

THE RELEVANCE OF ADVERTISING TO THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS*

Abstract

Emphasis on language teaching has moved away from the traditional approach of composing and comprehending correct sentences as isolated units of random occurrence. The new trend now emphasizes usages that achieve communicative purposes. The benefits of adopting a communicative approach to the teaching of language have been well articulated by scholars (e.g. Widdowson, 1978, Orisawayi, 2004). Using the identified benefits of communicative approach to language teaching as a basis, this paper argues that advertisements can provide a veritable means of impacting at least part of the required knowledge to learners of the English language.

Introduction

Language “and communication are two mutually inclusive terms. At the heart of language is communication and at the heart of communication is language. Though one does not exactly mean or translate to the other, they impact on each other. Therefore, it is difficult to talk about a language situation that does not involve communication and vice-versa. Consequently, the teaching of language must take cognizance of the communicative function which linguistic structures can perform. This view is supported by Widdowson (1978: ix):

If we are seriously interested in an approach to language teaching which will develop the ability to communicate, then we must accept the commitment to investigate the whole complex business of communication and the practical consequences of adopting it as a teaching aim. Such a commitment involves... a consideration of the nature of discourse and of the abilities that are engaged in creating it ... (and) an attempt to think out the possible pedagogic procedures, which will lead the learner towards the ability to handle discourse.

One way of doing this is to adapt and adopt advertising as a teaching aid in order to inculcate the discourse abilities of English in our learners, especially at the secondary school. The significance of using the secondary school as a take-off point in developing these abilities can be summarized in the words of Orisawayi (2004: 100):

Our expectations here rest on the assumption that at the secondary level the pupil should have internalized not only the basic linguistic rules but also those socio-linguistic rules that would help his language function within the Nigerian context.

Specifically, the secondary school leaver is expected to be proficient in English to the level of developing linguistic, socio-linguistic and socio-cultural skills that will permit him/her to understand and use the language functionally, socially, professionally and communicatively. Exposing the secondary school learner to the discourse of advertising may serve these purposes by making him/her well-equipped communicatively by the time he/she is ready to leave the school.

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The Communicative Approach to Language Learning

The communicative approach to language learning holds that the urge to communicate underscores the use of language. It also recognizes the centrality of language in communication. This approach makes sufficient distinction between communicative competence and linguistic competence and establishes the complementary relationship between them (Banjo, 1987: 6; Adeniran, 1987: 16).

Based on Chomsky's formulation, Adeniran (1987: 16) provides an insight into linguistic competence as a concern with the speaker-hearer's tacit knowledge of the structure of his language. It is this knowledge that Hymes (1972: 271) says "is commonly not conscious or available for spontaneous report, but necessarily implicit in what the (ideal) speaker/hearer can say". However, in contradistinction to this implicit knowledge of language is linguistic performance, which according to Widdowson (1977: 3), "involves the simultaneous manifestation of the language system as usage and its realization as use". Thus, Widdowson makes a distinction between language usage and language use as two aspects of performance. He defines "usage" as an aspect of performance, which "makes evident the extent to which the language user demonstrates his knowledge of linguistic rules", and "use" as another aspect of performance which "makes evident the extent to which the language user demonstrates his ability to use his knowledge of linguistic rules for effective communication".

Language use as conceived and conceptualized by Widdowson is synchronized with communicative competence as explicated by Adeniran (1987: 25) as a necessary extension of linguistic theory which insists that the rules that characterize language structure be related to those of social structures. This is the fulcrum of functional theory which perceives communicative competence as a development matrix of the rules of language and the knowledge of the Socio-cultural determinants of language use.

The Concept of Advertising

Defining advertising may not be as easy as one thinks but one thing that is constant in an attempt to define the concept is 'persuasion'. Many practitioners and scholars have attempted to define advertising in different ways. Some adopt a communicative approach, some a marketing, an economic, a social, public relations, and an information approach, depending on area of interest and point of view. These approaches indicate that advertising is palpable and touches every aspect of societal life. This makes it both interesting and serious. To underscore this seriousness, *Advertising Age*, a magazine, held a contest to determine the best way to define advertising and came up with the following:

The printed, written, spoken or pictured representation of a person, product, service or movement, openly sponsored by the advertiser and at his expense, for the purpose of influencing sales, use, votes or endorsements (Ogbodoh, 1990: 4).

Advertising may be relatively new in our society (Nigeria) but the concept is as old as Man. The first advertisement has been traced back to the Biblical story of the Garden of Eden, where the serpent successfully advertised the forbidden fruit to Eve and she in turn successfully re-advertised it to her husband, Adam (Ogbodoh, 1990:8). Since then, mankind has been held hostage by advertising, which has passed through different stages of development and sophistication ranging from open display, town crying, signs, hawking and painting to outdoor bill-boards/posters, print media advertising, electronic advertising and Internet advertising.

Advertising serves the following basic functions:

- (a) It identifies products and differentiates them from others.
- (b) It communicates information about the product, its features and its location of sale.
- (c) It induces consumers to try new products and suggests reuse.
- (d) It increases product usage.
- (e) It builds brand preferences and loyalty.
- (f) It increases knowledge/awareness.

Advertising can be classified into different kinds by preceding the term with an adjective. The following are the common classifications of advertising:

- (1) Classification by target audience
 - (a) consumer advertising
 - (b) business advertising
- (2) Classification by geographic area covered
 - (a) international advertising
 - (b) national advertising
 - (c) regional advertising
 - (d) local advertising
- (3) Classification by medium

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) newspaper advertising (b) magazine advertising, 	}	print media advertising
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> (c) radio advertising (d) television advertising, 	}	electronic advertising
- (4) Classification by function or purpose
 - (a) product versus non-product advertising
 - (b) commercial versus non-commercial advertising
 - (c) direct - action versus indirect action advertising
- (5) Classification by means of communication
 - (a) verbal versus non-verbal advertising
 - (b) spoken versus written advertising
- (6) Classification by genres
 - (a) religious advertising
 - (b) product advertising
 - (c) political advertising

Advertising in Language Teaching

The rich resources of language constantly used in advertising can provide a useful pedagogical tool in the teaching of English in Nigerian secondary schools. Some of these resources are:

1. Linguistic / textual items (words/sounds)
2. Paralanguage
 - i. voice quality/variation
 - ii. gestures
 - iii. facial expressions
 - iv. typeface
 - v. letter size
3. Context
 - i. people
 - ii. objects
 - iii. space

These resources can be adapted to develop the language needs of the learner. The question now is: how? All a teacher needs is identification of the need of the students, which in turn informs his choice of what to teach. The moment this is settled, the teacher selects an appropriate advertisement that suits his purpose and adapts it for the students' needs. Obviously, different language needs will require different media of advertising. For example, a newspaper or magazine advertisement will hardly be desirable in the teaching of pronunciation. Also, a print-media advertisement that emphasizes extra-linguistic information communication will not serve any good purpose for the teaching of vocabulary.

The adaptation stage is the crucial stage of communicative approach to languages teaching. This can be done in various ways according to the intention and goal of the teacher. Let us assume that the goal of the teacher is to teach vocabulary/lexical development. He/She can divide the students into groups and ask each group to work out the meaning of every content word in a piece of advertisement through its morphological composition of prefixes and suffixes. In addition, the teacher can ask the groups to identify favourable words or words with affectionate or positive usage and provide their opposites.

In case the task involved is writing, the teacher can ask the students to react to an advertisement by writing a composition on their impression of the advert. If the advertisement is television based, the students can be asked to comment on identified characters or personalities in the advert. They can also be asked to perform the same task orally. The teacher can ask them to think of another advert, which a particular advert reminds them of.

In terms of reading, students may be exposed to certain electronic advertisements, after which they are called one by one to read the text of the advertisement. Students themselves should be made to assess not only the level of correctness of their colleagues but also the level of imitation of the speaker in the advert.

The implication of all these is that various advertising media become a useful tool of language and also a teaching aid in the hand of the language teacher. Thus, it will not be strange to see a language teacher coming to class with various newspaper/magazine advertisements in addition to audio and videocassettes of recorded advertisements.

This approach could stimulate excitement in a language class and induce active participation.

However, the language teacher must show awareness of the peculiarity and characteristic features of the advertising language especially as it relates to pre-supposition and implicatures. The language teacher should make effort to let the students know the different meaning potentials of an advertisement. This can be done as part of building the reading skills of the students. Advertising language can be used to expose students to different reading types and strategies. A particular advertisement can be made available to the students upon which different tasks are based. The advertisement can be used to expose students to literal reading, metaphorical/figurative reading and contextual reading. For instance, an advert that says, "Your wife is having an affair" (Ignis Gas Cooker) can be made available to the students and effort made to substantially subject the advert to literal and contextual reading. While the literal meaning is someone's wife's unfaithfulness in having an extra-marital affair, the contextual meaning is the satisfaction that someone's wife is having by using Ignis Gas Cooker. Again, there is the use of pre-supposition in the advert. The use of "wife" is contextually significant. It is assumed that it is the responsibility of the wife to cook. Therefore, the one that is supposed to derive satisfaction (have an affair) by using Ignis Gas Cooker is the wife, and not the husband. Also, the husband is inferred by the expression "your wife". This also has an implicature: the wife's satisfaction is the concern of the husband. The advert is a message to the man (husband) to provide the tool for the wife's satisfaction i.e. buy her an Ignis Gas Cooker.

In terms of syntax, the teacher can select appropriate advertisements to teach syntax. Adequate care should be made to distinguish the grammar of advert headlines from the grammar of advert body copies.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that advertising will help students to understand words as used in real situations. It will enable them to develop a real sensitivity towards the language as it exposes them to suitable texts and contexts. This is in addition to sensitizing learners to grammatical structures.

Therefore, using advertising materials to teach English in the secondary school is one sure way of improving the quality of the language in Nigeria.

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