Linguistic Realizations of Metadiscourse in Advertising Slogans: A Case Study of McDonald's

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ABSTRCT

This paper conducts an empirical study on the linguistic realizations of metadiscourse markers in advertising slogans. A database of 162 McDonalds' slogans was built to examine the subcategories and frequencies, and linguistic realizations of metadiscourse used in the data. In terms of the use of metadiscourse, it was found that interactional metadiscourse accounted for a remarkably higher proportion among the metadiscourse used in McDonald's slogans, particularly engagement markers, attitude markers, and self-mentions. Further elaborations were given as to the linguistic realizations of different metadiscourse subcategories. The use of the above metadiscourse markers contributes to the persuasive function of the advertising slogans through pathos and ethos. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the persuasive function of metadiscourse in advertising slogans.

Keywords: *metadiscourse, advertising slogans, linguistic realizations*

1. INTRODUCTION

An advertising slogan is a short phrase used by the company in its advertisements to reinforce the identity of the brand [1]. Advertisers are assumed to consider language and rhetorical devices when creating a slogan for a brand [2]. [3] claimed that "Perhaps one of the clearest examples of the rhetorical role of metadiscourse is found in advertisements". Because the use of metadiscourse in advertising slogans differs from that of other genres, it is crucial to explore the particular linguistic expressions of metadiscourse markers in achieving persuasion.

A few studies have examined metadiscourse and persuasion in advertisements, including the use of metadiscourse in achieving persuasion in magazine advertisements[4-5], person marker, hedges, and emphatics in printed advertisement tagline [6], comparative study of textual, interpersonal, and visual metadiscourse markers in English and Persian advertisements [7].

Previous studies have selected printed magazine advertisements as the research object, yet none of these studies have examined the rhetorical function of metadiscourse in advertisement slogans spread through other media, such as TV, radio, internet and billboard. Therefore, the present paper conducts a case study on the use of metadiscourse markers in relation to their persuasive function in advertising slogans, with an in-depth analysis on the linguistic realizations of each metadiscourse subcategory.

2. ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK

Considering the purpose of advertising is to influence people's thinking or action in purchase goods or services, this paper uses the oft-quoted definition proposed by Hyland: "Metadiscourse is the cover term for the self-reflective expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, assisting the writer (or speaker) to express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a particular community" [3]. [3] proposes an interpersonal model in which metadiscourse comprises interactive metadiscourse and interactional metadiscourse. Because these two dimensions of interaction include stance and engagement [8], this model has been widely accepted for analysing discourse and the relationship between writers and readers. In this paper we also adopt Hyland's framework for analysis because it comprises both the textual and interpersonal aspects of discourse analysis which are the defining features of most types of communication [3], including advertising.

3. METHODOLOGY

McDonald's advertisement slogans were chosen as the data for the study because McDonald's is the world's largest restaurant chain by revenue with outlets in over 100 countries worldwide and has had a global marketing campaign with slogans in numerous languages since the 1960s.

Data were collected from the Wikipedia website, which lists McDonald's multilingual slogans in 46 countries from 1960 to 2015. For all the non-English slogans, an English translation is provided on the website. For data analysis, all the English slogans, either originally in English or translated into English, were collected. Identical slogans used in multiple countries were counted only once. Thus, a small database consisting of 162 English McDonald's slogans was built.

The analysis consisted of two stages. First, the metadiscourse markers used in all the slogans were identified and classified into subcategories according to Hyland's framework [3], and then the frequency of each subcategory was calculated. Second, the specific linguistic expressions of each subcategory were examined and classified, and their frequency of use was calculated.

Regarding the reliability and accuracy of marker identification, some caveats must be given. Each instance of metadiscourse markers repeated within or among slogans was counted because it represented its frequency of use. For some linguistic forms which are identical to certain metadiscourse markers, we discussed about their contextual meanings; for example, the modal auxiliary *must*, has both propositional and metadiscursive meanings. In the slogan "Must get my taste", *must* is probably propositional with a deontic meaning, rather than a metadiscourse marker, which is generally related to possibility.

In addition, attitude markers are one of the ambiguous metadiscourse subcategories that are hard to discern. In this study, adjectives like *tasty, big, different* and *delicious* and verbs like *love, like,* and *enjoy* in McDonald's advertising slogans were regarded as attitude markers because they not only express propositional meaning about products, but also reveal writers' attitude or opinions about the products in an effort to "express a position and suck readers into a conspiracy of agreement so that it can often be difficult to dispute such judgement" [3].

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section first reports the subcategories of metadiscourse that were used in McDonald's slogans and their frequency of use. Then, the linguistic realizations of each subcategory were analysed.

4.1. Use of metadiscourse subcategories and their frequency

Metadiscourse markers used in McDonald's slogans fall into two categories: interactive and interactional (Table 1).

Table 1 Categories and frequencies of the metadiscourse used

Interactive	Frequency	Interactional	Frequency
Transitions	6 (3.23%)	Engagement markers	87 (46.77%)
Frame markers	0	Attitude markers	65 (34.95%)
Endpoint markers	0	Self-mentions	22 (11.83%)
Evidentials	0	Boosters	4 (2.15%)
Code glosses	0	hedges	2 (1.08%)
Total	6 (3.23%)	Total	180 (96.77%)

Clearly, the frequency of interactional metadiscourse is markedly higher than that of interactive metadiscourse, suggesting that the metadiscourse used in McDonald's slogans is mainly intended to attract readers to the text. The low frequency of interactive metadiscourse indicates that readers are thought to have a limited need to be guided through the text of a slogan, as advertisement slogan has to be short and striking or memorable [9-10].

Regarding the interactional metadiscourse, Table 1 indicates that the metadiscourse used in McDonald's advertising slogans contain all the five subcategories proposed by Hyland (2005), with engagement markers (46.77%) being the most frequently used subcategory, followed by attitude markers (34.95%) and self-mentions (11.83%).

This result corroborates with Wang's study [5] on the use of metadiscourse in advertisements for women's

products in the British fashion magazine Cosmopolitan as in both studies interactional metadiscourse accounts for most of the metadiscourse. It is striking, though, that the advertising slogans of McDonald's could contain all the subcategories of interactional discourse despite their brevity and terseness as compared with the advertising texts in Cosmopolitan which offers profuse advertising with either short and long advertisements[11]. From this we can see that interactional metadiscourse is a prominent feature of advertising.

Whereas the three subcategories of interactional metadiscourse most frequently found in [5] are engagement markers, attitude markers, and boosters, the present study finds that much more self-mentions are used than boosters. The differences might be explained as follows: One study concerns printed advertisements in women's magazine which offers

consumer spreads with all the associations with female desire, pleasure, and fantasy [11] Hence, boosters, are used to express writers' certainty regarding to the customers' experiences about product quality and thus persuading consumers to buy what is being offered because its key features are certain and necessary [4]. The other study concerns fast food advertisement slogans with children and young people as its major target audience. Self-mentions are thus frequently used to display young people's personal attitudes and feelings to products, indicating the tendency toward orality in advertisements [12].

4.2. Linguistic realizations of metadiscourse subcategories

4.2.1. Linguistic realizations of engagement markers

Engagement markers are devices that explicitly address readers, either to focus their attention or include them as discourse participants. There are two major methods of engagement: one is to use pronouns, determiners, or interjections that involve readers in an argument; the other is to use questions, directives (mainly imperatives), and references to shared knowledge that position readers in the discourse at critical points, thereby guiding them to respond [3]. Engagement markers used in McDonald's slogans include pronouns, determiners, questions, and imperatives. The pronouns and determiners most frequently used are the second-person you, your, and yourself. Also, the inclusive first-person plurals are used to engage the readers. The use of these pronouns as engagement markers is related to the concept of synthetic personalization [13]. Imperatives, which convey orders or suggestions directly, rank second in the frequency of linguistic expressions used. Some rhetorical questions are also used in McDonald's slogans. Thus, the use of imperatives and rhetorical questions are syntactic devices contributing to the persuasiveness of advertisements.

4.2.2. Linguistic realizations of attitude markers

Attitude markers express the writer's attitudes to the proposition. It plays a key role in strengthening the persuasiveness of the writer's argument [3]. It is observed that attitude markers, such as attitude verbs, adverbs, and adjectives, often convey a slogan writer's attitude toward the involved product. Overall, 65 attitude markers are employed in McDonald's slogans, among which adjectives are the most frequently used. Drawing on Biber'sthree semantic classes for adjectives: epistemic, attitude/emotion, and evaluation

[14], we further classify the 47 adjectives c into two classes: evaluative adjectives, such as good, great, tasty, lovely, big, cozy, and different, which express the evaluation and attitude toward the products or service; and emotional adjectives, which express the writer's mental states, emotions or feelings of the products or service, such as merrier. In addition to adjectives, emotional verbs are used in McDonald's slogans to convey emotions. For example, love was used nine times, like five times, and enjoy four times.

4.2.3. Linguistic realizations of self-mentions

Self-mentions refer to the degree of explicit author presence in the text through using first-person pronouns and possessive adjectives [3]. Twenty-two self-mentions are used in McDonald's slogans, and most of them are first-person singular pronouns or determiners. I is used nine times and we (exclusive) six times (Table 4).

4.2.4. Linguistic realizations of hedges

Hedges are devices such as possible, might, and perhaps, which indicate the writer's decision to recognise alternative views and thus withhold complete commitment to a proposition [3]. Based on their linguistic forms, Crompton [15] classifies hedges into six categories: epistemic copulas, epistemic modals, adjectives expressing probability, adverbs expressing probability, nonfactive verb phrases, and impersonal subject + nonfactive verb + Noun Phrase. Here, Crompton's classification was adopted because it gives a comprehensive account of the linguistic forms of hedges, which is pertinent to the current study. In the data, we found two hedges (somewhat and quite) in McDonald's slogans which are adverbs expressing probability.

4.2.5. Linguistic realizations of boosters

Boosters are words such as clearly, obviously, and demonstrate, which allow a writer to express certainty [3]. In McDonald's slogans, boosters include such adverbs as only, always, and simply, and adjective like sure. They are used to emphasise the writer's certainty about the quality of the products and service.

4.2.6. Linguistic realizations of transitions

Transitions are mainly conjunctions and adverbial phrases which help readers interpret discourse connections between steps in argument by signalling addition, causation, and contrast. (Hyland 2005: 51). Only six transitions are used to persuade readers through logos appeal in McDonald's slogans,

including conjunctions like and and because, and adverbs like why.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper reported an empirical study of metadiscourse in advertising slogans, with those of McDonald's as the data of our case study. It was found that interactional metadiscourse accounted for a high proportion of the metadiscourse in McDonald's slogans. Engagement markers, attitude markers, and self-mentions were the types that were most frequently used. The linguistic realizations used in each subcategory of metadiscourse boast the distinctive features.

This study adds to our understanding of metadiscourse by showcasing its role in advertising slogans and its persuasive function made possible by an array of metadiscursive resources. The distinction between evaluative attitude markers and emotional attitude markers sheds light on the identification and further classification of metadiscourse subcategories based on semantic features. Besides, the findings about the metadiscourse categories and their linguistic realizations in achieving persuasion in McDonald's advertisement slogans well inform the comprehension and writing of advertisements for products and service in general and slogans in particular.

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