation with some typical examples.

Among all the linguistic attention-attracting strategies employed in advertisements, language deviation needs to pay special attention to because it is regarded as the use of language that violates normal rules. Based on the case studies of language deviation, it can be seen that deviation

is widely-used in advertising with good grounds, and well-adopted deviation in advertising can attract audience's attention to go through the advertisement and even persuade them to buy the products advertised. As a whole, the study of language deviation in advertising can help to interpret the advertising communication.

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