

On the Discourse of Advertising Slogans: A Study of Advertising Language

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Abstract: *Art is an integral part of human existence and the question about art which has always perplexed human minds is what can be included under the gamut of art? As times progressed, this question became all the more persuasive followed by the birth of certain activities, such as advertisements, often deemed creative but not always considered artistic. This debate over the artistic or the non-artistic nature of advertisements is based on the debate of banality of art and the conflict between high and low art. Certainly this debate regarding the artistic or non-artistic status of advertisements is divided between two schools, each taking a side either in favor of the artistic status of advertisement or the opposite. There have been many theories and techniques devised to determine the status of advertisements. One of the techniques or devices that can be used particularly for ads abundant with texts is language and its usages as it is a determining factor from various perspectives. This element of language hence can be used to assess the debate regarding the status of ads as art or non-art. Thus, the objective of this paper is to look into those elements of language which may render 'art' or 'non-art' status to advertisements, with the advertising slogans being the subject of interest here.*

1. Introduction

There are many aspects which can be drawn to separate humans from animals. But one of the determining factors which automatically put humans on a high pedestal than other living creatures is our capacity to formulate and process language of the highest order. But does that mean that other animals do not communicate with each other? Or, there is as such no way or language other than the one that we human beings use to communicate? Perhaps not; other animals do communicate with each other in their own way and in their very own devised (or instinctive) mode of communication. But when it comes to the human beings, this aspect of

communication and the use of a certain category of communication using language become very important. For humans, language is not just a mode of basic communication, but it is the element or the tool that allows us to express our feelings, emotions and sentiments in a way which often gets reflected as art through paintings cinema, literature, music and such others. Thus, there is a place for language beyond basic communication in the lives of human beings. Literature, cinema, music, paintings, dance and all such art forms use a certain language to communicate their thoughts. Perhaps it would be better to say that these elements of human expression use the language in such a way that it becomes different from our day-to-day language. Thus, it is often theorized that language is indeed one among the many factors that can determine the artistic status of an entity.

As the title of the paper suggests, the objective of this paper is to assess the role of advertising language in determining the artistic or non-artistic status of advertisements. The branch of language science called "Discourse Analysis" is particularly very significant here, not just from the perspective of this paper but also from the point of view of understanding "art" (or artistic language) as Discourse Analysis is specially devised to analyze written, vocal, sign language and other significant semiotic events. Advertising language (advertising slogans) – the subject matter of this paper is one such category of human expression which can fall under the category of "Discourse Analysis" and thus, can be analyzed by using the analytic categories of Discourse Analysis.

2. Advertisement—is it Art?

The question whether advertisements can be considered as art is highly loaded and is dependent upon innumerable factors including the very definition of "art" for a clear-cut answer. If ads are considered as craft or objects which are not "means to some end, but end in itself" then it might be possible for advertisements to be considered as art. But there are

many other factors which can determine the artistic or non-artistic status of ads.

2.1. Difference between Art and Ads

Appreciating or understanding art demands the understanding of what is being addressed and expressed. Art is thus, a product of self expression. Apart from this, art is also considered timeless and without a motive, that is, art should be studied as something which is an end in itself and not a means to some end. But advertisements are definitely not objects without a motive. Ads are made with a motive of selling. As far as the feature of persuasion is concerned it is a necessary element of art which insights one into the understanding of “self-expression”. Advertisements too persuade but the persuasion of advertisements is different from that of art. Art persuades us to feel in a certain way which is an end in itself and not a means to some end; whereas, advertisements persuade people to act (to purchase) – motivate the consumers to purchase. The art of interpretation also plays an important role in judging the artistic or non-artistic nature of an object. For instance, a painting is multifaceted and thus, opens to multiple interpretations. Advertisements on the other hand cannot afford to have multiple interpretations as the purpose does not oblige it. Again, if one analyzes the aspect of element of purpose, one would find that – art is something which is an end in itself and not a means to some end. It is created without any ulterior purpose, that is, art for art’s sake. Advertisements however, are a means to an end and not an end in itself. There is nothing as such advertisement for advertisement's sake – ads are not created because the society deserves to see it and the creativity involved in it requires to be admired. It has a different purpose of its own, that is, the purpose of selling. The conclusion which is generally drawn from here is that according to these parameters, advertisements probably could not be considered as art.

But should advertisements be completely negated as art? Let us consider the language of advertising slogans to look into the artistic or the non-artistic nature of advertisements. Let us again go back to the ideas which are attached to art. The ideas which are generally associated with the definition of art is “expression of human creativity and imagination.” But the question is whether creativity and imagination are enough to define art and what is it that makes imagination creative? One would notice that language and its systematic usage is integral to human thoughts, action and also our

aesthetic pursuits, and thus, it is language which also plays an extremely important role in determining art. A theory in language and literary studies which is considered as the benchmark theory for recognizing something as a work of art is known as the “theory of distancing and defamiliarization”. This theory of distancing and defamiliarization will be a very important factor from the perspective of this paper and all those pursuits where language is a determining parameter of creativity. Whether or not ads or advertising slogans can be considered as art will largely depend upon this particular theory of distancing and defamiliarization.

3. Distancing and Defamiliarization

Victor Shklovsky (1893-1984), a Russian theorist, writer and critic gave the theory of distancing and defamiliarization in his path-breaking work “Art as Technique”. He said, “The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar’, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.” Shklovsky’s theory of distancing and defamiliarization is very important as far as the discourse analysis of advertisements is concerned. Perhaps this is the only theory that can convincingly talk about art and its concrete nature. Generally all forms of literary work have this feature of distancing and defamiliarization. Consider the following quote from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*:

“Out, out, brief candle! Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more: it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

[Shakespeare, Act V:5, 1961]

The words and phrases “candle”, “walking shadow” and “stage” are the imagery which is used not just to make one perceive meaning but create a special perception of the object. It creates a vision of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it. The theory of distancing and defamiliarizing also is akin to the imagery that is associated with literary works. Again, look into the following lines from Pablo Neruda’s *Sonnet XVII*:

I do not love you as if you were salt rose or topaz,
Or the arrow of carnations the fire shoots off

*I love you as certain dark things are to be
Loved, in secret, between the shadow and the
soul.*

[Neruda, 2004]

The entire stanza is an example of imagery in a great literary work just as Wordsworth's *Daffodils*:

*I wonder lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills
When all at once I saw a crowd,*

*A host, of golden daffodils; Beside the lake,
beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.
[Wordsworth, 1807]*

All the three above mentioned literary works are instances of the theory of distancing and defamiliarization. Let us now go deeper into the theory of distancing and defamiliarization propounded by Shklovsky in terms of advertising language. As it is mentioned before the theory of Shklovsky is one of the most important features of literary work and also an important theory in discourse analysis. The imagery that literary works provide (as mentioned in the above examples) are essential artistic elements that play the role of differentiating artistic language from daily conversation. In artistic usage of language, the aim of language is to break the monotony of daily life and also to penetrate the realm of the 'habitual'. Habitualization often blinds one from the sensations of life. For instance, the road that one takes everyday to come to office becomes a habitual part and after a while, one would not even see the things that exist on the road. But in case, the same person sees a barren road instead of the usual lush green way to the office then it would definitely catch the attention of the onlooker. This also gives the aim of art – that is, art aims that one recovers the sensation of life. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. After we see an object several times, we begin to recognize it. The object is in front of us and we know it, but we do not see it. Hence, we cannot say anything significant about it. Art removes objects from the perception of automation.

The removal of objects from the perception of automation is a very important aspect and also the forte of the theory of distancing and defamiliarization. Let us look into some of the literary works which portray this theory:

*If music be the food of love, play on.
[Shakespeare, Act I:1, 2010]*

*I crave your mouth, your voice, your hair. Silent
and starving, I prowl through the streets. Bread
does not nourish me, dawn disrupts me, all day I
hunt for the liquid measure of your steps.*

[Neruda, 2006]

*Every new beginning comes from some other
beginning's end.
[Semisonic, Closing Time]*

*I celebrate myself, and sing myself, And what I
assume you shall assume, For every atom
belonging to me
As good belongs to you.
[Walt Whitman]*

*Out beyond ideas of wondering And rightdoing
there is a field. I'll meet you there.
When the Soul lies down in that grass The world
is too full to talk about.
[Rumi]*

4. Advertising Language

All the above mentioned instances are examples of the genre of conventional art and follow the imagery, distancing-defamiliarization rule to be categorized under art. While Shakespeare is talking about art, he is doing it through the example of music as the food of love; Neruda's description of love is graphic and detached from the usual daily conversations on love. Again, Rumi's words could refer to both the almighty where the soul gets merged with the god and also the lover. The notable points in all these lines are a certain usage of language which is not the one that is being used in day-to-day life. Thus, it can be deduced that the role that language plays is critical in determining the critical nature of a work of art – language and its usage become the deterministic agent and therefore, the aesthetic and non-aesthetic elements of objects is awarded by language and its usage.

The same theory of distancing and defamiliarization can be applied to the advertisement language as well. Consider the following advertising slogans:

*American by birth. Rebel by Choice. [Harley
Davidson]*

Share Moments. Share Life. [Kodak]

Make the most of now. [Vodafone]

*Let your fingers do the walking. [Yellow Pages]
Empowering People. [Acer]*

[Byte into an Apple](#)

[\[Apple Inc.\] Neighbour's envy, owner's pride.](#)

[\[Onida\]](#)

[Between love and madness lies Obsession.](#)

[\[Calvin Klein\]](#)

[The mark of a man.](#)

[\[Old Spice\]](#)

If one looks into these advertising slogans, one would realize that none of the slogans are actually speaking about what they intend to sell. These are taking the perception of the product away from the usual domain of awareness and taking them to a different plain where the product (through the language) is distanced and defamiliarized for the sake of renewed perception.

Aesthetic perception is viewed as non-utilitarian perception and it is often achieved through distancing and defamiliarization where words are silhouettes of one's expression. The utilitarian outlook makes us see the essence of the object and bracket the aesthetic existence. Skhlovosky said, "A work is created artistically so that its perception is impeded and the greatest possible effect is produced through the slowness of perception". As far as the advertisements are concerned it is undoubtedly commercial and utilitarian in nature and there is an involvement of a buyer and a seller. The objective of the advertisements is to familiarize the consumers with the products. But this task of familiarization is achieved through defamiliarization of the object through a certain usage of language. For instance, nowhere a bike is mentioned in the slogan "American by birth. Rebel by Choice"; or one cannot locate a camera in the slogan "Share Moments. Share Life". Defamiliarization is achieved through the employment of 'distancing' technique whereby the perception of the object by the subject is delayed or slowed down through distancing. The advertising slogans mentioned above are familiarizing the object, not with the intention of familiarization but the idea here is to make the viewers experience the artfulness of the object. Most of the times the objects leave our memory but the words remain.

5. Conclusion

The text of advertising slogans does follow the distancing and defamiliarization elements. The structure of the language used in the advertisements prolongs the aesthetic perception and the aesthetic experience by making the process of perception an aesthetic end in itself. Thus, the aesthetic value contained in advertisements cannot be ignored and the text which has elements in it that constitute our conventional or popular notions of art, to strip it of its aesthetic value for its utilitarian aspect is perhaps a hasty act. The utilitarian aspects of advertisements cannot be ignored but at the same time, the employment of artistic techniques into the making of ads is also difficult to ignore. Perhaps if one is able to detach oneself from the objects that are sold through ads it would not be very difficult to see the artistic elements in advertising slogans. Also, if utilitarianism is the element of problem, then one would have to deal with the question of selling of art – be it a painting, poem, a story, a cinema and such other. In a nutshell, answers to questions such as whether something is art or not art cannot be defined through water-tight compartments. There are a number of elements attached to it – ethical, linguistic, utilitarian and such other. Further research into this very particular subject undertaken from the point of view of aspects such as ethics can open up new insights into the nature of art and entities that can be included within the gamut of art.

6. References

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