

# Unfolding the Linguistic Features of Newspaper Advertisements in India

## Descripción de rasgos lingüísticos en la publicidad de periódicos en India

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The language of advertisements aims at precise, clear, pointed, and arresting communication. Like all communicative endeavours, in advertising, getting the message across is of prime importance. However, the use of language in advertising is of a particular character because the advertiser cannot afford to be delinquent or uncritical. The aim of this paper is to investigate the extent to which rules or conventions of the English language are broken in print advertising. It also shows the practical usage of linguistic features especially figures of speech in newspaper advertisements. This paper is based on many concrete examples that strengthen the theoretical part of the paper.

**Keywords:** Advertisements, figures of speech, linguistic features, newspaper

El lenguaje publicitario se enfoca en la comunicación precisa, clara, directa y llamativa. Como todo intento comunicativo, en publicidad el objetivo de transmitir el mensaje es de vital importancia. Sin embargo, el uso del idioma en publicidad posee un carácter particular ya que el publicista no se puede permitir ser ofensivo o acritico. El objetivo del presente artículo es investigar el grado en el que las reglas o convenciones del inglés se rompen en la publicidad impresa. También se muestra el uso práctico de rasgos lingüísticos, especialmente figuras retóricas, en la publicidad dentro de los periódicos. Este artículo se apoya en varios ejemplos concretos para fortalecer la parte teórica.

**Palabras clave:** avisos publicitarios, figuras retóricas, periódicos, rasgos lingüísticos

## Introduction

Language is the most significant gift to human beings. Can anyone think of a world without speech? It is through language that we encode and decode information. Generally

speaking, all communication, creative or critical thinking, and its articulation would have been nonexistent if language did not exist. This world would certainly be dark if the light of language did not illumine it. Sapir, the noted linguist observed:

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. (as cited in Salzmann, 1993, p. 153)

Taking cue from the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, it is not out of place to mention that it is language which determines the limits of our world, which constructs our reality. Therefore, language *is not* neutral. It is not merely a vehicle which carries ideas but also shapes ideas. It is the programme for mental activity (Whorf, 1956). Given that language is such an influential force in shaping our world, it is obvious that those who have the power to create the symbols and their meanings are in a privileged and highly advantageous position. This observation springs from the fact that language can be used creatively—the best examples of such use are seen in advertisements.

Nowadays advertising has penetrated into every nook and corner of one's life. Advertising not only offers information but also has a strong element of persuasion. This is the prime reason that researchers have tried to unveil the mechanisms of advertising: the linguistic dimension of the message, word-play, the use of image and sound, the process of coding and decoding, the interaction between message and audience, and so forth.

## **The Language of Advertisements**

The language of advertisements aims at precise, clear, pointed, and arresting communication. Like all communicative endeavours, in advertising, getting the message across is of prime importance. However, the use of language in advertising is of a particular character because the advertiser cannot afford to be delinquent or uncritical. As Weir (1960, p. 26) says, “The heart and soul of advertising are, and, in many opinions, will remain the creation of effective communication between producer and customer.”

It is certainly an interesting discovery that the creators of advertisements take liberties with language as poets do. The advertisers have an ‘advertising license’ just as the poets have a “poetic license”. The commercial advertisers like artists play with language creatively modifying the natural order of structure and form. Since it is important to create a positive impact about the product, the language used for advertising is chosen carefully. A number of linguistic features get foregrounded to create different styles in order to design the advertisements which have imperishable impact on the reader. Foregrounding can be achieved in two ways: (1) Parallelism and (2) Deviation. For instance, deviation in advertisements can be found at different levels, some of which are explained next.

**Lexical deviation.** An example of “broken words” also comes under lexical deviation. These words refer to separating words into smaller units. Such a technique is often applied to create an unexpected effect upon the readers. For instance:

The new definition of Smart Casual  
The Complete Man Raymond  
Since 1925

(*The Times of India*, 2008, September 30, p. 21)

**Syntactic Deviation.** Syntactic deviation includes violations in syntactic arrangement which could be described as “bad” or “incorrect” grammar. For instance:

Uflex packaging solutions help to bring to you your favourite spices and other foods just the way you want them—fresh and pure. *Which is why* [emphasis added] packaged food giants like Cadbury’s, Britannia, Nestle, TATA tea, P&G and Pepsi have placed their trust in us. And *which is also why* [emphasis added] Reliance Retail and Bharti Walmart—India’s youngest private labels—have left the task of preserving quality and freshness to us.

[Advertisement of UFLEX Flexible Packaging]

(*The Times of India*, 2008, August 20, p. 13)

*Why settle* [emphasis added] for any other AC when you can get a DAIKIN?

[Advertisement of DAIKIN Air-conditioner]

(*Dainik Bhaskar*, 2012, May 27, p. 12)

Leech (1966) has talked about different aspects of advertising, viz, grammar, vocabulary, discourse, rhyme, and rhetoric of advertising. He has also shown the relation of these aspects of advertising with the functional factors such as attention value, listening ability/readability, memorability, and marketing power. The linguistic devices such as illustration, alliteration, rhymes, onomatopoeia, elliptical constructions, metaphor, and paradox are linked with attention value. Simple and colloquial styles are connected with readability. Phonological regularities such as alliteration, rhyme, and onomatopoeia, etc., are related to memorability. Frequent use of imperatives, superlatives, inversions, and parallelism, etc., are associated with marketing power. To make communication effective, advertisements use specific language.

In advertisements, the characteristics of common language, that is, arbitrariness, grammatical accuracy, semantically correctness are exploited maximally. There is a frequent use of disjunctive grammar in advertisements (i.e., in which nonfinite clauses and small phrases are independent). Therefore, the language of advertisements is distinct. Leech (1996, p. 95) remarks: “Disjunctive language is primarily associated with headlines, subheads and signature.”

The major function of the language of advertisement is obviously to attract attention and to persuade people to buy the product or service it presents. Memorable slogans, humour,

and so forth, are also used to enhance impression. Besides, an advertisement may also amuse, inform, misinform, worry, or warn. Advertisements revolve around market economy and information technology. It clearly shows that control over the language is not only in the hands of academic institutions but that it is also shaped by the traders and marketing agencies based on their conception of what works well for the sale of their products on the market.

## Investigating Some Linguistic Features

The language of advertising frequently uses figures of speech and other stylistic devices that are considered typical of poetic language, such as puns, metaphors, alliteration, assonance, rhyme, etc. Keeping in mind the space and scope of this research paper, I would say it is not possible to discuss all the linguistic features microscopically. Consequently, for this study such examples have been selected which exhibit the most widely stylized linguistic features used by the advertisers in newspapers.

### *At the Phonological Level*

#### **Alliteration.**

The world of fashion

Has a new trend: Tradition [emphasis added]

Presenting Rivaaz, a stunning range of gorgeous gold jewellery from Gitanjali [emphasis added]

[Advertisement of RIVAAZ jewellery by Gitanjali group enterprise]

(*Business Standard*, 2008, December 19, p. 12)

Alliteration is the repetition of the consonant sound usually at the beginning of a word. It is one of the oldest poetic devices. In the above example, the phoneme /t/ is repeated at the initial position of words *trend* and *tradition* and the consonant phoneme /g/ is repeated at the initial position of words *gorgeous*, *gold*, and *Gitanjali*.

Furthermore, the presence of fluid sounds (nasals, laterals, and sibilants) adorn this beautiful alliteration with a glazed rhythmic effect.

Good time to Grab Golden Opportunity on 11.11.11 [emphasis added]

[Advertisement of BCL Homes at Mohali]

(*The Tribune*, 2011, November 10, p. 1)

In the given example, the repetition of the consonant phoneme /g/ at the initial position of words is evident. This repetition of the velar plosive with short intervals presents an effect to act swift.

Gateway to a defining decade [emphasis added]

Indian Overseas Bank

BANCON 2011 banker's conference

[Advertisement of a conference by Indian Overseas Bank]

(*The Hindu*, 2011, November 4, p. 20)

In the given example, the consonant phoneme /d/ at the initial position of words *defining* and *decade* is repeated. Besides, the vowel glide /ei/ in *gateway* and *decade* is repeated which is the example of assonance (repetition of vowel sounds).

Black brings bad luck [emphasis added]

That's just a superstition

[Advertisement of *Sportstar—The Sportier Tabloid*]

(*The Hindu*, 2011, October 28, p. 15)

This is an interesting example with repetition of the consonant phoneme /b/ at the initial position of words above—clubbed with assonance through the vowel /æ/ in *Black*, *bad*, *that*—creating an effect of statement /b/ and then jeering negation /æ/.

**Rhymes.** Rhyme is one of the popular features of advertisements. It is musical and is successful at catching the customer's attention.

Take what  
you want,  
when you want,  
where you want.

[Advertisement of a Scan Disk 8GB USB]

(*The Times of India*, 2008, September 30, p. 3)

The Best Bank—India

The Best Equity House—India

[Advertisement of Deutsche Bank]

(*Business Standard*, 2008, December 15, p. 1)

Journey is in Doubt  
if the Ticket is from a Tout

[Advertisement of Northern Railway]

(*The Hindu*, 2011, October 30, p. 5)

In your moments of happiness, it's there.

In your moments of prosperity, we're there.

[Advertisement of NSE – National Stock Exchange of India Limited]

(*The Economic Times*, 2011, November 9, p. 11)

**Onomatopoeia.** It is a figure of speech in which the sound reflects the sense. It is also at times called echoism.

*Mmmm.... Smells good! Uflex?* [emphasis added]

Uflex packaging solutions help to bring to you your favourite spices and other foods just the way you want them—fresh and pure.

[Advertisement of UFLEX Flexible Packaging]  
(*The Times of India*, 2008, August 20, p. 13)

### *At the Lexical Level*

**Lexis is subject to innovation and experiment.** Advertisements have rich and colourful vocabulary, that is, use of nouns, pronouns, adjectives, neologisms, clipping, acronyms, blending, and so forth. The choice of vocabulary depends on the context the advertiser wishes to present, the audience and thereby the register. Advertisements provide a springboard to learn the words and phrases quickly. For instance:

Why settle for any other *AC* when you can get a DAIKIN? [emphasis added]  
[Advertisement of DAIKIN Air-conditioner]  
(*Dainik Bhaskar*, 2012, May 27, p. 12)

This is an example of acronym as *AC* is formed by joining the initial letters of *air-conditioner*.

*NIFTEM* [emphasis added] (National Institute of Food Technology Entrepreneurship and Management)  
Admission Notice 2012-13 (B.Tech. and M.Tech.)  
About NIFTEM...WORLD CLASS EDUCATION IN FOOD TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT  
Provision for state-of-the-art research labs [emphasis added] in future  
LIFE AT NIFTEM CAMPUS

- Entire campus is planned to be a *Highb-Tech Wi-Fi* [emphasis added] campus

In the above given example, there is use of acronym in *NIFTEM*. Clipping is used in *labs* as it is the short form of *laboratory*. *Highb-Tech* and *Wi-Fi* are examples of blends: High-Tech from High and Technology, Wi-Fi from Wireless and Fidelity

An overview of the matrimonial advertisements presents interesting examples of multiple adjectives. Advertisers use comparative and superlative degrees to exhibit the excellent quality/superiority of their product/person. The superlative description of bride/groom looks like:

Wanted a beautiful, slim, tall, well educated girl belonging to a respectable, educated Jat Sikh family  
(*The Tribune*, 2008, December 27, p. 5)

Whenever the string of adjectives seem to be less effective, intensifiers such as really, actually, very, exceptionally, etc. are used. Sometimes classifiers are also added like *convent* educated, ex-convented, *modernist*, *green card holder*, *high status*, and so forth. “If fair fails to convey what the advertiser wishes to convey, gori, with all its associations in the Indian context, is added to the list of attributes of the bride. All the adjectives used in

matrimonial advertisements are adjectives of implications/illocution” (Pathak, 2005, p. 16).

**A glance on common affixation.** The ‘-ing’ and ‘-ed’ suffix is very frequently used, especially in matrimonial advertisements mincing compound words. Generally speaking, this reflects the lexical creativity of Indian English.

-ing type	home-loving, good-looking, English-speaking, working, smart-looking, etc.
-ed type	well-placed, well-established, well-trained, well-educated, career- oriented, broadminded, sweet-tempered, fair-complexioned, sweet-natured, etc.

Of the two types, the -ed formations are more frequent. Most of these items do not have a dictionary entry in the structure, sense and world-class in which they appear. Though at times semantically unintelligible and structurally bizarre to the native speakers of English, they have by now acquired full justification and stylistic significance in English newspapers of India. (Pathak, 2005, p. 17)

### *At Syntactic Level*

**Elliptical construction.** An elliptical construction is a sentence in which certain word/words are deliberately omitted because they can be understood easily from the context. In almost all the headlines, elliptical sentences are used.

Trump Vidyarthi Plan comes again  
[Advertisement of Trump Prepaid Mobile Card issued by MTNL]  
(*The Times of India*, 2008, December 24, p. 24)

Rule the road  
[Advertisement of Chevrolet Captiva car]  
(*Business Standard*, 2008, December 15, p. 16)

Dishing it out  
[Advertisement of “dish TV”]  
(*Business Standard*, 2009, January 6, p. 1)

Carry the bank in your wallet!  
[Advertisement of facilities of ATM of Oriental Bank of Commerce]  
(*The Tribune*, 2011, November 8, p. 18)

**Tense.** Among all the tenses, it is the present tense and specifically present indefinite tense that is frequently used in advertisements.

Gitanjali presents RIVAAZ  
[Advertisement of jewellery]  
(*Business Standard*, 2008, December 19, p. 12)

Finally a real estate pullout that helps you to find your dream home. We value your dreams...

[Advertisement of real estate]

(*The Tribune*, 2011, November 7, p. 9)

Where there is trust, reassurance follows

[Advertisement of LIC Finance Ltd.]

(*The Hindu*, 2009, January 13)

**Imperatives.** Imperative syntactic constructions are frequently used in advertisements.

Let us surprise you,

Come experience France

[Advertisement of a French hand bag]

(*Business Standard*, 2008, December 15, p. 16)

**Binary connectives.** In these types of connectives, two parts (words, or clauses, or sentences) are connected with each other. The word which is emphasized in the first part is opposite to the word emphasized in the second part. As these connectives are concise in form, they draw the attention of the consumers easily. For instance:

“Play more.

Pay less.”

(Samsung Virgin mobile)

(*The Times of India*, 2008, September 30, p. 5)

SBI Car Loan

Walk in. Drive out.

[Advertisement of SBI car loans]

(*The Hindu*, 2011, November 4, p. 1)

**Grammatical inversion.**

Opportunity you can't afford to miss

[Advertisement of TDI Centre Jalandhar]

(*The Tribune*, 2009, February 4, p. 18)

Nominal has been placed in an inverted order in the above example.

**Grammatical parallelism.** Parallelism is commonly used in advertisements. It consists of phrases, clauses, or sentences of similar grammatical construction.

We switched their cars for a week and changed their minds forever.

Experience the Ford difference with a test drive today!

[Advertisement of Ford cars]

(*The Tribune*, 2011, November 9, p. 5)

In this example, the word *their* is repeated in the first sentence. In the second sentence, the consonant phoneme /t/ at the initial position of words *test* and *today* is repeated and the



consonant phoneme /w/ at the initial position of words *we* and *week* is repeated. It is an example of alliteration also.

**Anaphora.** “A rhetorical device involving the repetition of a word or group of words in successive clauses is called anaphora” (Cuddon, 1999, p. 37). It is also called epanaphora.

Discover the *magic* of *cooking* [emphasis added]  
 Introducing the new USHA cooktops,  
 that make *cooking* a truly *magical* experience [emphasis added]  
 [Advertisement of USHA Cook-tops]  
 (*The Tribune*, 2011, November 12, p. 5)

In the given example, there is repetition of the words *cooking-cooking* and *magic-magical*.

## At Semantic/Pragmatic Level

**Simile.** It is a figure of speech in which two dissimilar things are compared with each other by the use of words such as *as*, *like*, and the expressions *such as* and *as though* to draw attention. The comparison is explicit. Advertisers use similes to intensify the features of the product. For instance,

A contest as big as a parent’s heart  
 [Advertisement of Gini & Jony]  
 (*Dainik Bhaskar*, 2011, November 12, p. 2)

A micro spring as thin as hair.  
 A roller ball almost as hard as a diamond.  
 A technology that adapts to you.  
 [Advertisement of Add Gel Pen]  
 (*The Economic Times*, 2012, February 20, p. 1)

**Metonymy.** A figure of speech in which an object is designated by the name of something which is generally associated with it is called metonymy (Wren & Martin, 2009).

It’s Modern.  
 It’s Classic.  
 It’s like monogrammed stationery.  
 Or boutique tea.  
 Or aged wine...  
 [Advertisement of Apartments, Pune]  
 (*The Economic Times*, 2012, February 17, p. 3)

**Metaphor.** “A metaphor is a comparison in which one thing is described as if it were another: the starry canvas of the night” (Hicks, 1998, p. 63). For instance,

The meeting of minds  
The triumph of thought  
The Indian Banking Industry is future-ready.  
BANCON 2011  
[Advertisement of an annual conference by Indian Overseas Bank]  
(*The Hindu*, 2011, November 5, p. 19)

**Antithesis.** For emphasis, a striking opposition or contrast of words is used in the same sentence. For instance,

Institute of hospitality & management  
“*come* as a student *leave* as a manager” [emphasis added]  
[Advertisement of an institute]  
(*The Tribune*, 2012, May 25, p.1)

## Conclusion

The modern world depends on advertising; therefore, their creators come with different techniques and styles of creating it in order to tell the qualities of the product and to increase its sale. Therefore, by analyzing a number of examples of newspaper advertisements, it can be said that the creators of advertisements use different styles to convince readers and break the rules or conventions of the English language. As newspapers are rich in a variety of words, phrases, collocations, idioms, associations, different structures, they can be relied upon for a variety of purposes. Newspaper advertisements comprise an important feature of newspapers and are by nature terse, precise, pithy, and attractive and so is the English language included in them. So, what can be a better source for learning the English language than newspaper advertisements?

Advertisements are also a beneficial medium in ELT. They are eye-catching, enhance creativity and provide knowledge about innovations. Although pieces of news, articles, letters to the editor, and all other printed items can also be used for teaching English, the advertisements often draw the attention of learners and readers more easily, so they can be a highly interesting means of teaching English. Use of the mass media as a teaching instrument in the classroom has increased considerably at all grade levels in the past few years. Advertisements can be used as interesting aids for teaching English language in that:

1. Advertisements provide us information about the new products coming on the market, thereby extending our knowledge and deepening our understanding. This will also acquaint the readers with language change concerning space and time.
2. Advertisements contain a wide variety of language styles not easily found in conventional language learning course books and students must become familiar with such language forms.

3. English-language newspapers are easily available in the libraries of schools and colleges, therefore, language teachers can use new material to develop the students' language skills which create interest in learners and make them thoughtful.
4. Reading advertisements is an enjoyable and popular pastime for most people, so, activities based on advertisements in the language classroom can become an extension of this interest for such people and for the teachers who apply them.
5. Advertisements are a good source of building vocabulary as well as to understand structural aspects of language. The conventional way of vocabulary building by picking up words from advertisements and learning them appears to be gloomy and monotonous. It can be made interesting by using different teaching strategies such as association, using pictures (Look and Say), synonyms and antonyms, Magic Thread (Word Game), etc.
6. As the beauty of the language lies in the use of the figures of speech, it can be taught in an interesting way by using newspaper advertisements because examples from normal day-to-day life are easy to grasp. Furthermore, anyone who wishes to understand the significance and value of the work of language must concentrate on the elements of foregrounding. And foregrounding can be achieved through parallelism and deviation which have been discussed in the paper with examples of advertisements. So a teacher can teach this important part of the deviation and usage of figures of speech through newspaper advertisements.

Thus, the present paper introduces the analysis of advertisements at different levels—phonological, lexical, syntactic, and semantic. The above described linguistic features such as grammatical structure, alliteration, rhyme, and simile, etc., provide learners a rich experience of language usage. This learning lightens the flame of creativity and motivates them to use the language authentically.

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This article was received on August 3, 2012, and accepted on September 26, 2012.