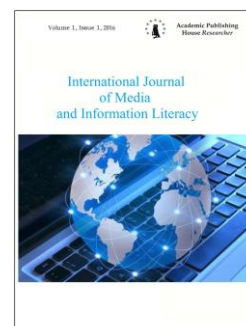


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Teaching Students How to Analyze the Impact of Advertising Media Messages in the EFL Classroom

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Abstract

This paper examines a critical approach to analyzing advertising media messages and describes a number of instructional activities meant to enhance students' reading and discussion skills, enforce their inferential thinking and critical analysis skills. It also considers linguistic, extralinguistic and extracurricular reasons for integrating advertising media messages in the EFL classroom. The focus is on key media education concepts which rely on applying critical questions advertising media messages. Analysis of advertising messages can help EFL teachers encourage sociocultural interpretation of contemporary media texts and raise students' media literacy in the EFL classroom.

Keywords: language learning, advertising, message, analysis, critical thinking, inferential thinking, media literacy, media text, students, EFL.

1. Introduction

The impact of advertising on our lives is difficult to overestimate since almost every person at least once faces the need to place an advert, to scan adverts of other people or respond to someone else's advert. It would seem that there are so many methods and tricks developed in the field of advertising that it is extremely difficult to invent something new.

There is an amazing variety of advertising media messages:

1) depending on an advertised object (product advertising – in the narrow sense, advertising a company, advertising a brand, advertising an idea, advertising a business, advertising a candidate, etc.);

2) depending on the application range (economic advertising, political advertising, social advertising, leisure advertising, meta-advertising – advertising of an advertising agency);

3) depending on the target audience (mass advertising, advertising for a specialist);

4) depending on the media (radio advertising, TV commercials, posters, street billboards, newspaper advertising, advertising by mail, advertising in special publications, advertising in catalogues);

5) depending on the argumentation method (rational advertising, emotional advertising, logical advertising, associative advertising, subject advertising, figurative advertising, factual advertising, etc.);

6) depending on persuasion means (direct advertising, allegorical advertising, dissonant advertising, conformist advertising). Besides, there is the so-called "tough" advertising and the so-

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called “soft” advertising, etc. In educational practice, advertising messages are most often used in teaching reading skills in the EFL classroom.

However, from our point of view, learning to read and understand an advertising text can hardly be considered the major goal of learners studying English as a foreign language. We prefer to treat the advertising message as one of effective EFL training tools or educational materials available to any teacher constantly searching for original and authentic texts in addition to traditional textbooks.

Moreover, advertising messages are becoming an important means of secondary socialization of an individual thus helping students to get acquainted with both the linguistic and extralinguistic norms of the society in which and for which they are created. They also contribute to developing inferential thinking and critical analytical skills of future professionals.

In our opinion, consumer advertising is one of the most suitable media texts for the EFL classroom since it contains well-known everyday life realities which are most widely represented in goods and services advertising. This also helps to overcome intercultural barriers that arise when teaching EFL if it is organized as a dialogue of cultures.

Advertising at the present stage has become one of the most common, dynamic phenomena of mass communication. Its extralinguistic, linguistic, linguacultural features make it a convenient source of authentic textual material suitable for learning a foreign language: “Advertising often explores linguistic and visual codes in a variety of ways, thus being of value to teachers. Advertisements use consistent patterns of linguistic, textual and visual representation, as well as persistent themes to project an image of a global reach” (Petrovska, 2008: 169).

When fulfilling informational and convincing functions an advertising message attracts some precedent phenomena, intertextual and hypertextual links thus concentrating in itself a large amount of explicit and implicit information about culture, history, mentality and background information connected with English native speakers and their culture.

2. Materials and methods

Journal publications and books concerning the issues of analyzing advertising media messages in the EFL classroom are the main sources for writing this article. The study is based on the systemic and the comparative methods.

Our research material concerns the analysis of advertising media messages in the EFL classroom which include print media (newspapers, magazines, pamphlets), electronic media (radio, television), outdoor signs and posters, direct mailings, novelties, and the Internet. We understand a “media message” as “information transmitted on media channels” (Fedorov, 2017: 20; 2019; Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2018). As for the term “advertisement”, it is understood as “public promotion of a product or service by means of a notice, such as a poster, newspaper display, or paid announcement in some electronic or digital medium, designed to attract public attention or patronage” (Danesi, 2009:11).

We also relied on key media education concepts in our research: media agencies, media/media text categories, media technologies, media languages, media representations and media audiences (Bazalgette, 1992: 199; Hobbs, 2011; Livingstone, Haddon, 2009).

3. Discussion

Going beyond the classroom, students meet with a great number of media texts which they sometimes cannot comprehend properly, such as advertising messages. There are many definitions of advertising (Bieberly, 2008; Bryant, Thompson, 2002; Danesi, 2009). Most of these definitions express the point of view of managers, advertising manufacturers and copywriters:

- advertising is a social institution, a tool of a product promotion, a form of marketing communication, as a rule, paid for by a certain advertiser that is non-personalized, and distributed to influence the target audience;
- advertising is non-personalized transfer of information, usually paid for and often based on persuasion, about products, services and ideas through various media;
- advertising is information about consumer properties of goods and types of services in order to generate consumer demand for them;

– a special combination of visual and targeted (pragmatic) information distributed through various channels (including mass media) by advertisers initiated by producers of goods and services in order to generate demand for these goods and services from consumers and encourage them to buy the advertised product.

Advertising attracts attention of researchers from different scientific fields: psychology, sociology, communication theory, theory of translation, linguistics, culturology. As a rule, advertising is considered from the point of view of its design, functioning, and methods of influence on the recipient. In other words, in most cases, researchers represent the position of advertisers and ad manufacturers. Very rarely scholars focus on language tools used by advertising to realize its inherent functions.

Much fewer methodologists, theorists and practitioners of language teaching pay attention to critical analysis of advertising messages. The advertisement has always been regarded as something exotic, a low colloquial genre which is seldom used in teaching foreign languages.

When evaluating the advertisement as a potential learning tool we inevitably encounter the need to characterize its potential merits justifying the appeal to them in the language learning process. Hence, let us discuss the reasons for using advertising messages in language learning.

Linguistic Reasons

1. Demonstration, as a rule, of a living, relevant authentic English language.
2. Reliance on a wide range of national cultural linguistic units (phraseology, proverbs, national cultural stereotypes, set word usage, references to precedent phenomena – names, texts, events, facts, etc.) that are of a particular value for learning a foreign language in the context of intercultural communication.
3. A wide range of facts and units of the English language included in the curriculum are represented in advertising messages which turn them contextually and communicatively into complete statements that can be viewed as lively and vivid illustrations of English grammar and vocabulary.

Contemporary advertising (advertisement) has already become an integral part of our life and is not just an “engine of commerce” but also a real art. Undoubtedly, any advertising has the same goal – to persuade a consumer to buy more, more and more. As they say, there is no such thing as bad publicity.

Traditionally, advertising has been considered to be a special type of a text, which, being a tool for stimulating economic growth, at the same time has a tremendous power of psychological impact on society.

Modern text linguistics refers advertising to the category of creolized texts which structure consists of two inhomogeneous parts: verbal (language / speech) and non-verbal (belonging to other sign systems). The world of creolized texts is multidimensional: newspaper and journalistic texts, scientific and technical texts, instructions, illustrated and artistic texts, ad texts, posters, comics, leaflets, etc. The role of creolized texts is rapidly increasing as the image is stepping up.

Such texts have their own rules governing the external design of the text. Knowledge of these norms allows communicants to accurately distinguish a newspaper text from a poetic one or an advertisement without delving into the content of the text in terms of its paralinguistic design. Thus, in advertising messages preference is given to photographs, verbal and iconic parts (a picture, a diagram, etc.) are found in different combinations. The communicative-pragmatic norm of an advertising message is characterized by a wide range of paralinguistic means.

On the one hand, advertising messages refer to utilitarian media texts but, on the other hand, they are considered to be the most mobile and dynamic texts which occupy a leading place in mass media according to intercultural communication experts since advertising reflects self-awareness of the linguacultural community in a simplified form.

A striking distinctive feature of advertising messages is the use of almost all functional styles of the English language: depending on the target audience of the advertising message they can belong to formal business and everyday speech, scientific, literary and artistic styles. This fact is essential for EFL students’ awareness of various functional styles of modern English.

It is known that the main requirement for an advertising message is a maximum amount of information accompanied by a minimum amount of text. Text compression should be combined with expressiveness thus causing a number of translation problems. Hence, when translating

advertising messages, it is necessary to understand the image of the product that a media agency seeks to convey to media audiences. The main criterion for relevant translation of such a media text should be its communicative and sociocultural adequacy. The text of an advertisement itself is an indissoluble unity of verbal and non-verbal components which must be taken into account when translating it into a foreign language in the EFL classroom.

Extralinguistic and Extracurricular Reasons

1. Prevalence and availability of advertising messages (they are easily found: in the street, at the airport, in the newspaper, on radio and television, in shops, on the Internet, etc.). Nowadays we are surrounded by different types of outdoor advertising: advertising on billboards, installations, furniture, street lighting, electronic displays, road signs and bridges; at train stations and airports; advertising installations on roofs of buildings, etc. Types of advertising in the subway: sticky application on turnstiles of station lobbies and subway cars, posters on the subway track walls, advertisements on doors of station lobbies, illuminated information signs and billboards in the lobbies of metro stations and subways, etc. Thus, the ubiquity of advertising makes it, perhaps, one of the most accessible types of authentic English media texts. It would be extremely irrational to ignore such accessible textual material when modeling the content of learning language.

2. Conciseness. Any advertisement is a brief media text, – sometimes a phrase, a motto, or an appeal. This conciseness of a statement in an advertising message is connected (except for the purely economic reason – a high cost of advertising space), among other things, with some psychological reasons: the shorter the advertisement, the more likely is that a person will read it to the end between times. Such non-language economy is realized with the help of various means of language compression (or meaning compression) – the ways to communicate information in a compressed non-expanded form. Brevity, visibility and mobility of advertising texts contribute to their methodological and educational potential in the EFL classroom.

3. Reference to well-known realities (advertised objects). Due to international economic, political and cultural integration, modern advertising often reports on goods, services of international and global distribution. In the field of mass communication there is a large number of transnational advertising, functioning in different countries. Such advertising messages often correlate their content with the national culture, mentality, traditions, etc. But its essence – the advertised product or service – remains the same, recognizable in all countries with the same success. In situations of intercultural contact this property of advertising makes it a speech material convenient for critical and sociocultural interpretation.

Owing to their specific functions advertising messages widely present information about culture as they appeal to the background knowledge and culture of a language speaker. Information of this kind is accumulated due to the reference to some precedent phenomena: names of famous people, words with a national and cultural component, phraseological units and proverbs. This fact contributes to students' cultural awareness since advertising messages possess a significant linguistic and sociocultural potential. That is why they can be effectively used as a means of solving the problems of forming a speech, communicative, sociocultural, information and media competencies of EFL students.

4. Results

Despite their significant linguistic, methodological, and media educational potential advertising messages are rarely used by EFL teachers to solve the problems of fostering the language, speech, communicative, regional geographic competences of EFL students. At the same time, possessing all the advantages of authentic texts they can fully complement the language environment, and in some cases compensate for its absence at the EFL lesson and beyond.

In order for English-language advertising messages to be transformed into a means of learning, it is necessary, first of all, to decide on principles of their selection for educational needs. As the main criteria for deciding the question of the degree to which a particular advertising message corresponds to goals and objectives of teaching a foreign language, we offer the following requirements: informative content and compliance with educational and extracurricular interests of students (age, professional interests, social and cultural interests); representativeness (in terms of their representation of the genre advertising diversity); an educational value; a linguistic and cultural value; a positive axiological context; availability of its subject and metaphoric content for EFL students and the stage of language learning. An exceptionally rich linguacultural potential of

advertising messages is the best match for the tasks of linguistic and sociocultural aspects of teaching a foreign language.

Moreover, the inter-ethnic nature of advertising is provided, among other things, by a certain universal set of keywords used in advertising messages to form a positive image of a product or service in order to make the consumer purchase the advertised product. Study of these clichés and key words in the EFL classroom could help the teacher enlarge and enrich the students' vocabulary concerning mass media production.

The most important function of advertising is to draw the attention of the media audience and stimulate consumer demand. It is associated with the use of various ways of expressing motivation: both explicit and implicit. And students should be taught to “read between the lines” the implied message in order to develop their critical reading skills.

Critical analysis of advertising messages can help EFL teachers enhance students' analytical skills and raise their media literacy: “Instructors should consider using advertising analysis methods to help students meet the goal of improving critical thinking and language skill in a way that is motivating and interesting” (Hobbs et al, 2014: 27). In this context, EFL students can be asked to describe and analyze print and TV advertisements, develop their awareness of the advertising techniques and media effects on people, create their own advertisements, discuss how words and images are used together to communicate the message of the ad, discuss gender representation in advertisements, etc.

It should be noted that amusing or funny advertising in English is one of the most common features in many countries. Sometimes viewers can only guess what prompted the authors to create such “masterpieces”. There is even a special TV program that presents the funniest commercials in English of the year. Here are some useful Internet sites containing creative amusing advertising videos and posters that can be used by EFL teachers (funny-commercials.net, veryfunnyads.com, funny-commercials.org, funniest-commercials.net).

In our opinion, use of pragmatic media texts (advertisements, travel tickets, posters, etc.) at foreign language lessons corresponds to this principle and in turn contributes to the growth of learners' motivation, acquaints students with contemporary reality of the English-speaking country and expands their linguistic and professional outlook.

Mass media culture inundates people with marketing and advertising every day telling them that they are not going to be happy or successful or attractive or worthy unless they buy what they have to offer, and hiding from view all the suffering and exploitation that are inherent in many ads and their products and services. That is why “the objective of classes devoted to studying advertising is to teach school children (or university students) to recognize various advertising technologies, analyze their goals and, finally, to make independent, reasonable decisions in everyday life” (Novikova, 2004: 19).

Hence, students should be provided with some tools to free themselves from the imposing influence of such advertising and to help them become conscious citizens able to discern, think critically, and make competent choices based on their own values and desires. For this purpose, they should be acquainted with the key media education concepts (Bazalgette, 1992: 199). Teachers can help both children and adults protect and empower themselves from marketing and advertising. Here are some activities that can help.

Activity 1. Advertising language.

Media concepts: language, category

Language skills: vocabulary

Procedure: show the students a word cloud (Figure 1) with advertising key words (such as market, publicity, brand, classified ads, flyer, commercial, etc.). The students focus on the words, or add more, to get everybody fully on topic under study. Then give them some sentences and ask them to try to deduce the meaning of the bold words from the context.



Fig. 1. A word cloud with advertising key words

E.g. Advertising is a marketing tactic involving paying for space to promote a product, service, or cause. Many adverts are only effective because they persuade people that they need products or services when in reality they don't. Sometimes advertising is deceptive, you can't believe a word they tell you.

Activity 2. What advertised products do you have?

Media concepts: language, audience

Language skills: vocabulary, speaking

Procedure: ask students in pairs to think and speak honestly about all the things they have in their houses that have been advertised. Perhaps they could say what they have, how it was advertised, and who bought it and why.

Activity 3. Advertising slogans.

Media concepts: agency, language, audience

Language skills: vocabulary, speaking

Procedure: students review a number of "slogans" and write convincing sales slogans for something, which they should sell to the class. After listening to the advertisements ask the students to consider which ads have influenced them. Ask them to be very honest as they reflect on the impact of the advertising message on their desires.

E.g. Advertising Slogans

Can we interest you in a ... ?

This is a very popular item.

You're never too old / young for a ...

An eye-pleasing item!

Enjoy the amazing beauty of ...

Make an impression with ...

Activity 4. Analyzing advertisements.

Media concepts: agency, language, audience

Language skills: vocabulary, speaking

Procedure: scatter advertisements from popular modern magazines over the floor of the classroom. Demonstrate how to analyze the messages implied in them, using the following questions:

1. What product or service is being advertised?
2. What need or desire does the advertisement promise to fulfill? (e.g. love, happiness, wealth, beauty, health, etc.?)
3. Who is the target audience?

4. Who is excluded by the advertisement? (i.e. social classes, races, body types, values, etc.)?
5. What suffering, exploitation or destruction is hidden from the audience's view? (i.e., destruction to the environment)
6. What product might do more good? What service could do less harm?

Activity 5. Do you know how to advertise?

Media concepts: language, audience, technology

Language skills: speaking

Procedure: have your students role play the following advertising situations.

1. You want to sell a new type of laptop. You have decided to advertise it on the Internet. Decide when you want your ad to be broadcast so it could be seen by the maximum number of appropriate people.
2. You have just opened a new local electronic store. You don't have a big budget so you need to think carefully about how and where to advertise.
3. You want a new roommate. Decide how to advertise so it will be seen by the type of person you want to live with.
4. You have invented a new kind of a medical device, and you want to market this. Decide which will serve you best and why.
5. You want to advertise your company. It is not a new company but you lost money last month and you want new customers.

5. Conclusion

The issues of media culture and media literacy of the younger generation are becoming increasingly urgent nowadays in view of the growing and ambiguous effects of present-day digital technologies and their content on a personality and society development: "Media educated citizens with a high level of information and media culture are one of the strategic European educational and sociocultural objectives" (Mikhaleva, 2016: 116). This is especially relevant for children and youth since a low level of media users' information and media culture may actualize the risk of younger audiences being manipulated by some destructive forces, which sometimes leads to asocial behavior among children and teenagers (Livingstone, Haddon, 2009). Hence, the main aim of contemporary media education is a media educated personality with a high level of digital literacy and media culture that is indispensable for safe and socially significant self-fulfillment, sociocultural and personal development in ICT mediated cross-cultural communication.

On the one hand, thanks to their dynamic and socially responsive character, advertising messages are able to fulfill the role of the natural context in foreign language acquisition for introducing and training a wide variety of linguistic phenomena. Many educational topics in the study of the phonetic, grammatical, stylistic levels of a foreign language can be provided with illustrative material from contemporary advertising messages.

On the other hand, teachers should not forget about the manipulative character of advertising messages and teach their students to "read between the lines" the implied message in order to develop their students' critical and analytical skills. And for this purpose, students ought to be provided with some media educational tools to free themselves from the imposing influence of such advertising and to help them become conscious citizens who are able to discern, think critically, and make competent choices based on their own values and desires.

In this context, EFL students can be asked to describe and analyze print and TV advertisements, develop their awareness of the advertising techniques and media effects on people, create their own advertisements, discuss how words and images are used together to communicate the message of the ad, discuss gender representation in advertisements, etc.

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