

# A Study of the Foregrounded Features in English Advertising Texts

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**Abstract.** The thesis aims at a preliminary study of the stylistic values of the foregrounded features in English advertising texts, so as to help getting a better understanding and appreciation of the English advertising texts. The foregrounded features in English advertising texts can be divided into verbal and non-verbal foregrounded features but the latter are seldom explored in China. According to description, interpretation and comparison, the thesis intends to make use of foregrounding in some other textual analysis and in the study of art, in addition to the traditional literary analysis.

## Introduction

In modern society, with the help of mass media, advertisements have made their presence felt and been playing an ever-increasingly important role in not only the commercial realm, but actually almost every aspect of our daily life. English advertising touches our feelings, shapes our thoughts and outlooks, and, as a natural result, affects our lives to a great extent. A successful advertising text employs a variety of techniques: unique vocabulary characteristics, grammatical features, rhetorical devices, identification marks, illustrations, colors, sounds and specific layout, etc.

## A Literature Review of Foregrounding

The notion of foregrounding comes originally from the visual arts and refers to those elements of a work of art that stand out in some way. According to Russian formalist scholars working at the beginning of the last century, the purpose of art and literature is to defamiliarize the familiar, and by defamiliarizing a work of art or a text we make it stand out from the norm — it becomes foregrounded. Foregrounding in linguistics was studied in literary texts in the early twentieth century and was introduced to academics in the West, through translations, by Garvin. Then the theory of foregrounding has its further development in British stylistics, most notably by Geoffrey Leech [1]. He categorizes prominent linguistic character into two types. One is prominence in quality, and the other is prominence in quantity. Michael Halliday, the founder of Systemic Functional Linguistics, accepted Leech's view and made a generalization of the mode of prominence [2]. He classified prominence into two categories: incongruity and deflection. The former is the deviation from the norm; the latter is the strengthening of the norm. Incongruity is usually achieved by deviations caused by irregular linguistic structure, irrational use of language, or the transference of language from one field of discourse to another one. As to deflection, it is usually realized by repetition, or overregularity. Besides, Halliday's theory appeals to all texts, both literary and non-literary, and lays emphasis on both internal and external contexts.

Foregrounding effects do not have to be linguistically based. It has also been a useful concept in the study of visual arts and spectators' responses. The concept plays an important role in Russian Formalists' approaches to film [3]. Later, defamiliarization techniques were put to work by Brecht, not only in his theatre productions but also in films. In China, Zhang Delu contributes greatly to the development of the foregrounding theory. Since he published an article entitled *Linguistic Semiotics and Foergrounding* in 1994, foregrounding has aroused much attention from Chinese scholars,

especially those in the field of literary stylistics. Wu Xianyou attempts to employ the foregrounding theory to the stylistic functional analysis and distinguishes the defamiliarization from foregrounding.

The study of advertisements has drawn the attention of scholars of various disciplines. In the field of linguistics, the researches on advertisements are primarily carried out in semiotic analysis, pragmatic analysis, stylistic analysis, and cognitive analysis. Nevertheless, most of these researches focus on the languages of the advertisements, while the essence of advertisements lies in non-verbal elements as well. Thus, to appreciate advertisements researchers should broaden the range of their investigation to cover both verbal and non-verbal elements.

### **Verbal Foregrounded Features in English Advertising Texts**

An advertisement is composed of verbal and non-verbal components. This distinction refers to whether or not language is used [4]. The verbal components consist of headline, sub-headline, trademark and slogan. Language features in these elements are quite conspicuous and easy to be noticed by the general public. The layout and organization of advertising language can exert a direct influence on the effect of advertising. Language can be said to be the soul of advertising, which reflects the significance of language for advertising, and is the reason why it is necessary to analyze the verbal foregrounded features in English advertising texts.

#### **Verbal Foregrounded features in English Advertising Texts at Different Linguistic Levels**

To attract the customers' attention in the first few seconds, copywriters usually resort to some stylistic measures for the sake of graphological prominence, which can occur in any sub-area of graphology, such as the type of print, the shape of the text, grammetrics, punctuation, indentation, etc.

Table 1. Foregrounded Features at Graphological Level

Incongruity	Deflection
Capitalization and Decapitalization	
Space	
Shape of the Text	

Table 2. Foregrounded Features at Phonological Level

Incongruity	Deflection
	Rhyme
	Alliteration
	Assonance
	Consonance
	Reverse Rhyme
	Pararhyme

Table 3. Foregrounded Features at Morphological Level

Incongruity	Deflection
Coinage	
Misspelling	
Borrowing	

**Table 4. Foregrounded Features at Syntactic Level**

Incongruity	Deflection
Sentence Fragment	Repetition
Disjunctive Element	
Elliptical Clause	Parallelism
Negative Sentence	

The above four tables list the detailed verbal foregrounded features in English advertising texts at different linguistic levels, i.e. at graphological level, phonological level, morphological level, and syntactical level.

Take *Repetition* in Foregrounded Features at Syntactic Level as an example. All the overregular features in literature are, in some sense, repetitious. The term repetition, therefore, is restricted to mean the case of exact copying of a certain previous unit in a text, such as a word, phrase or even a sentence. At syntactic level, it can be further divided into two types, immediate repetition and intermittent repetition. In English advertising texts, repetition, especially that of key words or sentences, is used to emphasize some important aspects of the advertised product or service or certain information, so as to attract and stimulate consumers.

When you're sipping Lipton, you're sipping something special. (An ad for tea)

*Lipton* is a famous brand name for tea. In this advertising text, "you're sipping" is repeated twice. However, the objects following it are different: one is "Lipton" and the other is "something special". This fact shows that it is Lipton that makes something special for you. It arouses customers' great curiosity about the product and sparks their interest to taste Lipton.

### **Figures of Speech as Verbal Foregrounded Features in English Advertising Texts**

A figure of speech, sometimes called a rhetorical, is a word or phrase that departs from straightforward, literal language. Figures of speech are often used and crafted for emphasis, freshness of expression, or clarity. Scholars of classical Western rhetoric have divided figures of speech into two main categories: schemes and tropes. Schemes are figures of speech in which there is a deviation from the ordinary or expected pattern of words. Tropes involve changing or modifying the general meaning of a term [5]. Hence, the appropriate use of figures of speech can be treated as foregrounded features if it relates to the meaning of the text as a whole. The figures of speech in English advertising texts are used to achieve three goals — firstly, to form the brand image or corporate image in consumer's mind; secondly, to stress the uniqueness of the advertised product; thirdly, to stress the unique sales proposition of the advertised product. The figures of speech used in English advertising texts are listed below.

**Table 5. Figures of Speech as Verbal Foregrounded Features in English Advertising Texts**

Simile
Metaphor
Metonymy
Synecdoche
Pun
Personification
Irony

### **Non-Verbal Foregrounded Features in English Advertising Texts**

An advertisement is composed of verbal and non-verbal elements. This distinction refers to whether or not language is used. Language is the most important vehicle of communication, but even when people talk to each other, the speech is accompanied by gestures and poses by which people communicate non-verbally. The simultaneous use of verbal and non-verbal communication is an

extremely important element in human's culture. It can be found in plays, films, TV programs, strip cartoons, and in most advertisements. The non-verbal elements in advertising texts are made up of illustrations, advertising music, sounds and colors. Each element plays an important role in successful advertising texts.

Illustrations in advertising texts, which include photographs, art works, cartoons, diagrams, etc. are regarded as language of vision in advertising. They are the most important visual part of advertisements. In some cases, they are considered to be even more important than headlines and body copies though they are less important in other cases. Anyhow, in most cases, illustrations form an essential part of advertising.

Color is also an important element in advertising texts. In recent years, colors have been showing increasingly great importance in printed advertisements and TV commercials. They are so widely applied in advertisements that much attention is paid to them in advertising design. Thomas B. Stanley, an American advertiser, lists seven reasons for applying colors in advertising texts. 1) Colors are employed to attract attention to the advertisement; 2) to represent objects, scenes, and people with complete fidelity; 3) to emphasize some special part of the message or of the product; 4) to suggest abstract qualities appropriate to the selling appeal; 5) to create a pleasant first impression for the advertisement; 6) to create prestige for the product, service, or advertiser; 7) to fasten visual impressions in people's memory [6].

Music in advertising texts can be used to attract the listener's attention, carry the advertised product's message, and act as a mnemonic device. Music also creates excitement and adds energy to the message being conveyed in an advertisement. Advertisers enhance the memorability of their advertising slogans by presenting them in the form of musical jingles. Music jingles are simply music with lyrics. The musical lyrics and melodies in jingles interact and help listeners retain lyrical information about the product in their long-term memory [7].

## **Conclusion**

The thesis provides an analytical study of the foregrounded features in English advertising texts. The application of foregrounded features in English advertising texts, which makes the whole advertisement vivid and attractive, may make the readers much easier to get involved in the product or service advertised, hence a probable inclination to buy products or accept persuasions and services. Both verbal elements and non-verbal elements play important roles in advertisements. The most effective method is to make the verbal and non-verbal work together in the same advertising text.

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