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Mit einem einleitenden Beitrag
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The discourse analysis of marketing communication texts in mass media

The term 'marketing communications' is used to denote communications by means of various persuasive messages about products, organizations, candidates and ideas that marketers send to audiences to build up knowledge of the mentioned objects, to evoke positive attitudes towards them, to stimulate the audience to act in a certain way (buy, use, vote, approve) and remain loyal to them. Possibly the most dominant type of marketing communications in our culture is advertising, but there are many other effective forms of marketing persuasion (public relations, sponsorship, point-of-sale communications, sales promotion, event marketing, product placement, etc.). Advertising uses mass media channels (traditional and new media) to contact and interact with the audiences, and thus the language of advertising has become a special form of mass media language.

Furthermore, the classical distinctions between the editorial materials of mass media and advertising are gradually disappearing. Specialists in advertising and mass communication claim that adverts and other marketing messages are becoming "more integrated into the media environment such that it becomes difficult to distinguish promotional messages from the news or entertainment that surround them" (Thoughts 2000). The following publications contain similar statements: Richards/Curran (2002), Schultz/Barnes (1999), Rodgers/Lim/Bae (2009).

Improving technologies of paid and non-paid collaboration and working partnerships between marketers and mass media organizations lead to the transformation of advertising tools and development of the so-called "branded content". It involves a new type of creative partnership between content developers, broadcasters/publishers/distributors, communication agencies, and brands. So the borders between marketing messages and editorial materials are blurring. The consequence is that soon language peculiarities of these two types of messages will hardly be revealed by traditional linguistic methods used in fundamental scientific monographs (Leech 1966, Dyer 1982, Geis 1982, Vestergaard/Schrøder 1985).

Nevertheless, the general public can catch not only *what* a message is intended to communicate but also *why it has been generated* (not anytime and

not everybody, of course). The public has always known: if a message is used to promote a product, service, company, or person, it is advertising (or marketing communications as more correctly specialists would say). But how could we include this naïve but true understanding of the general public in a communication model? The main point is the prevalent orientation of the message flow and communication tools towards news/entertainment versus towards brands and audience's brand preference (so far as it was designed by an addressant and could be caught by an addressee). In other words, if the communication (or part of it) is brand-centered or at least brand-oriented, it is a sort of marketing communication. To investigate this distinction, discourse analysis is needed.

Marketing communication discourse (as a single whole) relatively rarely becomes an object of linguistic studies, although research into advertising texts has lately developed into numerous linguistic monographs, articles, and conference papers. A probable reason for this dissimilarity is that in linguistics, attention has traditionally been drawn to such communication units as separate texts (either verbal or nonverbal). In ad studies, linguists underestimate the role of a larger communication unity within the framework of which advertisers create marketing messages – such unities as marketing communication campaigns (and advertising campaigns as integral parts of it). These campaigns consist of a series of interconnected messages based on brand identity communication transmitted by traditional mass media or new media over time, with the purpose of persuading target audiences and promoting to them products, services, companies, candidates, or distinguished persons as well as noncommercial organizations, movements, or ideas. These messages mutually intensifying each other cause a synergy effect. The addressees on their part perceive and comprehend these messages not as separate texts but as a system of texts in their correlation with each other.

As Larson emphasized in his book (Larson 1992), campaigns differ from a "collection" of persuasive messages about the same product, candidate or cause in three main ways. They

1. systematically create "positions" in the audience's mind for the product, candidate or idea;
2. are intentionally designed to develop over time. In other words, campaigns are composed of stages for getting the audience's attention, preparing the audience for action, and, finally, for calling the audience to action;
3. dramatize the product, candidate, idea or ideology for the audience, inviting receivers to participate in a real or symbolic way with the campaign and its goal. (Larson 1992, p. 283)

Before generating and creating marketing messages, addressants devise a communication campaign as a single whole thoroughly, and subordinate all verbal and nonverbal texts to this overall campaign vision and its goals. So the main hypothesis of this article is: **There are some subtle means and internal structures that addressants use to coordinate the content of all marketing messages and unit them in a campaign as a single whole.** The marketers and advertisers are usually guided by these structures intuitively, but sometimes quite consciously. From a creative point of view, the campaign could be represented as a unity of messages about the same promoted object with the inner connections (semantic correlations) between them. These messages are delivered to the target audience over a fixed time period via selected media with some end in view (persuasion), subordinate to the marketing goals.

In order to confirm the hypothesis and reveal the means and structures, we first focused on product and company-oriented campaigns (not candidate or idea-oriented), keeping in mind that the investigated material could be augmented later. So 100 marketing communication campaigns were selected, and serial messages within each campaign transmitted through mass media were analyzed. The following characteristics were taken into account:

– existence or absence of invariable elements in the messages related to the same campaign and the types of these elements (if they exist);
– existence or absence of variable elements in the messages related to the same campaign and their types;
– relative order of messages delivered to the target audience over the time of the campaign.

The conducted research shows that each analyzed campaign is based on some constant elements presented in the messages and includes zones of possible variety. Constants of the serial marketing messages may be classified as the following main types: identity constant, positioning constant, semantic constant and rhetorical constant.

1) **Identity constant**: Invariable brand/product and company-identifying signs (e.g. name, logo, emblem, appearance, package, corporate style elements, slogan). They appear in all types of messages in full complement or partly. The exception to the rule is the teaser campaign. The first message of the teaser campaign is designed to arouse the curiosity of the audience and thus includes a teaser with no brand/product/company-identifying signs. These signs appear in the messages in the following revelation stage of the campaign.

2) **Positioning constant**: Invariable emphasis on the same benefits for the audience and/or associations of the promoted object that form or strengthen distinctive positioning and brand image.

3) **Semantic constant**: Invariable topic and semantic type of information about the brand (mainly emotional or mainly rational or combined, centered on product attributes and benefits or on an audience's emotions and lifestyle, etc.). The choice of semantic type by the persuader (addressant) is based upon marketing positioning strategy and target audience characteristics.

4) **Rhetorical constant**: Invariable style and rhetorical figures (either verbal or nonverbal), upon which the creative execution of the campaign is based. On the tactical level the unity of messages within the campaign is also maintained through varied linguistic and semiotic means: reiterations of words, phrases, taglines, continuing central and supporting characters, layout, type, and colour in print and outdoor media; mode of action, jingle, and colour in electronic media, etc.

These invariable elements cause co-reference and well-perceived correlations between the messages, building up the campaign as a single whole. The first two constants form the reference of the advertising messages to the particular brand and to the position of this brand in the market place. The third and fourth constants mould the distinctive language and communication style of the brand.

On the strategic level the variable elements in the messages related to the same campaign are of the following types: various benefits of the brand stressed in different messages within the campaign; various segments of the target audience for whom different messages are created; various arguments and motives stressed in different messages within the campaign; various products of the same company simultaneously promoted through different messages within the campaign; various objectives and stages of persuasion with which different messages of the complex campaign correlate (to form or maintain brand awareness, a positive attitude towards it, brand preference, and brand loyalty), and some others. On the tactical level a variation may occur due to a big potential of creative executions of the same marketing idea: various headlines, copies, visuals, layouts, plots, characters, dialogues and so on.

The relative order of messages delivered to the target audience over the duration of the campaign can be classified into three main types (while each type has its specific variations): the consecutive stage-by-stage persuasion scheme, the scheme of connected in parallel (i.e., free-order) persuasive messages, and the combined scheme (the variation of the combined scheme is a cyclic one).

Consider as an example the marketing messages for Frontier Airlines (with headquarters situated in Colorado, USA). Its distinctive visual attribute is pictures of wild animals on the plane tails: a hare, a lynx, a wolf, a grizzly bear, a fox, and others. Evidently the pictures (one animal per plane) emphasize the relevance to the state Colorado with its beautiful nature. Together with the corporate name and logo, these pictures have become the company-identifying signs. The company has used various types of promoting messages united in the campaign: print, television, outdoor, and e-banner consumer advertising, business-to-business adverts, PR texts, the corporate site, direct mails to loyal clients); all of them include verbal and nonverbal **identity constants** and references to them. For example, the phrase in the advertisement *We're famous for our low fares, great service and, of course, the wildlife photos on our tails* connects the identifying sign with the advantages of the company services. In order to differentiate between the company and its competitors, and create its unique brand image, the metaphor "the company is like a wild animal" was chosen (**rhetorical constant**). This rhetorical figure emerges in the corporate slogan (*Frontier. A whole different animal.*) and is explicitly or implicitly used in many promotional texts.

The wild animal metaphor is developed in their PR, e-mail, and internet communication. One of the PR-texts describes the corporate values; the four principles the company follows in its business are called *four paws the company stands on* (notice *paws* not *feet*). In TV commercials the company uses the animals instead of the usual human spokespeople: *We've got the best spokesanimals in the business. It's because they love what they do and have fun doing it – just like us.* On the corporate site one can find a section called *Fun stuff*, where all the animals placed on the plane tails are presented with their names and short characteristics. A special offer to the loyal clients – Frontier MasterCard – is also communicated within the "wild animal"-metaphor: *Chose your animal. Deep inside all of us is an animal ready to cut loose. With a Frontier MasterCard you'll have your chance to show the world your inner animal. Choose from animals such as Larry the Lynx, Foxy the Fox, Grizwald the Bear, or Jack Rabbit – or pick one of the two newest additions: the Penguins, or Flip the Dolphin! Can't decide? Here are their profiles* [...].

The **semantic constant** of the campaign is its mainly emotionally oriented communication that directly or indirectly develops the topics of pleasure and inspirable wildlife nature. The **positioning constant** of the campaign is the emphasis on the combination of three value concepts for consumers: 'pleasure', 'comfort' and 'convenience'. *Our job is to get you where you need to go.*

But we also want you to have a little fun along the way; *When traveling on business, always fly Frontiers. We make doing business a pleasure*; *low fares and great service* (the advertising taglines).

The structure of Frontier marketing communication campaign is based on the combined scheme of message delivery: with part use of the consecutive stage-by-stage persuasion scheme and part use of the scheme of persuasive masses connected in parallel messages. The advertising campaign in mass media as a part of the Frontier marketing communication campaign was based on the latter scheme type.

Thus the study reported in this article reveals some semantic and pragmatic means which maintain this sort of communication unity as a marketing communication campaign. Many linguistic and semiotic peculiarities of advertising and other promotional messages (that distinguish them from the editorial mass media messages) can be explained through the concept of multi-message brand-centered communication as a single whole.

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