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LEXICAL FEATURES OF PERSUASIVE WORDS IN ENGLISH ADVERTISING: A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract. This article examines the lexical characteristics of persuasive vocabulary employed in English advertising discourse. Through systematic analysis of linguistic devices, rhetorical figures, and pragmatic strategies, the study identifies key patterns in how advertisers manipulate language to influence consumer behavior. The research demonstrates that persuasive advertising language relies heavily on specific lexical categories including evaluative adjectives, imperative verbs, neologisms, and weasel words, operating within carefully constructed syntactic frameworks. The findings contribute to understanding the interface between applied linguistics and marketing communication.

Keywords: persuasive language, advertising discourse, lexical features, rhetorical devices, English language, consumer psychology

Advertising discourse represents one of the most pervasive forms of persuasive communication in contemporary society. According to established definitions, advertising constitutes "a paid-for communication intended to inform and/or persuade one or more people" , functioning as a sophisticated linguistic tool designed to shape consumer attitudes and behaviors. The language of advertising operates through deliberate lexical choices that transform ordinary commercial messages into compelling calls to action.

The significance of persuasive language in advertising cannot be overstated. Research indicates that advertisements serve not merely to inform but actively to "persuade, remind, influence, and possibly change opinions, emotions, and attitudes". This persuasive function manifests primarily at the lexical level, where specific word choices create emotional resonance, establish brand identity, and drive consumer engagement. The present article provides a comprehensive analysis of these lexical features, examining how English advertising employs vocabulary as a strategic resource for persuasion.

Persuasive language in advertising may be defined as "language that aims to persuade and/or succeed in persuading others to accept a point of view". This definition encompasses the intentional deployment of linguistic resources to achieve specific communicative goals. Within advertising discourse, persuasion operates through multiple lexical mechanisms that appeal simultaneously to rational and emotional faculties.

The rhetorical structure of advertising typically comprises two primary moves: product identification and product description. The latter move subdivides into objective feature presentation and persuasive customer appeal, with lexical choices playing a crucial role in the persuasive component. This bifurcated structure necessitates distinct lexical registers—factual terminology for objective description and evaluative vocabulary for persuasive appeal.

Research identifies twenty-one distinct types of persuasive language strategies in advertising discourse. These strategies operate across phonological, syntactic, and lexical dimensions, with lexical features serving as the primary carriers of semantic content. The most frequently employed lexical devices include:

Long noun phrases with multiple modification
Evaluative adjectives and adverbs
Imperative verb forms
Neologisms and coinages
Weasel words and vague terminology

Hyperbolic expressions
Familiar and colloquial vocabulary

Evaluative adjectives constitute the most prominent lexical category in advertising discourse. Corpus analysis reveals consistent patterns in adjective deployment across various product categories. High-frequency evaluative adjectives include: *new, clean, white, real, fresh, right, natural, big, great, slim, soft, wholesome, perfect, better, best, first, only, complete*

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These adjectives function as implicit value judgments, attributing positive qualities to products without requiring objective verification. The adjective *new* and its derivatives (*anew, renew*) appear with particular frequency, capitalizing on cultural associations between novelty and improvement. Similarly, superlative forms (*best, perfect*) establish hierarchical superiority without specifying comparative criteria.

Long noun phrases represent the most dominant structural pattern in advertising discourse, accounting for approximately 25% of all persuasive devices. These phrases combine head nouns with extensive pre- and post-modification to create dense descriptive units. Examples include:

"Supercharge your drive"
"A racing machine on the wrist"
"Adrenaline as an art form"
"The luxury of the quiet time"

Such constructions enable advertisers to embed multiple positive attributes within single syntactic units, maximizing information density while maintaining processing fluency.

The imperative mood serves as the primary grammatical vehicle for consumer directive in advertising. Imperative constructions —"Buy Brown boots now!", "Drive it", "Charge the battery" — function as explicit performatives, attempting to bring about the actions they name. These constructions eliminate grammatical subjects, creating an immediate, face-to-face address that simulates personal conversation.

Directive verbs in advertising typically cluster around semantic fields of consumption (*buy, get, have, own*), sensation (*feel, taste, experience*), and transformation (*change, transform, discover*). The verb *get* deserves particular attention for its versatility across registers and its implicit promise of acquisition without effort. Analysis of automobile advertising demonstrates strategic verb selection: "Don't dream it. Drive it" employs verb contrast to transform aspiration into action.

Advertising discourse generates neologisms through multiple morphological processes including compounding, blending, affixation, and semantic extension. These coinages serve dual functions: capturing attention through novelty and creating proprietary terminology associated with specific brands.

Notable examples of advertising neologisms include:

Beanz Meanz Heinz (rhyming compound)
Cookability (derivational suffixation)
Schweppervescence (blending)
Tangoed (zero-derivation/verbing)
Wonderfuel (blending)

Such formations exploit the psychological principle of *novelty impact*, creating memorable lexical items that differentiate brands within crowded marketplaces. The morphological transparency of these coinages ensures comprehensibility while their formal innovation ensures distinctiveness.

Weasel words represent a specialized lexical category characterized by suggestive meaning without specific commitment. These terms create impressions of value while evading verifiable claims. Two primary subcategories exist:

Open comparatives employ comparative adjectives without explicit standards of comparison: "Meatloaf is better" (better than what?).

Bogus superlatives utilize superlative forms without defined comparison sets: "Brown's Jackets are best" (rated alongside what?).

Additional weasel words include intensifiers (*virtually, fights, refreshes, helps, refreshes*) and vague quantifiers (*up to, as much as, more than*). These lexical items enable advertisers to imply efficacy while maintaining legal defensibility.

Hyperbole —"exaggeration to claims not meant to be taken literally" —represents a fundamental lexical strategy in advertising. Hyperbolic expressions typically concentrate in adjectival and adverbial modification, amplifying product attributes beyond plausible limits. Examples include *"More than Swiss made", "Beyond Expectation. Beyond compare", and "The best four by four by far"*

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The effectiveness of hyperbole derives from its flouting of Grice's Maxim of Quality. Consumers recognize the literal falsity of such claims yet process them as indices of genuine enthusiasm rather than deception. This "pragmatic license" enables advertisers to communicate emotional commitment without factual accountability.

Lexical selection in advertising frequently prioritizes phonological patterning over purely semantic considerations. Alliteration — the repetition of initial consonant sounds — creates mnemonic devices that enhance brand recall. Representative examples include:

"Different by design. Disruptive by choice"
"Charge the battery. Change the world"
"Today, Tomorrow, Toyota"
"Mean but green"

These patterns operate below the threshold of conscious attention, creating subliminal associations between sound and brand identity. The lexical choices required to achieve such patterning often override semantic optimization, demonstrating the priority of phonological persuasion.

Rhyming couplets and rhythmic phrasing exploit the mnemonic power of poetic structure. Examples such as "travel light, travel right" and "mean machine" create sonic templates that facilitate verbatim recall. The lexical compression required by rhyme schemes—selecting semantically appropriate terms that share phonological endings—generates distinctive advertising phraseology.

Lexical choices in personal deixis significantly affect advertising's persuasive force. The second-person pronoun *you* and possessive *your* predominate in contemporary advertising, creating "double indexicality" referring both to the receiver and to a constructed character within the advertisement's narrative world. This pronominal strategy simulates personal address, transforming commercial communication into apparent interpersonal dialogue.

The first-person plural *we* typically indexes the manufacturer or advertiser, positioning the brand as collective enterprise. Contrastively, third-person pronouns (*he/she*) often designate non-users, creating distance and inviting conspiratorial identification between advertiser and addressee.

Advertising increasingly adopts colloquial lexical registers to minimize social distance. Contractions (*isn't, you're, we'll*), clipped forms (*ad, phone, fridge*), and subject/auxiliary

omissions characterize contemporary advertising syntax. The lexical selection accompanying these syntactic features—*ain't, gonna, wanna*—signals informality and accessibility.

Example: "Small business isn't small to us" employs contraction and colloquial negation to establish conversational parity between corporation and customer.

Metaphor represents one of "the most effective means of advertising strategies", enabling abstract product attributes to assume concrete, experiential form. Lexical metaphors in advertising typically map source domains of nature, power, and human relationships onto target domains of commercial products.

Automobile advertising exemplifies this pattern: "Driving the world ahead" metaphorizes corporate ambition as vehicular motion; "Born to perform" applies biological determinism to mechanical function; "Little car. Big heart" anthropomorphizes automotive engineering.

Lexical ambiguity generates persuasive effects through multiple simultaneous interpretations. Puns exploit phonological identity between distinct lexical items: "MINI ON" activates both the brand name and the animated character (*Minion*). The slogan "Get used to being followed" plays on *follow* as physical pursuit and as social media engagement.

Such polysemic density maximizes information value per lexical item, rewarding consumer attention with multiple interpretive possibilities.

The lexical features of persuasive words in English advertising constitute a sophisticated system of linguistic manipulation. Through strategic deployment of evaluative adjectives, imperative verbs, neologisms, weasel words, and phonologically patterned vocabulary, advertisers create discourse that simultaneously informs, entertains, and compels. These lexical choices operate within broader rhetorical frameworks that include metaphor, hyperbole, and colloquial register adoption.

Understanding these lexical mechanisms provides essential insights for both applied linguistics and consumer psychology. As advertising continues to evolve across digital platforms, the fundamental lexical strategies identified herein—novelty, evaluation, direct address, and phonological patterning—remain constant, adapted to new media environments but unchanged in their persuasive intent.

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