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A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Linguistic Features of Billboards

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Abstract *The present research, "A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Linguistic Features of Billboards", has been accomplished in order to make a comprehensive analysis of the fact how advertising is manipulating and altering the basic philosophies, dogmas, creeds and ideologies of the common people. Advertising is a vast field, and it has influenced the lives of all of us in the last decades. Keeping this factor in view, the researcher has made an attempt to uncover those aspects which remain hidden in the glamorous and eye-catching commercials which contribute to the capitalist's efforts to make maximum profit by thrusting his products on the customers. The researcher has done the linguistic analysis by using Norman Fairclough's model of Critical Discourse Analysis (1993) of the billboard advertisements. The researcher has analyzed the language and images used on the billboards and had made an attempt to find out the basic notions for which these linguistic expressions have been used in the boards. For this purpose, he uses various tactics. The sincerity which is illustrated in the billboard advertisements by the advertiser is not factual. The real picture is on the other side.*

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Introduction

Advertising is an outstanding discourse category in all existing societies of the world and in the society in which we live; it is already a well-established phenomenon. A very significant distinctive characteristic of advertisement discourse is its role because it is constantly persuading people to purchase particular manufactured goods. But at the same time, advertisement transmits information and message to the consumers and only through this do they come to know about any particular product, its value, usefulness and availability. An advertisement not only creates meaning at first but also provokes us to make a deal where it is passed from one thing to another (Williamson, 1983).

It is the use of sign systems and language which distinguishes human beings from animals. Both species can communicate, but humans have sign systems. This sign system is based on logic and reasoning. The sign can take the form of words, gestures, images and objects. These forms are means of communication. Humans utilize these signs to communicate to others. Different symbols are used in logos, billboards and advertisements. These symbols convey a message or meaning to the viewer. Various symbols and signs can be used in advertising. According to Ferdinand de Saussure, language is built up by so many variable signs. The sign is a substantial entity, and he names it "signifier" and "signified". "Advertisements are so prepared as to move away from the page in which they are developed; they provide contribute to our experiences of life (Fiske, 1990, p. 43)."

The normal customers come across over 6,000 advertising messages daily (Tesky, 2008), and this can be compared to more or less 1500 in 1984 (Rumbo, 2002). This difference shows that today advertising has become a fundamental

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component of current modern Western civilization. In this way, a culture of consumption is being developed. Now a day's people's identities, values and aspirations are defined by consumerism, not by their citizenship. The societal manipulation and financial supremacy detained by corporations have facilitated them to set up discursive authenticity. Now the people are marginalized and left without an approach to any significant contribution in cultural fabrication. The present study is aimed at a linguistic analysis by using Norman Fairclough's model of Critical Discourse Analysis (1993) of the billboard advertisements.

Literature Review

Human beings learnt the art of trade as the civilization developed, and interaction among various tribes of society started. Different cultures began to come close to one another. Men developed the aptitude of mutual understanding by promoting their own cultures, products and fashions. The earliest modes of advertisement were inscriptions on woods, metals and stones. The traces of wall paintings have been found in India dating back to 4000 BC (Bhatia: 62). The advertising was done orally in China.

The need for advertisement was felt in the 15th century. During the Middle Ages, municipalities and cities began to grow, but the general public was illiterate. So the signs were used for the advertisements. These were of cobbler, blacksmith, miller and tailor used for different items, i.e. boot, diamond, hat and suit respectively. The first printing press was established by William Caxton in England in 1487, and the very first print advertisement was in the English language. Advertisements began to appear in newspapers in the 18th century in England. Promotion of books and newspapers were made in this way. In addition to this, medicines were also advertised through newspapers in England in the 18th century. Thomas J Berret is regarded as the father of modern advertising (Coates: 107-15). He worked for Pears Soap Company in England. In 1920, an advertisement for tobacco was in vogue, and it laid the foundation of modern advertisements by bringing into use modern techniques for advertisements. In the same year the first radio station was established, the advertisements were made to sell radios, and with the passage of time, various nonprofit organizations such as schools, colleges, clubs and public organizations established their own radio stations (Mc Chesney, 1928). With the advancement of radio technology, many organizations started to sponsor the programs on the radio. Before the start of the program, a brief introduction of the company was broadcasted. In the same way, at the end of the program, this practice was repeated (Mc Chesney, 1928).

In 1950, commercial television was started, and the the world of advertisements entered a new phase. Now the public watched the advertisements of various products on screen. Many sponsoring firms used this mode for advertising. In the 1980s, cable television was started, and separate channels were introduced for advertising purposes. Such channels can still be watched on TV. It was till 1998 that advertising was done mostly through radio and televisions. Since the 1990s, the internet has occupied a conspicuous place in the modern world, and advertising is being done through it. Since the internet has gained a foremost position in the lives of individuals, advertising agencies are promoting their products through this.

Advertisements in Modern Era

In the modern-day to day world, electronic media has gained supremacy. The people's tastes, choices and aspirations are controlled and directed by the bourgeoisie with the assistance of these electronic devices, which are playing a pivotal role in present-day society in molding the ideologies of the common layman. Media is propagating certain ideologies by rendering a particular culture more elaborative and conspicuous. Advertisements have become an inevitable part of media. As a matter of fact, advertisements are just like the blood of the media. Advertising has both information and amusement in it, and these aspects contribute to their likeability among the customers (Halley & Balldinger, 1991).

The modern world has become a global village. Now international challenges are being faced by various multinational companies. Now the purchaser has also become a global consumer. Consequently, connected consumer ship has created challenges for advertising agencies. It is due to this fact that advertising has

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become a major area of interest for the huge marketing companies of the world. Consumer behavior can very easily be formed with the help of advertising without having any concern with the quality of the advertised product (Gorn, 1982).

Basic Notions of Advertising

While describing advertising, four factors can be brought to light, that is plan, creativity, execution and media. All these four factors require thinking and wisdom on the part of marketing professionals. These marketing and advertising professionals are solely responsible for the implementation and development of advertising. These ideas are used by the advertising agencies to make their advertising effective and more useful for the common public. In the following, these ideas are described step by step.

Planning

Plan or strategy is used by the advertising agencies and marketing professionals to give directions to the advertisements. These plans or strategies play a key role in the formation of advertisements. The marketing professionals and advertising agents prepare the advertisements to fulfil certain objectives and demands (Fraser, 1992). These advertisements are designed for specific audiences keeping in view their demands and mindsets. So the formation and design of these advertisements should be so as to shape the behaviors of the people.

Creativity

Creativity plays a key and speculative role in the development and formulation of advertisements. Creativity is required everywhere in all fields of life, and the field of advertisement is specific in this regard. New and innovative ideas are presented with a view to grab the attention of the customers and the audience. That is why advertisements are presented with certain ideologies and concepts which are applicable to the minds of the customers or viewers (Fairclogh, 1995). Without the idea of creativity, no add can become attractive and eye-grabbing. People are hired by advertising agencies and marketing firms to make their advertisements more innovative. These professional people have expertise in their respective areas, and they work for a specific field.

Execution

Execution of advertisements is also very important. The designs, colors, photographs, writings, settings and acting are all parts of execution. The manners of the depiction of the product reflect the process of execution. If an advertisement is executed properly, keeping in view all the required criteria, that product is liked and appreciated by a lot of customers. Advertising sets the standards for future plans. Advertisements should be so executed as to make them acceptable to the customers, and all abovementioned elements such as color writing and acting play a vital role in the development of the commercials. The process of execution of the advertisement is a complex and intricate phenomenon (Ewen, 1976). The persons who are involved in this process of execution should keep in their minds the liking and disliking of the common public. This is an age of modernism. People have to earn their money with great difficulty. They like to purchase only those products which are not very costly and come within their budgets. Thus the marketing firms and advertising agencies should follow this rule while designing their advertisements.

Social Roles

Advertising has a social effect by giving information about new and innovative products. It also helps the consumers to make a comparison between different items. The advertising agencies use different celebrities in their advertisements. These celebrities are a source of attention for the common public. The people watch them using certain items and get inspiration in this way. The consumers keep themselves in their places and feel elevated. They think that they will become as attractive and eye-catching as these models are. In addition to this, advertising introduces new, innovative and groundbreaking elements in society (Weatherall, 2002). It introduces fashion and modern tendencies in society. It is human nature to be attracted by fashion and up to date ideas. Thus advertising fulfils this demand of the people living in modern society. Besides this, advertising has an educational role in society. It teaches people how to use certain products. It is with the help of advertising that they can be able to make use of those products and items which were unknown to them prior to their utilization.

Framework

Norman Fairclough's Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (1993)

Norman Fairclough, who is considered to be the founder of CDA is a professor of linguistics at Lancaster University. Fairclough is deeply interested in the fact of how collective societal practices are formed and how they affect the lives of individuals.

The researcher has used the Fairclough model of discourse analysis 1993 to make the stylistic analysis of the linguistic and metalinguistic features of billboards. Fairclough's model elaborates the fact that all social practices are related to particular historical perspectives, and obtainable and current societal connections are duplicated in the shadow of these past social norms and practices. It is a matter of interest. There are so many questions regarding this with particular relation to the positioning of text and serving of interests and negation of interests as well. Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis brings into various light aspects which were helpful for the stylistic analysis of linguistic and metalinguistic features of billboards.

This model consists of three interconnected procedures of the study, which are related to three interconnected facets of discourse.

1. The item of analysis. It can be visual or visual text.
2. This procedure refers to the way or method of how this particular object or item is reproduced. It can be in the form of writing, designing or speaking and reading or manipulating by the audience or the receptors of the messages.
3. The socio-historical contexts and circumstances that direct these procedures.

Fairclough says that each of the above-mentioned elements needs diverse types of analysis. These types are in the following

1. Analysis of text which is regarded as description.
2. Procedural analysis, which is regarded as interpretation.
3. Societal analysis, which is regarded as an explanation.

Signifiers play a key role in this approach. They structure a text, particular linguistic choices and their progression. Along with this fact, socio-historical aspects should also be kept in mind while making selections. In other words, it can be opined that texts are illustrations of publicly synchronized discourse. Side by side, another fact to be noted is that the procedures of production, transmission and reception of messages are communally controlled. The researcher has used Fairclough's model because this model gives manifold aspects of logical, analytic, investigative and diagnostic entries.

According to Fairclough, the text is normally taken as a form of vocal or written language. It is so because in the current scenario, the text is multi semiotic, and basically, it appears in the shape of language. It also merges language with a number of multifaceted semiotic shapes. In this regard, television is a notable example that combines language with other semiotic forms like effects of sound, visual reflections and melody and tune. The same is the case with written language as it is also multi semiotic, not in the sense that it presents a number of pictures and illustrations, but in the present circumstances, the very design of a piece of paper also contributes to the collective evaluation of the written text. Thus text can be regarded as a linguistic, literary work of art, and we can build up methods to evaluate other forms of semiotics correlated with various shapes of language.

Data Analysis

Area 1: Beauty Items Billboards

In a billboard B1 of talcum powder, the word "Medora" has been written in red color sat the left upper corner of the board. Besides this, there is a picture of a woman which is conspicuous. There are five cartoons of talcum powder of different fragrances and colors. There are also words of Urdu language visible on the board. There is another billboard B2 of Faiza beauty cream. Like other boards, the picture of females can be seen on the billboard. In addition to this, there is bilingualism. In another billboard, B3, which is of Fine Face Whitening cream, the words "Fine Face Whitening cream" are written in a vertical manner. A picture of a lady is also visible. It has also been written that cream is for both males and females. The images of cream can also be seen. In another billboard B4, Life buoy has advertised its products. The picture of the mother and kid are visible. It has been written that 1.7 million children do not reach the age of 5. On the left corner of the billboard, it has been

written: “Help a child reach 5”. The picture of a lady and a kid in her lap is in the middle of both of these statements. There is yet another billboard B5 in which these words are written. “Zubaida Apa Whitening soap”. A picture of an aged lady is visible on the board with her signatures at the bottom of the board. There is a board B6 in which “Pantene” shampoo has been advertised. The words “Break the cycle of hair fall in 14 days” have been written. A picture of a lady holding the lock of hair firmly in her right hand has also been shown. B7 is of Face Fresh Beauty Cream in which there is a picture of a lady is visible and prominent. Billboard B8 is of Lux soap in which a famous actress is exposing herself. Billboard B9 is advertising Head and Shoulder in a picture of the famous actress is visible and on the right upper corner of the board. Words “Up to 100% dandruff free” have been written in the middle. Picture of shampoo is also visible on the left lower corner of the board.

Area 2: Food Item Billboards

In this area, food item billboards have been selected. They are ten in number. In this phase, the descriptive analysis of their text and images has been done. Billboard F1 is of dairy milk chocolate. The words “Dairy Milk” have been written in white. Milk is pouring out of a pot. Almonds are also visible. The color of the pot is chocolate. In billboard F2, the name “Netto” has been written largely, and below this name, the phrase “100% pure fruit juices” has been written. Many bottles of fruit juices have been shown in the picture. The words “for your health and fitness” have also been written on the upper left corner of the board. In billboard F3, “payas ki watt lga” has been written. The product is a cold drink Sprite. Similarly, in billboard F4, which is also of a cold drink, the words “Duniya hai dil walon ki” have been written. Two famous cricketers have been shown undermining each other. On billboard F5, a big bottle of a cold drink Pepsi has been shown. A cricketer has been shown chasing that bottle, and two other cricketers are halting his progression towards the bottle. Words in the Urdu language, “Dil Mange Abhi” have been written conspicuously. In billboard F6, which is of Tapal Danedar, two females have been shown. One is in an eastern dress which is offering tea to an up to date lady. On the top of the board, words, “Duniya k Behtreen baghat say ap ki payali tak” have been written. In billboard F7, biscuits have been advertised. A child has been shown holding his face with both hands. Billboard F8 is about Omore ice cream. A picture of the moon is also shown on the board, and with that picture of a large spoon with an ice cream pack can also be observed. Billboard F9 is of “Tarang” in which three females wearing shining dresses, and a male is visible. Words “Chai ka sahi jor” have been written there. Billboard F10 is of Nesvita. There is a picture of a lady. On the left upper corner of the board, a tag is visible in which the price of the pack has been prescribed.

Area 3: Mobile Phone Billboards

There are ten billboards in this area which advertise mobile phone items. Billboard M1 is advertising telenor mobile phone. “Telenor Talkshalk” has been written in the middle on the top of the board. Picture of lady, holding a coin of 10 paisas in her right hand is also visible. Another billboard M2 of Telenor is also there. Words “ Behtreen network , behtreen karobar” are written in a conspicuous manner. Picture of a businessman using cell phone can also be observed in the board. In the background, sacks are visible. In billboard M3, Samsung Galaxy Core 2 has been written in bold words on the left upper corner of the board. Image of mobile phone is in the middle of the board. Picture of a lady and two singers is also there. There is an image of a person who is on the top of the board. It seems as if he is peeping from behind. Another billboard M4 is of indigo in which a male and female with smiling faces have been depicted. Words “Share the Joy” have been written boldly. In another billboard M 5, Zong is advertising its circle club. So many persons are there on the board. In billboard M6, Ufon has advertised its product. Picture of lady and figure “4.99” is visible on the board. In billboard M7, Jazz is advertising “Sms khazana”. Two persons, holding cash in their hands can also be seen. In billboard M8, Jazz “aur sunao” has been advertised. A lady is talking on cell phone in a very relaxed manner. She is looking very happy. M9 is of Ufon 3G. A fast-moving car is also in the board. It seems as if the car is coming out of the board at a very fast speed.M10 is of Telenor. In this board, a man with moustaches has carried a young boy on his shoulders. Words “Her Pakistani ki pohanch main” have been written there. It seems as if this

mobile package is for the common man since the person looks to be a common man.

Area 4: Shoe Billboards

In this area, only five billboards have been included. In billboard S1, a lady is visible on the right side of the board. Word Metro is also apparent there. On the left side of the board, two lady shoes of black hue can also be seen. Onboard S2, two feet of a lady wearing shoes can also be seen. A valet is also present there. In billboard S3, the word "Stylo" has been written on the left corner of the board. A picture of a female foot wearing shoes can also be observed. In the middle of the board, the words "Up to 51%off" have been written markedly. Billboard S4 is of Service Winter Arrivals. Two portions of the board are apparent. In one portion, there is a shoe, and in the other, a lady can be seen in a very happy mood. S5 is of Service Sale Lagee up to 75%. Different characters of different ages are visible. All are looking very happy.

Area 5: Cloth Billboards

In this part, five billboards have been included. In billboard C1, "Gul Ahmed" has been written on the upper right corner of the board. Below this, "Eid Kurta Collection" has been written. Two male models wearing kurta shalwar have been depicted. In billboard C2, three females are the source of attention and on the right upper corner of the board, the words "I (love) Nishat Winters" have been written. An image of heart has been displayed in place of the word "love". In billboard C3, an image of the female is conspicuous on the right side of the board. "khadi Cambric Autumn 2014" has been written evidently. In the middle of the board, an image of both hands working on khaddi has been shown. Billboard C4 is of Bareeze Embroidered Classics. A lady wearing a western dress is in a sitting posture. The background is white. Billboard C5 is of Firdous Lawn. There are seven different pictures of the same female wearing clothes of various colors that are perceptible.

Linguistic analysis of billboards of the different areas such as beauty items, food products, mobile phones, shoes and clothes have been done using Norman Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis (1995). The model has three layers. Subcategory A1 makes the textual analysis which is regarded as description. In this category, names and titles of the billboards, advertisements were described by the researcher. Additionally, in line with Fairclough (1995)'s proclamation that discourse is guarded by and placed in societal perspectives and these things give emphasis on those features of discourse that can be regarded as contextual. Besides this, Wodak (2001) is also of the view that if we want to know the correct use of language in a given text, it's essential to envisage contextual aspects, which include the past history of occurrences. We also need to comprehend the social constructions, cultural standards, and substantial inheritances that discourse takes place within. The present linguistic analysis is in line with Fairclough (1995)'s three-dimensional way of discourse analysis, which observes that discourse is entrenched in the socio-cultural application at diverse stages that is, in the abrupt state of affairs, in the wider establishment or associations and at a social level (Fairclough, 1995). In this analysis, the researcher has observed how our concepts are shaped by a particular factors, which we observe from social perspectives. These social discursive approaches become part and parcel of our lives, and we are guided by them as well.

Conclusion

Advertisers, advertising agencies and marketing professionals work day and night to make their advertisements gorgeous, dazzling and good looking. All this is done on the demand of capitalists who have money and want to earn more and more. The researcher has observed that different linguistic expressions have been highlighted in the advertisements. Various emotional and social prospects have also been manipulated in these boards to change the ideas and dogmas of the people. The basic aim of the researcher is to uncover threes aspects and to discover how these elements are related to human psychology and how changes are brought in people's outlook and behaviors.

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