



Theories of Discourse and the Advertising Text

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Abstract: For the analysis of advertising text, discourse theories can be leveraged, which fall under disciplines such as pragmatics, stylistics, and rhetoric. These theories successfully exploit mechanisms of implication, lexical creativity, stylistic innovation, and the connection between verbal and nonverbal elements. Expressiveness in advertising represents a special case of artistic expressiveness, and understanding it benefits significantly from discussions that integrate perspectives from a variety of discourse theories.

Keywords: advertising text; discourse theories; pragmatics; stylistics; rhetoric.

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1. Definition and Characteristics of Discourse

In any advertisement or advertising phenomenon, there is a meaningful connection between the linguistic and semiotic messages. Advertising discourse is a suitable domain for pragma-linguistic, stylistic, and rhetorical approaches, successfully exploiting mechanisms of implication, lexical creativity, stylistic innovation, and the connection between verbal and nonverbal elements.

Today, advertising is a predominant subject of research in the field of language sciences, being one of the most influential contemporary discursive practices. To analyse and explain advertising discourse, it is essential to employ a diverse range of external criteria. These criteria often focus on verbal or semiotic aspects, the thematic approach, or the impact that the discourse has on the audience. This type of approach emphasizes the importance of linguistic structure and the signs used in advertising, the thematic domain in which the message is inserted, as well as the effects generated by advertising communication on its recipients.

From a pragmatic perspective, every text is defined as a tool of linguistic communication between sender and receiver. The advertising text has an undeniable orientation. The message conveyed in the realm of advertising is a product of media communication, which, in turn, is governed by a set of fundamental principles that characterize any form of human communication.

The centrality of media discourse in contemporary society involves various dimensions of convergence:

- Support convergence (e.g., television and computer in digital television or television and print media in iconic tabloids);
- Intertextuality of channels (there is a dynamic relationship between print media and television: print publications take and present breaking news from television, while TV stations, in turn, anticipate and announce the content of the next day's newspapers);
- Convergence of media research, which combines objectives and methods borrowed from anthropology, semiotics, linguistics, and sociology.

Mass media serves as an essential system between the public and private spheres or, more broadly, between the phenomenal world and its interpretation. Mass media reflects reality and cultivates, in modern societies, a communicative thought and discourse that implies a promise of transparency and democracy—a promise that fosters connections and counteracts the atomization of society.

By considering advertising as a characteristic element of a media-driven society, we acknowledge that mass media holds a significant position in the current context, particularly through its contribution to public communication. Even though mass media does not form a uniform entity but presents diversity depending on media channel types, all of them tend to orient, to a greater or lesser extent, toward economic objectives. In this context, traditional mass media (radio, public and

commercial television, etc.) operates under specific economic principles, while private media entities predominantly focus on profit generation.

Over the past decades, discourse has established itself as a key concept in linguistics, at the intersection with sociology, psychology, communication theory, and the philosophy of language. Discourse analysis involves surpassing the sentence level by reintegrating social, cultural, and situational factors that can provide a complete meaning to the sequences of the speaking subject and the interlocutor.

Originating from extremely diverse theoretical domains, the term "discourse" refers more to the vast problematics of a field of study than to a specific way of understanding language. This perspective was explored by Umberto Eco¹, who managed to outline its significance. The writer emphasizes a distinct semiotic model for advertising discourse, founded on structuralist principles. In his work "A Theory of Semiotics", the author asserts that the image is constructed with capacities devoid of meaning, criticizing the notion of the sign, as iconism represents a hybrid sum of phenomena. The semiotician advocates for the iconographic dimension of the advertising image, ultimately highlighting the banality of advertising arguments based on phatic function and product valorisation.

Umberto Eco's merit lies in the fact that, by delving into the image of connotation, he steers the discussion about advertising discourse towards pragmatics, despite conducting an analysis structured around elements of structure and code within a model that involves deconstructing advertising. His interpretative model is based on five levels of stratification:

1. The iconic level,
2. The iconographic level,
3. The tropological level,
4. The topic level, and
5. The enthymeme level.

The advertising image consists of two subsystems, perceived by the receiver in a similar manner: the level of denotation and the level of connotation. At the denotative level, there are no differences between signifier and signified. This level supports the connotative level, which is highlighted by sociocultural meanings.

By thoroughly presenting the history of advertising (from papyrus scrolls in Thebes to the present day), the author outlines the stages of advertising development under the influence of social, economic, and even psychological factors of humanity.

Modern advertising belongs to a system of political control over the market, characterized by privileged areas, price fluctuations, and commercial and economic campaigns. The author argues that advertising's influence on society is not only economic but also impacts social and personal values. Consumption is associated

¹ Eco, Umberto. *Tratat de semiotică generală*. București Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1982.

with human aspirations, meaning that people do not just buy objects—they purchase social respect, beauty, success, control, and power.

To satisfy the consumer's dreams, advertisers use well-thought-out tricks and strategies, employing the most subtle psychological, sociological, and communicative tools.

A pragmatic perspective on Romanian and international advertising discourse is proposed by Adriana Vizental² in her work "The Pragmatics of Advertising." The author's demonstration shows that advertising, viewed as a modern art, is a result of contemporary human conditions inclined toward low-quality art.

Adriana Vizental's conclusion is that Romanian advertising discourse has significantly evolved in recent years in terms of creative techniques, as advertising has become an integral part of our daily lives—so much so that we can say we live in a world of advertising.

2. Pragmatics and Interdisciplinarity

Pragmatics, a foundational trend in discourse analysis, explains the assumption of meaning at the discourse level through various concepts. For example, the concept of enunciation refers to how a social actor "stages" their communicative act (the "I" in communication or "who we claim to be in and through discourse"). This distinction allows for differentiating between the speaker (a social actor who communicates something) and the enunciator (how the social actor constructs their "voice" and/or "identity" within the discourse).

Over the past 30 years, pragmatics has evolved into an empirical discipline, integrating increasingly diverse linguistic dimensions. Pragmatics, psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics are branches of linguistics that study linguistic signs from the perspective of their use by speakers.

Regarding the interaction between advertising and pragmatics, the latter examines the relationship between the message and its recipients within the advertising context. Pragmatics explores how the advertising message is delivered to the audience and how recipients interpret the received information.

The pragmatic aspect of advertising, when analysed through cultural, anthropological, and economic contexts, highlights the process by which advertising messages are interpreted and adapted to different cultural and economic frameworks. This involves analysing the effects of messages on recipients—whether they are actual buyers or potential consumers—as well as how culture and specific economic conditions can pragmatically influence the reception, impact, and response to these messages. Essentially, advertising aims to elicit a concrete reaction—a "material cooperation", such as purchasing a product, through verbal means, demonstrating how communication effectively shapes consumer behaviour in different contexts.

² Vizental, Adriana. *The Pragmatics of Advertising*. Editura Universităţii „Vasile Goldiş”, Arad, 2002.

Adopting a pragmatic perspective in advertising studies requires a thorough analysis of the persuasive function of language and argumentative structures, offering a detailed description of linguistic characteristics. This includes examining vocabulary, phraseology, syntax, punctuation, and the constitutive elements of an advertisement—such as the title, body text, slogan, and others—alongside visual components, which often have a significant connection with the language and text used.

Beyond linguistic and pragmatic tools, advertising strategies play a crucial role, involving an analysis of rhetoric and the specific language used in advertising. From an anthropological and cultural perspective, advertising is seen as a social practice that employs a system of signs in a way that emphasizes the importance of cultural and temporal context, highlighting how place and time influence the integration of advertising elements specific to a given culture. This approach underscores the interaction between advertising and its cultural contexts, revealing the essential role of language and signs in creating advertising messages that resonate with the values, norms, and expectations of the target group.

However, language and its structures can influence how people subjectively perceive reality, meaning that categories of the world and reality are not simply objective but are shaped by the knowledgeable consumer or the recipients of advertising messages.

What influences recipients in this "subjective construction" in terms of effect or act is their cultural background, their worldview, the situation or context in which the message is received as a native or foreign language, and all other external, internal, material, or non-material influencing factors.

Various academic disciplines study the effects of language, including rhetoric, stylistics, pragmatics, literary studies, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, media and communication sciences, cultural studies, and speech science, among others.

In his work *Lingvistica textului. Introducere în hermeneutica sensului*, Eugen Coșeriu³ proposes a sophisticated model of textual and pragmatic discourse analysis, based on the principles of integral linguistics. This approach not only integrates contemporary trends in text and discourse studies but also systematizes a still relevant theoretical framework, capable of offering empirical solutions and overcoming existing theoretical challenges. This is reinforced by the ability of Coșerian text linguistics to constructively utilize principles of generative grammar, structural linguistics, and text linguistics, the latter often being limited to the study of literary texts.

³ Coșeriu, Eugen. *Lingvistica textului. O introducere în hermeneutica sensului*. trad. rom., Iași, Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2013.

In general pragmatics, discourse can be considered the space where language is put into action, effectively materializing both verbal and nonverbal content. A similar perspective is found in Coşerian textual linguistics, which views discourse as an activity that manifests all types of linguistic and extra linguistic knowledge, with its product being the text.

3. Analysing Discourse

Discourse has become a key concept in linguistics over the last decades of the past century, positioned at the intersection of linguistics with sociology, communication theory, and psychology. Coming from different theoretical backgrounds, the definitions of the term "discourse" are numerous, complementary, and sometimes even contradictory. However, most definitions are formulated by contrasting discourse with what it is not. Thus, discourse is not an utterance, a sentence, or a text, nor is it a language; rather, it is an activity conducted by two or more subjects within a determined context, producing utterances that go beyond mere sentences.

The term "discourse" describes a broad area of research rather than a specific way of interpreting language. Since the term implies a relationship between language and non-linguistic reality parameters, discourse is considered an interdisciplinary field of study rather than solely a linguistic one.

Discourse analysis provides us with a deeper understanding of how social order is reflected and configured⁴. The purpose of discourse analysis is to identify the relationship between linguistic regularities and meanings, as well as the goals that are highlighted and negotiated through discourse.

The presentation of the discourse concept emphasizes the variety of perspectives from which it is discussed in different approaches to language research, particularly in relation to other concepts such as sentence, utterance, and text.

Media discourse acts as a coherent social narrative that establishes thematic hierarchies and issues while simultaneously updating mediation phenomena such as:

- Linguistic transposition operations (schematization, selection, modalization, determination, etc.);
- A mediating instance (e.g., the witness, moderator, expert, etc.);
- A medium for dissemination;
- A communicative intentionality (e.g., explanation, argumentation, narration, specification, etc.).

As a form of discourse that is not always based on reality—since it is constructed through collages of images or omissions—media texts (written or

⁴ Rovența-Frumușani, Daniela. *Analiza discursului. Ipoteze și ipostaze*. București, Editura Tritonic, 2012, p. 218.

audio-visual) borrow characteristics from myths and legends but also provide schematization and a sociocultural microcosm.

Through its stimulative methods, advertising has deeply penetrated the human psyche, combining science (sociology, semiotics, and psychology) with art, invention, and playfulness.

From a discourse analysis perspective, studying media discourse requires a holistic approach, described as "focused interdisciplinarity."⁵ This approach is carried out in the following manner:

- At the textual level, semiolinguistic analysis examines how verbal and non-verbal signs are used to construct a news report, an advertising message, or a soap opera.

- At the level of discursive practices, the study focuses on institutional procedures through which advertising texts are created by journalists so that they can be decoded by the public.

- At the level of sociocultural practices, media discourse contributes to social structuring and transformation.

In the postmodern society, characterized by advertising and the "conversationalization" of advertising discourse, messages exert an ambivalent influence on social control:

- On the one hand, advertising contributes to standardization and maintaining the status quo.

- On the other hand, it supports cultural democratization by promoting the visibility of gender, cultural, and religious differences.

According to the principles of Coşerian textual linguistics, discourse analysis is structured on three fundamental levels:

1. First Level – Identifying the type and nature of the text or discourse based on specific discursive objectives.

- Following Aristotelian typology, integral linguistics distinguishes between various discursive purposes:

- Scientific purpose (derived from apophantic logos),

- Pragmatic purpose (determined by the efficiency of pragmatic logos),

- Poetic purpose (related to poetic logos).

- Each of these purposes reflects how the speaking subject relates to the communication situation and interaction with the interlocutor.

- However, these purposes are perceived internally within the subject's discourse rather than as external processes or orientations.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 5.

According to Emma Tămăianu⁶, these discursive purposes represent a "first layer of textual form," where form is understood as the construction method of meaning that shapes discursive modes.

2. Second Level – Identifying subtypes of discursive modes, which do not merely reflect:

- Scientific disciplines (in apophantic discourse);
- Practical actions (in pragmatic discourse);
- Instead, they highlight textual functions.

At this level, the analysis focuses on the function of signs in concrete linguistic acts or specific textual functions, which Eugen Coșeriu classifies into:

- Implicit textual functions (e.g., rejection, acceptance, affirmation, allusion, example, response, irony, etc.).
- Explicit textual functions (e.g., exhortation, information, advice, explanation, instruction, etc.).

3. Third Level – Examining semantic functions of evocation, guided by multiple relationships:

- The relationships between a sign and other signs;
- The relationship of signs with signs from other texts;
- The relationship between signs and the objects they denote;
- The relationship between signs and knowledge about objects.

These relationships are analysed within various contexts, including situational, regional, contextual, and discourse universes.

4. Conclusion

By following these stages of textual analysis, we gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of texts and the pragmatic objectives of advertising discourse. Discourse analysis ultimately bridges the gap between linguistic structures and real-world interactions, allowing us to decode the ways in which media and advertising shape perceptions, behaviours, and social norms.

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⁶ Tămăianu, Emma. *Fundamentele tipologiei textuale. O abordare în lumina lingvisticii integrale*. Cluj, Editura Clusium, 2001, p. 105.

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