

REVEALING THE 'TRUTH' IN THE 'LIES' IN ADVERTS: A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS ON THE FLOUTING OF THE QUALITY MAXIM IN COMMERCIAL BILLBOARD ADVERTS

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Abstract

This study on selected commercial billboard adverts is done using Grice's Theory of the Cooperative Principle particularly the quality maxim which is one of the four maxims postulated by Grice, others being the maxim of quantity, relation and manner. This is done to unravel the 'truth' in the 'lies' contained in the six purposively selected and analysed data. When the quality maxim is flouted, the expression produced sounds untrue, but the truth lies in its implication. Unravelling the reasonableness in the unreasonable in the analysed data is the task of this study as shown in the above analysis. The fact that such an assertion cannot be true and knowing that this is intentionally done necessitates a deeper analysis to unearth the advertiser's intended meaning to which implicature is amenable. The analysis has shown that the advertisers flouted the quality maxim in the analysed adverts in order to attract attention, sustain attention and to implicitly make certain claims about the product or even ascribe certain attributes to the product with the aim of motivating readers to patronize the product being advertised. This study has also shown that the perlocution of the adverts on readers is motivational. It has also been shown in this study that motivation which is the perlocution is achieved through performing certain speech acts. The speech acts performed by the advertisers in the above adverts are basically the directive act and the persuasive which are explicitly expressed in some adverts and implicitly expressed in others. This study is rewarding as it has analytically revealed what looking at a glance readers will term as false or unprovable in commercial billboard adverts but are so worded dexterously with an aim in mind.

Introduction

Advertising, according to Lewis (2000) is a paid non personal communication from an identified sponsor using mass media to persuade or influence an audience. Advertising is a popular means of promoting businesses and a means of introducing new ones into the market by exposing them to the public via various media which includes newspaper, television, radio, billboard etc. The advent of computers has made possible a paradigm shift from the traditional advertising media to new and more effective

means. The use of billboard to advertise products and services has gained prominence since as an outdoor form of advertising, it ensures constant exposure to the adverts. Billboard makes it possible to advertise using different modes of communication such as words, pictures, symbols, signs etc. which according to Crystal (1997) makes the initial impact and helps to persuade readers to patronize the advertiser. This has led scholars such as Vorlat (1976 p.291) to argue that advertising is "essentially a persuasive speech act" since commercial adverts cannot be devoid of persuasion.

Due to the mobility of the target audience, commercial billboard advertisers ensure that their advert is short and appealing (Ding, 1995). In trying to achieve this, they flout the Gricean maxims of quantity, quality, manner and relation. The quality maxim in particular is frequently flouted in order to produce implicature which aid to communicate the advertiser's message. Flouting the Gricean quality maxim, readers see it that the advertiser has said what is not true or what he does not have evidence to. Interestingly, this is done to attract attention and sustain it in order to derive the implicature which is targeted towards the advertiser's message. It is interesting to gradually discover that what is seen being untrue is actually meaningful. Flouting the quality maxim is one of the subtle and covert ways advertisers put forward their message to readers. The effect of such flouting on the readers will produce the perlocution. This is also a reason for flouting the quality maxim. It is well known that the aim of every advertiser is to get people to patronize him. Usually, they don't just come out plainly to tell people to buy their product, they use indirectness by flouting any of the Gricean maxims. When readers read and derive the implicature, the perlocution immediately acts. Whatever perlocution takes place, whether to challenge, to direct, to desire etc, motivation is the end point which could make readers to act towards patronizing the advertiser.

This study is aimed at revealing the 'truth' in what readers might call 'lies' in commercial billboard adverts. The 'lies' are a result of the flouting of the quality maxim which is intentionally done to produce implicature which is uncover the message. The interesting thing about a study as this is the process of unearthing the implicature which is revealed by detecting the how the maxim is flouted. Furthermore, the study looks at why the quality maxim is flouted in each of the adverts and perlocution of it on the readers which completes the communication process of encoding a message and sending it to the receiver who must decode it and act on it to complete the process. All this reveals how language is dexterously and indirectly used by advertisers to pass their message across to readers in a strong way that seeks to motivate them to patronize the product being advertised.

Methodology

The data for this study were collected from the internet. These are commercial billboard adverts located within Nigeria thus, this study is limited to commercial billboard adverts that are found in Nigeria only. The study made use of the purposive

sampling technique to select the data for analysis. The selected data were analysed using Grice's (1975) Theory of Conversational Implicature as framework especially the area of the four maxims of quantity, quality, manner and relation. Specifically, the study focuses on the quality maxim in which Grice argues that to have a successful conversation, interlocutors must say only what is true and what they have evidence for. As a basis for analysis, this theory is apt as it will achieve the aim of this study which is to reveal the 'truth' in what the public might call 'lies' in commercial billboard adverts.

Theoretical Framework

Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle

The Theory of Cooperative Principle was propounded by the H.P Grice in 1975 in his work entitled: 'Logic and Conversation.' There, Grice argued that no matter the background of interlocutors, there is a basic principle of conversation that they adhere to. Grice's Cooperative Principle states:

Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

This principle enhances smooth exchange between interlocutors and makes it successful. This principle serves as theory of communication which gives consideration to how meaning can be achieved by looking beyond the meaning of the constituent words in the speech exchange. (Levinson, 1985). This is to say that the Cooperative Principle considers utterances as eliciting meaning more than that which is expressed by the semantics of the constituent words in an utterance. The CP as a theory seeks to provide insight to the necessary factors that make communication successful. On the other hand, non-adherence to these principles hampers effective communication. This principle may not be consciously followed by interlocutors but they form necessary and underlying ingredients to any successful communication.

Grice's Conversational Maxims

Grice, according to Peccei (1999) divides the Cooperative Principle into four maxims: the quality maxim, the quantity maxim, the manner maxim and the relation maxim. These maxims, according to Grice (1975) are expected to be observed by interlocutors when they engaged in communicative event. The maxims are explained below:

The Quality Maxim

This maxim states thus:

Try to make your contribution one that is true.

Specifically, interlocutors should not:

- (1) Say what they believe to be false
- (2) Say that for which they lack adequate evidence.

The observance of this maxim by interlocutors ensures sincerity as they engage in any communicative event thus, any interlocutor who contravenes this maxim by saying what is not true or what they lack evidence for is said to have flouted this maxim which will result to insincerity and could mar the communication.

The Quantity Maxim

This maxim states thus: make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the conversation. Specifically, interlocutors are expected not to; say too much or too little; make their contribution more informative than is required. This maxim necessitates control in the quantity of information given in a talk exchange; it should be in the needed quantity hence, any interlocutor who supplies information more than the needed quantity or less than the needed quantity is said to have flouted this maxim which will result to the use of unnecessities.

The Relation Maxim (Maxim of Relevance)

This maxim states thus:

Make your contribution relevant. Specifically, interlocutors should stay on the topic; be relevant.

This maxim makes it a necessity that interlocutors provide information that is in tandem with the subject matter being discussed. This maxim helps interlocutors to maintain relevance. Straying from the subject matter or topic under discussion will amount to flouting this maxim which will result in the use of unnecessities.

The Manner Maxim

This maxim states that interlocutors should be perspicuous. Specifically: avoid obscurity; avoid ambiguity; be brief; be orderly.

The essence of communication is understanding. When a message is decoded as encoded by the sender, communication is said to have taken place thus, this maxim helps interlocutors to achieve communication by being perspicuous in their use of language so as to effectively communicate their message to listener(s).

Conversational and Conventional Implicature

Grice (1975) derives two types of Implicature: Conventional and Conversational Implicature. Melchenko opines that "the concept of conversational implicature explains how it is possible for speakers to mean and for hearers to understand more than is literally said. The hearer understands the speaker's intended meaning by generating conversational implicature" (2003 p.23). Differentiating between conventional implicature and conversational implicature, Thomas (1995 p.57) states that conventional implicature refers to "what is implied by the literal meaning of words." While conversational implicature "is what is implied according to the context

of utterance.” Kempson (1984, cited in Saba 2018 p.35-36) identifies four characteristics of conversational implicature. They are as follows:

They are dependent on the recognition of the cooperative principle and its maxims and they will not be part of the meaning of the lexical items in the sentence since their interpretation depends on a prior understanding of the conventional meaning of the sentence. More so, the implication of an utterance will characteristically not be the sole possible interpretation of that utterance. There may be more than one possible assumption, which will reinstate the cooperative principle in the face of an apparent breakage. Since these assumptions are not explicit, they are often indeterminate. The working of an implicature will depend on assumptions about the world which the speaker and the hearer share.

In addition, they are cancellable. That is, an interpretation which is not part of the conventional meaning of the utterance can be explicitly denied without contradiction. It is thus seen that in actual use sentences will not be restricted to an interpretation determined by the form and meaning of the sentence itself and that these interpretations may vary accordingly as the assumptions made by the speakers and hearer vary.

Analysis of Commercial Billboard Adverts

Datum 1



Locution 1: United in love and laughter

Locution 2: MTN, everywhere you go

The above datum is a commercial advert of MTN, a telecommunication network service provider in operation in Nigeria. MTN is a leading telecommunication giant in Nigeria operating alongside Glo, Airtel, gMobile etc. The first locution 'United in love and laughter' informs readers that using MTN brings out unity occasioned by love and laughter. When people use MTN, they can connect with family, friends, business

partners and patrons though they may be physically apart. They may be physically apart, but they can be psychologically and emotionally connected via MTN. This locution ascribes unity, love and laughter to the use of MTN which may not be actually true, neither is there any evidence to prove that those who use MTN are happier and more united than those who use Glo or Airtel for instance. For instance, MTN could be used to call someone to strike an argument, fire an employee, break a sad news etc. Therefore, this locution flouts the quality maxim, however, readers should not just discard the advert as false as it is intentionally used to derive implicature. By flouting the quality maxim, the advertiser, as a marketing strategy, seeks to project the positive side of using MTN to connect and share love and laughter with family and friends. MTN makes up for physical distance between people. They may be physically apart, but they can connect via MTN. The truism of locution 1 above is only discoverable when readers look beyond the literal expression into the implicit information that is borne.

Locution 2, 'MTN, everywhere you go' expressly flouts the quality maxim. The word 'everywhere' means no exception or limit to the network coverage of MTN. It means that there is MTN network everywhere in the world. This assertion cannot be proved to be true hence, flouting the quality maxim. Factually, there are many places in the world especially rural areas that MTN network service has not been provided to thus, making the assertion false. However, the truism of the assertion lies in its implicature which is derivable from the consideration of the locution as a flouting of the Gricean maxim of quality which enjoins interlocutors or language users to say only what is true or that for which they have evidence. The implicature derived is that MTN enjoins wide coverage; it is the largest telecommunications company in Nigeria; the largest telecommunications company in Africa and, it is used in over twenty (20) countries of the world (**provide reference**). Though it is not directly true that MTN is everywhere, the implicature derived through the flouting of the Gricean quality maxim that MTN has wide network coverage is true.

Flouting the quality maxim by the advertiser in the above MTN advert is a marketing strategy by the advertiser to attract readers to patronize MTN by motivating them to acquire an MTN SIM and registering on the network in order to experience happiness, share love and enjoy the wide coverage that it offers.

Datum 2



Locution: Glo, Rule your world.

The above locution is the slogan of Glo telecommunications company. Glo is a widely used mobile network in Nigeria just as MTN, Airtel and gMobile. The slogan expressly ascribes the ability to rule one's world to Glo subscribers. The explicit assertion is that anybody who subscribes to the Glo network automatically begins to rule their world. This assertion in the above locution cannot be proved to be true as there is no evidence to show that Glo subscribers are ruling their world and other network users are not therefore, it flouts the Gricean maxim of quality. However, this is intentionally done by the advertiser to communicate an implied meaning to readers. The truism of the locution above is in its implicature that is derivable from the locution. The possessive determinant 'your' in the locution, 'Rule your world' personalizes it to individual world (life). The implicature derived from the flouting of the Gricean quality maxim in the above locution is that Glo offers services that meet the telecommunication needs of subscribers. Ruling one's world in this instance would mean accessing all that one needs as far as telecommunication is concerned. This would mean having access to affordable airtime, data and so on. Even though one could not say that Glo is better than any other network service provider, it is surely serving their subscribers which accounts for its continuous usage.

The quality maxim is flouted in the above locution as stated above by the advertiser in order to motivate and challenge them to 'rule their world' by subscribing to the Glo network. This is a marketing strategy adopted by the advertiser which is premised on the knowledge that everybody prefers to rule than being ruled. Interestingly, the reason why people struggle to succeed in life is to be above others. It

is expected that the desire to rule their world will motivate readers to subscribe to the Glo network which is the goal of the advertiser.

Datum 3



Locution: Best years ahead
Choose ARM pensions

The above is an advert by ARM pensions. ARM pensions is a body authorized to handle issues of pensions. It is one of the pension bodies in operation in Nigeria from which employees could choose to handle their pension issues. The phrase, 'Best years ahead' simply informs readers that pension benefits are for the future not the present. Also, the advertiser asserts that the future is better than the present by virtue of the pension benefits members will enjoy however, according to the above locution, the advertiser ties having a better future to patronizing ARM pensions when he states, 'Best years ahead' and directs readers to, 'Choose ARM pensions' in order to enjoy the 'Best years ahead'. There is no evidence to base the assertion by the advertiser that ARM pensions is better than any other pension body. There could be other pension bodies which members may see as being the best too as far as they are satisfied with the services being rendered.

The implicature produced in flouting the quality maxim in the above locution is that ARM pensions offer efficient and satisfactory services to members. This could be true as the possibility exists that other pension bodies may not be very efficient in their service delivery hence; members may be unsatisfied with the services being rendered to them. Thus, even though the locution by flouting the quality maxim seems to lack evidence to support the claim, the implicature produced by the flouting could be true. The quality maxim is intentionally flouted by the advertiser to produce the implicature stated above with the aim of persuading readers, through the directive speech act to patronize ARM pensions. This persuasion also comes with a motivation. The advertiser exploits the fact that everybody desires the best to motivate and persuade to patronize ARM pensions in order to enjoy the best.

Datum 4



Locution: Welcome #APPyness

The above locution is presented in style. #APPyness is a blend of the '#' sign, App (short form for application) and the entire construction forms the word 'happiness'. The visual display of a phone and the text 'Stanbic IBTC' which is a bank means that the advert has to do with bank and phone. The 'APP' in #APPyness means phone application. The '#' sign relates to code that could be dialled to access services offered by Stanbic IBTC on phone. Collectively, looking the visual, textual resources used together with the sign inform readers that the advertiser, Stanbic IBTC Bank is advertising mobile banking. This is the use of phone to access services offered by the bank without having to physically visit the bank for it which helps to reduce population at the bank and aids quick and easy access to services.

The locution 'Welcome #APPyness' by inference means that to use the Stanbic IBTC mobile App to access the bank's services on phone is to 'welcome happiness.' This is asserting and claiming that customers are happy when they can have easy access to the bank services on their phone. This claim and assertion somewhat flout the Gricean maxim of quality since happiness is a general word and not only gotten by just being satisfied by easy access to bank services. In other words, people could have easy access to bank services and still not be happy. There is no evidence to prove that people are happy just because they have free access to bank services; the services however easy the accessibility is do not translate to happiness. A sad person may have easy access to IBTC bank services and still remain sad. However, the advert cannot be discarded as being false as a look into the implicature derived through flouting of the Gricean

quality maxim elicits the contextual meaning of the advert as intended by the advertiser.

The derived implicature by flouting the Gricean quality maxim in the above locution is that customers are happy that they don't have to spend time visiting the bank and sometimes having to queue up for long before they are attended since they can now easily access those services on their phone by downloading and using the Stanbic IBTC mobile App to transact. What is implied here is not the general happiness *per se* but the happiness that comes from having to transact easily on phone. A glance at the advert may show that the advertiser is not being truthful especially if one has had a bad experience using the Stanbic IBTC mobile APP or knows somebody who has. But, the implicature derived by the quality maxim flouting places it in its appropriate context; people don't become happy just by using the Stanbic IBTC mobile App to transact but seamless access and the effectiveness of the services received could leave the customer satisfied. What IBTC boasts of in the advert is easy access to services and that those services are effective to meet the needs of customers.

The implicature derived through the flouting of the Gricean maxim of quality in the above locution is geared toward motivating readers to patronize Stanbic IBTC by using the Stanbic IBTC mobile App. The motivating nuance is captured by the advertiser's ascription of happiness to the use of the bank mobile App. The advertiser intentionally chose the noun 'happiness' since everybody desires happiness and satisfaction when they access services have subscribed for. The perlocution of this is that readers will want to try out the Stanbic IBTC mobile App in order to experience happiness as claimed by the advertiser. This will then achieve the aim of the advert which is to increase patronage.

Datum 5



Locution: Veleta...Love at First Sip.

The above locution is an advert of Veleta wine which is a fruit drink. This information is borne visually as shown on the billboard as it shows a bottle of Veleta drink. In addition, the picture of a lady is shown on the billboard with a cup of drink. She is ready to drink it. Furthermore, the use of the word 'sip' in the locution tells that it is a drink that is being advertised.

The locution, '...Love at first sip' is a coinage of the general saying, 'Love at first sight' which basically refers to falling in love with especially with the opposite sex even when one is just seeing them for the first time. This is based on the belief that love is nurtured over time so, falling in love with someone one is seeing for the first time seems unusual howbeit, not infeasible.

The above locution, 'Veleta... Love at first sip' asserts that anyone who sips Veleta drink will fall in love with it. The advertiser attempts to differentiate Veleta from other fruit drinks claiming that unlike other fruit drinks that come to be loved after several patronage, Veleta is loved at first sip. This assertion flouts the quality maxim as it is impossible to claim that everybody will love Veleta after tasting it for the first time. No matter how great the taste is, some people may still not love it; the possibility is there. Furthermore, there is no evidence to prove that everybody who drank Veleta fruit drink loved it at the first instance. However, this flouting is done intentionally by the advertiser in order to produce an implicature which is targeted at achieving the purpose of the advert which is to increase patronage. The implicature produced through flouting of the quality maxim is that Veleta fruit drink is brewed using essential ingredients that can produce great taste that endears people to it when tasted. This implicature derived unravels the advertiser's claim that Veleta has what other fruit drinks may not have which results in its great taste. This ascription is a subtle comparison between Veleta and other fruit drinks by placing Veleta above them. Even though everybody may not love Veleta at first sip as captured in the locution, the implicature derived above by flouting the Gricean quality maxim makes the locution reasonable; Veleta is well brewed using essential ingredients that produce great taste. The perlocution of the above locution is that readers are motivated to patronize the product being advertised in order to enjoy that great and inviting taste as claimed by the advertiser. The result of this is increase in patronage which is the aim of the advertiser.

Datum 6



Locution: The World's Original Stone Coated Steel Roof Tile

The visual display and the above locution capture the product that is being advertised. Thus, the text captures the product and its use in words '...Stone Coated Steel Roof Tile' while the visual display captures it visually. The use of the word 'world' in the above locution communicates that the product being advertised has a global coverage; it is used globally. The phrase, 'stone coated steel roof' communicates what the product is made from and the function which is also borne visually on the billboard. The use of the adjective 'original' is a claim and an attempt by the advertiser to separate his product from others which he termed as fake or substandard. Overtly, the advertiser especially by the use of the definite article 'the', claims that his product is the only original 'Stone Coated Steel Roof Tile' in the world. This flouts the Gricean maxim of quality since it could hardly be true neither is there any evidence to prove that it is the only original product of its kind in the world. There is also the impossibility of not having travelled all over the world to compare it with what obtains there in order to arrive at such conclusion.

The flouting of the Gricean quality maxim in the above locution by the advertiser is intentional to produce an implicature. Even though the claim is not proved to be true, the truism of the locution rests in the implicature derivable from the locution. Flouting the quality maxim in the above locution produces the implicature that advertised product is produced using quality materials which enables it to favourably compete with other products of its kind in the (global) market. Simply, the advertiser ascribes originality to his product as a way of assuring readers of the durability and effectiveness of the product. Since everybody desires original products, readers are motivated to patronize the advertised product for its durability. Flouting the quality maxim therefore attracts readers' attention to the advert and motivates them to patronize the product after deriving the implicature.

Conclusion

The analysis of selected commercial billboard adverts above was done using Grice's (1975) Theory of the Cooperative Principle. Particularly, the quality maxim which is one of the four maxims postulated by Grice formed the basis for the analysis. This is done to unravel the 'truth' in the 'lies' contained in the selected and analysed data. When the quality maxim is flouted, the locution becomes false or arguable but then the implicature produced by that flouting which is the reason for the flouting is reasonable. Unravelling the reasonableness in the unreasonable in the analysed data is the task of this study as shown in the above analysis. This study is rewarding as it helps to reveal the 'truth' in what readers might call 'lies' in commercial billboard adverts which is commonly and intentionally done for a reason. For instance, datum 6 has the locution, 'The World's Original Stone Coated Steel Roof Tile' which overtly claims that the product is more original than any other in the world thereby asserting that other products of its kind are fake. The fact that such an assertion cannot be true and knowing that this is intentionally done necessitates a deeper analysis to unearth the advertiser's intended meaning to which implicature is amenable. The derived implicature that the product is made of quality materials which give it wider coverage and usage becomes tenable. This is all derived from the advertiser's (intentional) flouting of the quality maxim.

This study has also provided the possible reason for flouting the quality maxim for each of the analysed data. The analysis has shown that the advertisers flouted the quality maxim in the analysed adverts in order to attract attention, sustain attention and to implicitly make certain claims about the product or even ascribe certain attributes to the product with the aim of motivating readers to patronize the product being advertised. This study has also shown that the perlocution of the adverts on readers is motivational. It has also been shown in this study that motivation which is the perlocution is achieved through performing certain speech acts. The speech acts performed by the advertisers in the above adverts are basically the directive act and the persuasive act. These acts are performed by the advertisers intentionally in order to derive the perlocution of motivation which leads to the ultimate goal of making sales. The directive and persuasive acts are explicitly expressed in some adverts and implicitly expressed in others.

There is no gainsaying the fact that every commercial advert is primarily to increase patronage even though some advertisers covertly express it and distance themselves from this motive. This study has been able to unearth the mercenary motive of commercial adverts by first assessing the linguistic composition of the adverts in the light of the flouting of the Gricean quality maxim which leads to the derivation of an implicit meaning (implicature) which is shrouded in purposeful speech acts explicitly or implicitly expressed. This motive will place a sharp disparity between commercial adverts and others say, political adverts. Finally, and interestingly, this study has unravelled some of the lexes that served as motivation pointers or cues in the

analysed data which include 'everywhere' (datum 1), 'rule' (datum 2), 'best' (datum 3), 'happiness' (datum 4), 'love' (datum 5) and, 'original' (datum 6).

In conclusion, this study is rewarding as it has analytically revealed what looking at a glance readers will term as false or unprovable in commercial billboard adverts. This study is insightful as it has touched on areas that will be of interest to researchers, students, potential business owners and others who are keen on understanding the persuasive power of language-use especially as used by advertisers to propagate their business. Thus, this will particularly benefit scholars in Communication, Business Management and Pragmatics.

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