THE LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF ENGLISH ADVERTISING

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Abstract
Along with the rapid development of social economy, advertising has penetrated every corner of society. People are exposed to numerous advertising messages everyday. To compete with many other similar advertising messages, advertisers use various devices to catch readers' attention, arouse their desire, and induce their action.

In the present article, the writer attempts to apply the theories of general stylistics to the analysis of the commercial consumer advertisements in press. In order to generalize the stylistic features of advertising language, six samples have been selected from Reader’s Digest and Washington Post. These samples will be described and analyzed in the light of stylistic studies from the aspects of graphology, lexis, and syntax.

The practical significance of the study is to show the stylistic features of English print advertisements so that English learners may have a better understanding of the nature of language and appreciate the beauty of advertising English.

Key words
print ads, stylistics, stylistic feature

1 Introduction
Along with the rapid development of social economy, advertising is becoming increasingly popular. In order to secure a number of readers and to compete with many other similar advertising messages, advertisers try to make their advertisements as effective as possible. They use various linguistic devices to catch attention, arouse desire, induce action, and contribute towards satisfaction.

In this article, the writer tries to generalize the major linguistic features of advertising language in the hope of helping language learners to understand English ads and to appreciate the beauty of advertising language. To do so, the writer restricts her discussion to the language of the commercial advertisements in press, also called print ads, and selects six samples from Reader’s Digest and Washington Post. They are respectively “Canon Printer” Sample 1, “a big loser” Sample 2, “EOS Canon” Sample 3, “Hyundai” Sample 4, “SWISS Airline” Sample 5, and “Kuala Lumpur” Sample 6. These samples will be described and analyzed in the light of stylistic studies with the focus on linguistic description of advertising texts.

2 Linguistic Description
The first step in any stylistic study is to make a wholesome and systematic description of linguistic features of the text or texts which is usually attained from the study of phonology, graphology, lexis, and grammar. In this article, the stylistic features in phonology will be omitted since print ads employ visual channel rather than auditory channel to convey information. Accordingly, the sample ads selected here will be described and analyzed at the graphological, lexical, and syntactical grammatical levels.
2|1 At the Graphological Level

Stylistic analysis at graphological level deals with various aspects of design in graphology such as punctuation, capitalization, paragraphing, typography and the layout of the text. All of which can be utilized for communicative purposes and eye-catching effect. Among these aspects, the use of punctuation will be discussed.

2|1|1 The Use of Full Stops

The frequent abuse of the full stop aiming at achieving emphatic effect results in many one-word sentences or sentence fragments in English ads, which is a particular writing feature in advertising. For example:

And for a short time you even have the luxury of paying less. So test drive the XG350 at your Hyundai dealership. Because when you get this much car for this little money you win! Sample 4.

According to grammatical rules, the sentence should be written as follows:

And for a short time you even have the luxury of paying less. So test drive the XG350 at your Hyundai dealership because when you get this much car for this little money you win!

In this case, the sentence contains 34 words, which is much longer than the ideal average length. 17 words. Besides, the sentence structure is rather complicated, containing 4 clauses with 1 coordination and 2 layers of subordination.

In reality, the advertiser turns the clauses into sentence fragments by applying full stops. In so doing, the advertiser shortens the sentence length, simplifies the sentence structure and so makes the ad more accessible.

Moreover, by separating the adverbial clause of cause from the main clause, the advertiser highlights the reason why the reader should test drive the XG350. “Hyundai — when you get this much car for this little money you win!” With such a sound reason, how can people refuse the offer of test driving the car? Accordingly, the sentence fragment here makes the ad even more forceful in persuading readers to test drive the car.

2|1|2 The Use of Dashes

Dashes can be used to indicate parentheses or to separate adverbials from the main clause. Compared with commas, dashes separate the parentheses and adverbials further away from the main clause, which in turn put more emphasis on them. For instance:

The i860 prints out up to 23ppm in black and up to 16ppm in color — making it one of the fastest printers in its class! Sample 1.

The adverbial of consequence, “making it one of the fastest printers in its class,” can be separated from the main clause by a comma. And the sentence should look like this:

The i860 prints out up to 23ppm in black and up to 16ppm in color, making it one of the fastest printers in its class.

In the ad, however, a dash is employed instead of a comma. In this way, the adverbial becomes more eye-catching as it has been separated further away from the main part of the sentence. The use of dash here helps to highlight the consequence so as to emphasize the super quality of the printer. — it is one of the fastest printers in its class. In another example:

There has never been a better time to check out the 2004 Hyundai XG350 with its elegant styling and impressive features — including American Best Warranty 10 years 100,000 miles! Sample 4.

The dash in this example is used to highlight one of its impressive features — it includes American Best Warranty.
At the Lexical Level

Advertising English boasts a rich and colorful vocabulary. Its most important lexical features are the use of monosyllabic verbs, weasel words, favorable words, personal pronouns, compounds, neologisms, etc.

The Use of Monosyllabic Verbs

In order to make the advertised information easily understood and remembered, advertisers usually employ simple words, especially monosyllabic verbs in their ads. Such words as “make,” “get,” “take,” “try,” “come,” “go,” “have,” “see,” “use,” “give,” “serve,” “choose,” “let,” “look,” “call,” “come” are often found in English ads. The following table shows the prevalent use of monosyllabic verbs in ads.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Samples</th>
<th>Examples of Monosyllabic Verbs</th>
<th>Percentage of Monosyllabic Verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sample 1</td>
<td>be, print, fit</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample 2</td>
<td>lose, be, take, count, need, get, eat, shake, stick, want, hook, chat, come, stop</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample 3</td>
<td>mean, wed, pop, be</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample 4</td>
<td>be, check, have, get, win</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample 5</td>
<td>wish, have, want, visit, start</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample 6</td>
<td>be, speak, eat, gleam, glow, wear, look, share</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In English, short words are usually the most familiar and therefore the most easily understood by a wide range of readers. Moreover, most short English words are of Anglo-Saxon origin. These words can generate greater emotion than their Latinate equivalents, hence maximum impact. The high frequency of monosyllabic verbs used in the sample ads also helps to make the ads more persuasive.

The Use of Weasel Words

Weasel words are used to evade or retreat from a direct or forthright statement or position. Although the ultimate goal of advertising is to persuade readers to buy a certain kind of product, the word “buy” is rarely used in ads. This is because the word “buy” contains the meaning “to obtain something by giving money” which often makes people associate with their “unwilling outgoings.” Accordingly, a wide range of verbs with the connotation of “buy” is used. For example, “bring,” “give,” “help,” “offer,” “plus,” “prevent,” “provide,” “save,” “solve.” Here is an example:

Because when you get this much car for this little money, you win Sample 4 |

The word “get” here connotes the meaning of “obtaining something without having to pay the money” and so it avoids giving readers the impression that they are being persuaded or even lured to do the purchase. The advertisers use weasel words to convince readers that they are trying to offer help with their product instead of simply selling it out. Here is another example from the sample ads:

You enjoy more legroom and our attentive service Sample 5 |

The Use of Favorable Words

As the purpose of advertising is to introduce and describe the performance and qualities of the products, positive modifiers, especially favorable adjectives, are often employed to illustrate the function and nature of the advertised item.
Adjectives
Positive adjectives such as emotive adjectives and evaluative adjectives are frequently used in the creation of advertising as Leech [1966] observed. Advertising language is marked by a wealth of adjective vocabulary. For example

Leading edge technology marries all the features of a traditional SLR [Sample 3]

In this example, the word “leading” indicates that Canon has applied the newest technology in digital camera in its products and ensured its best quality. Other examples of favorable adjectives are

And you appreciate our unique lie-flat seats offering the ultimate in sleeping comfort [Sample 5]

Favorable adjectives confirm the desirable qualities the products have. More importantly, they help readers establish an affirmative attitude towards the products.

The Use of Comparative and Superlative Degrees
In addition to favorable adjectives, advertisers tend to use comparative and superlative degrees to indicate the excellent quality of their product or service. However, since it is illegal for advertisers to discredit or unfairly attack other products or ads, the advertisers do not make specific comparisons between their product and others by naming or referring to their rivals. For example, instead of saying “X washes whiter than Y” [a washing powder manufacturer would be likely to say “X washes whiter”]

Goddard [1998] In advertising texts, such comparatives are frequently used to show the products’ distinctive qualities. For instance

For example with extra room for you in our new SWISS Business Class designed to relax you even more [Sample 5]

In addition to constructing claims to the comparative superiority of their products, advertisers also use superlative degree to describe the uniqueness of the products. For example

And when we did over 500 testing samples [the newest entry into the EOS system pops the ultimate question] [Sample 3]

By using superlative degree, the ad conveys the message that the product advertised is equipped with the latest technology, hence the best of its kind without speaking ill of others.

The Use of Personal Pronouns
In advertising English, the use of personal pronouns is extremely common, especially “you” and “we.” Such pronouns make the language sound warm and friendly, help to narrow the gap between the advertiser and the reader, and make the ads more appealing. For example

We want to make flying an experience of excellence [You enjoy more legroom and our attentive service] And you appreciate our unique lie-flat seats offering the ultimate in sleeping comfort [Sample 5]

In this example, the use of personal pronoun “you” makes the reader feel that he is the particular person the advertisers care about and are eager to help. And together with the pronoun “we,” the ad gives the reader the impression that he can just enjoy the comfort and leisure and leave the work to the advertisers. Through the use of personal pronouns, the advertisers try to convince the reader that all the products and service they offer are out of the consideration of his particular needs and benefits and hence persuade the reader to do the purchase.

The Use of Compounds
English compounds are easy to form and their forms are many and varied. Sometimes a compound consisting of a number of simple words may convey unusual meaning and so arouse readers with rich associations. In the sample ads, here is such an example

You can lose twice the weight with the slim fast plan [Sample 2]
In this example the compound "slim fast" is used to modify "plan" meaning which makes you slim fast. It is far more compact than an attributive clause. Because of their expressiveness and brevity compounds are frequently used in English ads for example.

And it's the only plan with a built-in easy follow activity program. Sample 2.

2.2.6 The Use of Neologisms

The creativity of advertising language is best seen in its extensive use of neologisms. Generally neologisms can be categorized as coinage, anagrammatic spelling and borrowed words.

2.2.6.1 Coinage

New words or phrases created by means of imitation are not rarely seen in English ads. Such newly coined words and phrases may suggest that the product advertised possesses peculiar qualities as well as the value of novelty.

In English affixes are often used to coin new words. The most commonly used affixes include super, ex, ultra, auto, and aid. For example, superslim, ultracare, band aid, kleenex.

In the sample ads there are such examples:

Full compatibility with the EFILL wireless autofocus system means spectacular shots with natural looking light. Sample 3.

And when we over 50 EF autofocus lenses the newest entry into the EOS system pops the ultimate question. Sample 3.

2.2.6.2 Anagrammatic Spelling

Because of the great number of ads it's of great importance to make the advertising text unusual and memorable. And one of the simplest ways to call readers' attention is to use unexpected letters. This can be achieved by using infrequently encountered letters such as R or B, or by deliberately altering the spelling of words. For example, the slogan of an ad by Heinz:

Beanz Meanz Heinz. Adapted from Strategic Advertising Management by Larry Perry.

The slogan attracts readers' attention by using the letter B in place of the words' beans' and means'. Hence creating a new spelling. In another example:

WWW what new www.

At www landlord.com the answer is — a lot.

So www what are you waiting for? Adapted from Advertising English by Wang Tao.

This is an ad of a web. As we all know all the websites start with WWW. The unusual spelling of the words wwwhat? newww and www wait draws readers' attention. Meanwhile, it indicates the contents of the ad.

2.2.6.3 Borrowed Words

As many products advertised are imported from other countries, the advertisers sometimes deliberately put some foreign words into the advertising text to make the product appear exotic and hence more appealing. Here is an example of using borrowed words:


In this ad the use of Malay words helps to create an exotic atmosphere which may attract more tourists to go to the city advertised.

2.3 At the Syntactic Level

As far as syntactic features are concerned the language in English advertising resembles that of colloquial style, simple in structure. In this section the major stylistic features of English advertising at the syntactic level will be studied from the aspect of sentence types which refer to the employment of
different kinds of sentences including declarative, interrogative, imperative, or exclamatory sentences, simple or multiple sentences, major or minor sentences, and short or long sentences.

The Use of Imperative and Interrogative Sentences

It can be observed that the sentences in the sample ads are largely declarative sentences. This is because declarative sentences are primarily used to convey information and the ultimate aim of advertising is to inform readers about the quality of a certain product or the profit it may bring. In the meantime, in order to catch readers' attention and add variety to the writing, interrogative and imperative sentences are also frequently used in advertising. For example,

Hook up with a buddy online, get your own meal plan and easy recipes, or chat with a dietitian, Can I be a big loser? There's nothing stopping you. Sample 2

In this example, the advertiser uses imperatives as mild commands to prompt the action—to join slimfast program. Imperative sentences are sometimes preferred because such sentences are persuasive and appealing to readers.

Besides imperative sentences, interrogative sentences are also frequently found in advertising. Interrogatives are questions primarily used to seek information on a specific point. However, in advertising, English interrogatives are mainly used as a rhetorical device which does not expect any answer or the advertisers answer the questions themselves. For example,

Is this a vision or a city? Sample 6

This is the last sentence in the ad. After describing all the beauties and attractions of the city, the question is put forward to end the ad. The use of the question here seems so natural in persuading people to go there. And it may prove difficult to reject such a temptation. The interrogative sentence seems more powerful in persuading people to carry out the desired action than a declarative or even an imperative sentence.

The Use of Short Sentences

Sentence length is an important criterion of the readability of a text. The longer the sentence, the lower the readability of the text. According to the research done by United Press International, UPI, and the Associated Press, a text with an average sentence length of eight words or less is regarded as "very easy to read," while one averaging 29 or more words would be considered "very difficult to read." And the "standard" or ideal average is 17 words.

Since the advertising text aims at attracting readers' attention and informing them of a certain product, and long difficult sentences would drain readers' interest in reading the text, short and simple sentences are preferred in advertising writing. The investigation of the samples reveals that the average sentence length in English advertising is shorter than the suggested length. The average sentence length of each sample ad is shown in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Samples</th>
<th>Total Number of Words</th>
<th>Total Number of Sentences</th>
<th>Average Sentence Length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sample 1</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample 2</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample 3</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample 4</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample 5</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample 6</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In order to be easily comprehensible, English advertising tends to adopt short sentence structures. Besides, short sentences may help to retain readers' attention and persuade them to do the purchase with the tense atmosphere and fast pace they have created.

2.3.3 The Use of Simple Sentences

Besides sentence length, sentence structure is another criterion of the readability of the text. Sentences are either simple or multiple. A simple sentence consists of a single independent clause, while a multiple sentence consists of more than one clause. The investigation of the sample ads shows that simple sentences are more frequently used in print advertising. For example:

So you can lose twice the weight than counting calories by your lonesome. And shake that notion of just shapes out of your head. There's soup, pasta, meal bars, even ice cream snacks. Sample 2.

The frequent use of simple sentences can help to reduce the difficulty of the text. Meanwhile, simple sentences convey a mood of action. Moreover, a succession of simple sentences can make the paragraph powerful. All these are in harmony with the goal of advertising—to persuade readers to buy the product.

2.3.4 The Use of Minor Sentences

According to English grammar, a clause should consist of a subject, a verb, and an optional third element. However, some sentences in advertising texts do not conform to the regular patterns of clause structure, nor to the variations of those structures in the major syntactic classes. And they are called "minor sentences." These sentences are fragmentary, lacking constituents that are normally obligatory. For example:

Canon solution. A five-line printer. Introducing the Canon i860. With a pigment-based black for laser quality documents. And a photo grade black for high-contrast photos. Its speed is up to 16 ppm. The i860's resolution is up to a crisp 4800 x 1200 dpi. Sample 1.

Sometimes in advertising, English complex sentences are needed to express the complicated logical meaning. In order to stress the meaning or to make the structure clear, the main clause of a complex sentence is separated from the subordinate clauses by full stops. Besides, some phrases or words are also used as independent sentences. Such sentences or sentence fragments sound brisk and rhythmic. Also, they are striking to the eyes and therefore the advertising messages are more clearly presented and easily memorized.

3. Summary

Through the application of the analysis approaches and methods of general stylistics, the stylistic features of print English advertising are studied from the aspects of graphology, lexis, and syntax. It is shown that in an attempt to catch readers' attention and to impress readers of the excellence of their products or services, advertisers apply a variety of devices, for example, punctuations, different kinds of vocabulary, and different types of sentence types in the advertising texts.

References
Appendix

Sample 1
Canon Printer
There’s a big difference between
\[ black \] black
\[ white \] white
\[ color \] color
\[ for text and one for photos\]
Photos print out best with a certain kind of black. Text prints best with another. Problem is you can’t fit both in a standard four-ink printer. A five-ink printer. Introducing the Canon 1860 with its pigment-based black for laser quality documents and a photo-grade black for high-contrast photos. Its speed. The 1860 prints out up to 23 ppm in black and up to 16 ppm in color. To learn more call 1-800-334-2400 or visit www.usa.canon.com/consumer.
Canon KNOW HOW

Sample 2
I'M A BIG LOSER
You Can Lose Twice the Weight with The SlimFast Plan
"Hey my kind of plan. SlimFast took the guesswork out. They counted the calories and included the nutrition your body needs. So you can lose twice the weight than counting calories by your lonesome."
They get it down to a system where you can eat six times a day. And shake that notion of just shapes out of your head. There’s soup, pasta, meal bars, even ice cream snacks! This is no quick fix — it’s a way to eat healthy that you can stick with. And it’s the only plan with a built-in easy-to-follow activity program.
Want free support? Hook up with a buddy online get your own meal plan and easy recipes or chat with a dietitian. Can I can be a big loser? There’s nothing stopping you!"
For free personal support: call 1-800 SLIMFAST or visit slimfast.com

Sample 3
EOS Canon
the new EOS D30 digital camera Embark on a whole new world of photography. Leading edge technology marries all the features of a traditional SLR. Full compatibility with the EF lens wireless autofocus system means spectacular shots with natural looking light. Catching the action down the aisle at 3 fps. And when we’re over 50 EF autofocussing the newest entry into the EOSsystem pops the ultimate question. Are you digital yet?
Embark
On
Spectacular

Sample 4
Hyundai
Fully loaded\[ Full covered\]
Full of common sense.
The Hyundai XG350 \[2001\]
There’s never been a better time to check out the 2004 Hyundai XG350. with its elegant styling and impressive features — including America’s Best Warranty: 10 years/100,000 miles. And for a short time, you even have the luxury of paying less. So test drive the XG350 at your Hyundai dealership. Because when you get this much car for this little money, you win.

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