

# LITERARY ELEMENTS AS COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES IN ADVERTISING

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## INTRODUCTION

*The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (1999) defines literature as "writings that are valued as works of art, especially fiction, drama and poetry". This is contrasted with technical books, newspapers, magazines, etc. The dictionary also provides two additional meanings of literature, but the focus of this paper is on the first as stated above. This paper therefore explores the elements of literary writing in advertisements and argues that apart from providing an efficient way of passing on information, literary style enables advertisers to creatively encode their messages and achieve communicative dynamism.

The essence of advertising is to persuade people (the target audience) and make them adopt a particular view or behavioural pattern, and one of the efficient tools advertisers rely upon to achieve this is the use of literary elements. Literature is considered to be an art and is regarded as being beautiful because of its aesthetic deployment of language.

Therefore, in this paper, an attempt is made to prove that advertisers are conscious of the fact that literary language contains the artistry which they strive for in their effort to achieve communicative dynamism, and this is why advertisements are spiced with literary elements. The paper makes use of ten advertisements randomly selected from the field of fashion and cosmetics. Each of the adverts is then analysed for its literary qualities.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study of language in literature is what is known as literary stylistics. But then, other kinds of language use exist which are non-literary. An example of such is advertising. Thus, the study of language in advertising is regarded as linguistic stylistics. However, there seems to be an

interpolation or hybridization of tasks in the present study because the study focuses on literary language in a non-literary field – advertising. Therefore, it is necessary for us to understand the perceived differences between literary and non-literary stylistics.

Stylistics is the branch of knowledge that concerns itself with studying certain aspects of language, either literary or non-literary. It is often referred to as the study of style. Crystal and Davy (9) explain style in four ways:

- (1) *Individual style*, i.e. some or all of the language habits of one person e.g. Soyinka's style (an individual's occasional linguistic idiosyncrasies).
- (2) *Group style*, i.e. some or all of the language habits shared by a group of people e.g. the language of law, the style of public speaking, the language of banking, etc.
- (3) *Evaluative style*, i.e. referring to the effectiveness of a mode of expression; it entails making a value judgment on the overall effect of the language on the evaluator. It is subjective as there is no formal descriptive characteristics upon which the assessment is based.
- (4) *Literary style/language*, i.e. the assumption that "good", "effective", or "beautiful" writing can only be found in literature and the focus of attention on literature is in search of "good, effective or beautiful" writing.

From the foregoing, we can conclude that the fourth point is clearly seen as literary language or literary stylistics while the first three points can be regarded as non-literary language or non-literary stylistics otherwise known as linguistic stylistics. However, there is ample evidence of the availability of the first three options in literary uses of language, just the way other uses of language which are considered non-literary make use of features which are identified with literature.

Literary communication makes use of elements that add colour and elegance. The elements are contained in three genres of drama, prose and poetry and the three divisions make use of some identifiable features such as conflict, dialogue, action, costume/make-up, simile, metaphor, allusion, personification, apostrophe, irony, hyperbole, euphemism, synecdoche, metonymy, repetition and rhetorics (See M.H. Abrams, for a full discussion of each element).

All these elements are employed in any piece of writing whose author consciously or unconsciously intends to achieve beauty of form or artistic language. But beyond achieving beauty and artistic language, literature, through the use of its elements and features, performs functional roles even in non-literary domains. According to Maduekwe (65) “emphasis on communicative competence has placed increased demands on exposure to literature as a springboard for ideas, reaction, empathy building, preservation and transmission of cultural values as well as vocabulary development”. Advertising is one area where literature is put to the service of language not just as a springboard for ideas but also as a way of achieving the purpose for which an advertisement is created.

## PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

In this section, I present and analyse the data of this study which are ten advert copies randomly selected in the domain of fashion and cosmetics. The ten advertisements were labelled Texts 1 to 10. Each of the texts was analysed for its literary qualities and they were subjected to discussion to establish the relevance and function of each of the identified literary elements to the product/service being advertised.

### 3.1 Presentation /Analysis of Data

#### 3.1.1 Advertising Text 1 – Delta Soap

1. What Delta does for the skin is an open secret – oxymoron
2. There’s no hiding place for a Delta skin – metaphor
3. Delta soap protects and treats your skin against every form of blemish — personification
4. Delta Medicated and Antiseptic (soap) is one soap that deeply cares for your skin – personification

#### 3.1.2 Advertising Text 2 – Dianne (Powder)

1. Dianne smoothens  
Dianne pampers  
Dianne loves  
– Poetry/syntactic parallelism/repetition/ rhetorics

2. And what is right for the baby is twice right for the whole family ("What is good for the goose is good for the gander") – allusion/cliché.

3.1.3 *Advertising Text 3 – Sholizza (Fashion Centre)*

Paint the town red – metaphor

3.1.4 *Advertising Text 4 – 'Collectibles' (Fashion Centre)*

Rule your world

Be the look

Capture the eyes

Free your mind

– syntactic parallelism/rhythmical structure

3.1.5 *Advertising Text 5 – Buckles (Fashion Centre)*

1. Our label may not be on the lips of everyone – metaphor  
Quality speaks – personification
2. Style transcends time —irony

3.1.6 *Advertising Text 6 – Hangers & Kicks (Fashion Centre)*

1. Step into our shoes – metaphor/pun
2. Walk tall – metaphor/pun

3.1.7 *Advertising Text 7 - Dark & Lovely (Hair Cream)*

1. Dark & Lovely bathed my hair with ultra-rich conditioners and moved me into a DEEP COPPER WORLD – personification.
2. I captured the colour of the season and became as vibrant as the DEEP COPPER leaves of autumn  
— metaphor/simile.

3.1.8 *Advertising Text 8 – Johnson's Baby Powder*

We now deliver flowers – metaphor/metonymy.

3.1.9 *Advertising Text 9 – Nike Women's Canvas (fashion centre)*

You are not a goddess and most likely you will never be a goddess but just because you are human that doesn't mean we can't worship the ground you walk on – poetry/rhetorics



### 3.10 Advertising Text 10 – Concord Saratoga (Wrist Watch)

1. The fine line between sculpture and engineering  
– allusion/comparison/analogy.

### 3.2 Interpretation of Data

The first literary element in our first text analysed is an oxymoron, “open secret”. The use of this figure of speech as the headline of the advertising text serves to increase the curiosity of the reader in order to unravel the mystery of the literary expression and by so doing, his/her knowledge of the product increases and the aim of the advertisers is achieved, that is, to get the reader to have relevant information that can promote the sale of the product. In the second example of the same text, there is a subtle use of metaphor in which “there is no hiding place for a Delta skin” means that the positive effect of using Delta soap will result in a skin that will easily be recognized and appreciated. In the third and fourth examples, Delta soap has assumed the function of a doctor as it is personified as being the one that ‘treats and protects’ and also ‘cares’.

Advertising text 2 gives us an example of rhetorical repetition, “Dianne smoothen, Dianne pampers, Dianne loves”. In addition, Dianne, a product being advertised, is humanized as it is ascribed the ability to smoothen, to pamper and to love. In the second example, there is an adaptation of a well-known cliché to suit the mood and tone of the advert, “and what is right for the baby is twice as right for the whole family, an adaptation of “what is good for the goose is good for the gander”[Nigerian English version].

The third text supplies us with one example, “paint the town red”, a metaphor. Here, we see a rhetorical operation of reader’s destabilization in action. This is as a result of the use of a relation of similarity between “painting” (a form of visual art) and appearance (fashion) to shock the reader. The significance of this is to effortfully involve the reader in the processing of information. This agrees with the observation of McQuarrie and Mick (7) that: Effortfully processed information is more readily retrieved from memory than less effortfully processed information.

The fourth text employs the literary element of rhythmical structures to achieve syntactic parallelism as the reader is given a four-count charge (“rule your world, be the look, capture the eyes and free your mind”).

Advertising text 5 provides us with another instance of reader’s

destabilization as “quality” is presented as having a human attribute that can “speak”. According to McQuarrie and Mick, (1996:6) “destabilization comes about as a result of rendering multiple meanings tenable”. The fact that “quality speaks” as suggested by the headline rudely shocks the reader as a result of deviation from expectation. In speech act theory, there are expectations put in place by participants in the communication situation which bring about conventions and constraints (Grice). Sperber and Wilson however contend that speakers (readers) know that they have to search for a context that provides intelligibility for the violation. If the reader is able to restore understanding from the context, he or she assumes a figurative usage and responds accordingly. But if the context does not help, the reader assumes a failure in communication and a breakdown (McQuarie and Mick: 3).

In the case of this literary element, there is a figurative usage as the meaning is recoverable from the context. In fact, the sub-headline kicker, example 1, (our labels may not be on the lips of everyone), is another instance of figurative usage, a metaphor. It should be noted that the use of “labels” and “quality” in the two examples is an employment of the rhetorical device of substitution and the type involved here is metonymy which “makes use of the fact that objects and events in the world are represented mentally as complex schemas built up from molecular concepts”. While “labels” is used to refer to either products or trade name, “quality” is used to stand for efficiency, reliability and trustworthiness.

The third example in this discourse is an irony, “style transcends time”. It is more usual and normal to expect time to transcend everything, including style.

Advertising text 6 provides two examples of metaphorical expression, “step into our shoes” and “walk tall”. The two expressions are suggestive of the action the reader is being persuaded to take in the advert. To step into someone’s shoes implies that one should take over the functions and responsibilities of another, and to walk tall implies that one is happy with oneself, is full of confidence and has self-fulfillment. These metaphorical expressions have been applied to the observable state of the advertiser’s world. Therefore, the expressions have been made to perform both figurative and literal functions.

The literal function has to do with shoes which are the product

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unsolicited and seemingly unwarranted comparison created between a goddess and a human being. This leads to the use of litotes, "that doesn't mean we can't worship". The two negatives in this expression amount to a positive ["we can worship"] but it also takes cognizance of the unusualness of the situation. This is a way of making the reader realize that in spite of her (the persona) limitations as human, she can still be given the treatment of a goddess, and this is the reason why the ground on which she, (the persona, representing the target consumer) walks on, can be worshipped. The idea of worshipping the ground is itself hyperbolic, indicating the level of honour attached to the shoes being advertised.

Advertising text 10 uses allusion/analogy to communicate its message. "The fine line between sculpture and engineering" is obviously a comparison not just between the two terms of "sculpture" and "engineering" but also between "sculpture" and "engineering" on the one hand and "Concord Saratoga", the wristwatch being advertised, on the other. Sculpture is the art of making figures or objects by carving wood or stone, shaping clay, pouring metal into moulds. Engineering, on the other hand, means the practical application of scientific knowledge in a design. What is "the fine line" between them?

A look at "line" in the *Oxford Advanced Learner's English Dictionary* reveals that "line" has more than twenty different shades of meaning. Some of them are:

1. a long thin mark on the surface of something
2. the use of lines in art
3. a length of thread rope used for a particular purpose
4. a course of action, behaviour or thought
5. to cover the inside surface of something with a layer of different material.

All these are ambiguously built into the message contained in this advertising expression (headline). The ambiguity inherent in the use of "line" makes it possible for the advertisers to explore different shades of meaning as reflected in 1-5 above. The practical application of scientific knowledge is engineering and in this text, it means the manufacturing or production of wristwatches. The art of making wristwatches by carving the surface of the metal is sculpture. Therefore, combining scientific application of knowledge with the art of sculpture



of surface materials is “the fine line between sculpture and engineering”.

The reader should be able to interpret “line” (read between the line) for the message to be derived. But there is an assumption that the reader/ target consumer shares the notion that the line is “fine”. What makes the line fine is left for the reader to process and imagine.

## CONCLUSION

Advertising has demonstrated the close relationship between language and literature. As a matter of fact, the difference between the two has been exaggerated as an academic exercise; otherwise there is a mutual symbiotic relationship between them. In the first instance the two are culture-referred. Language is regarded as culture and vice-versa, while literature depicts the culture of a society. Secondly, it has been seen in this study that advertising belongs to a non-literary field yet it makes use of the resources of language that clearly belong to the discipline of literature. The principle of effective communication makes no distinction between genres of language use; it is hinged on effectiveness and appropriateness. Literature draws on a wide area of human experience, activities and endeavours which results in its rich and varied language. Advertising also concerns itself with everything on the surface of the earth that human beings deal in/with, which means it also touches on a wide range of human experience, activities and endeavours. As the adage says “only the deep can call to the deep”. Advertisers have seen a commonality of interest between their profession and literature as a way of impressing their products and services on the consumer and target audience, and as a way of being stylistically and artistically significant, literature is used as a tool of achieving communicative dynamism.

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