
WORDSMITHERIES IN ADVERTISEMENTS: A STYLISTIC STUDY OF SELECT AMUL ADVERTS

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**B.AARTHY PRIYA***Full-Time Ph.D. Research Scholar**Periyar E.V.R.College, Trichy, Tamil Nadu, India*

Abstract

In the words of W.H. Auden, "A poet is before anything else, a person who is passionately in love with language". Going by Auden's words, one may claim that even those who don't write poetry can be poets since they have a poetic bent of mind (having a passionate love for language). To prove the hypothesis that human beings are universal wordsmiths, some advertisements have been chosen for study. This study aims to bring light to the otherwise ignored area of advertisement discourse that abounds with literary tropes and figures as much as literature.

Advertisements are virtually everywhere. They have become an indispensable part of human life. Ads are written to disseminate information about products or ideas to potential customers and/or target audiences respectively. The Advertising Association defines advertising in this way: "Advertisements are messages, paid for by those who send them, intended to inform or influence people who receive them." (Go Figure! 4) The word advertising has its roots in the Latin word 'advertere', meaning to turn towards. This sums up the purpose of advertising – it should turn the focus of potential customers towards the advertised product. And to do so, advertising agencies employ a range of visual and verbal devices like picture, headline, logo, copy and slogan.

Product advertising dominates the field of advertising; however one can spot idea and image advertising more and more often recently. By doing so, they can ensure that they retain the existing customers and attract new customers. The main function of advertising is to persuade the audience. This persuasion is the reason why an advertisement sells. This paper is solely concerned with print media adverts. Analysing print ads is a very useful study for a language researcher. A copy is the textual part of a print ad. The text of an advert is an artistic written entity, composed by a creative individual which is aimed at both informing and entertaining the audience. The

copywriter uses linguistic devices to establish a point and to remarkably help achieve an emotive end. As Phaedrus said, "Rhetoric is not an art, but a routine" (Bradford 4), to these copywriters, the art of persuading through their words is an everyday routine. Such zealous writers can aptly be called wordsmiths. The reasoning behind this nomenclature is fairly simple. Just as their counterparts, blacksmiths and goldsmiths work with iron and gold to transform them into objects of value, wordsmiths too work with words to create wonders.

Copywriters make use of a range of rhetoric devices such as word play, puns, rhymes, neologisms and homophones to attract the readers. The world of advertising resorts to a cavalier treatment of the linguistic code to achieve maximum impact. This results in copious supply of anomalous words and expressions that have come into vogue. A fine example of a slogan with a grammatical deviation that became largely recognised is Apple Inc.'s "Think Different". This slogan departs from the usual pattern of an adverb modifying a verb. In the famous Macintosh promotional campaign, Apple used this "Think Different" slogan (with a verb+adjective) to launch the campaign which became a huge success. Ad writers also make up ad-hoc words like scent-sation (for a perfume ad), beautifull (volume-enhancing shampoo ad), eatingest (pancake ad), etc. New blend words are formed from existing words or the spelling is altered to incorporate the message of the ad.

Pithy lines and catchy phrases are trademarks of advertisements. To understand why advertisements are written in a particular way, it is essential to apply the concepts of sociolinguistics. "Sociolinguistics is concerned with the relationship between language and the context in which it is used." (Holmes 2). There is a relationship between language and society which explains why different discourse patterns are used in different social contexts. According to Roman Jakobson, an act of communication is one in which an addresser sends a message to an addressee:

ADDRESSER(S) => ADDRESS => ADDRESSEE (S)

Both the addresser and the addressee of a message can be viewed from different points of view. The basic view is as the writer and the reader, where the subject is a text – an artistic written entity. Here is a list of some other sociolinguistic theories related to the field of advertisement discourse.

Searle's Speech Act Theory deals with how one makes sense of interactions. In communication, people use presuppositions – ideas that they take for granted – to communicate effectively. The use of presuppositions saves time and gives the communication an informal character and personalizes the text so that it is not so remote. So, presuppositions in adverts are welcome, because they make the interaction more intimate, and secure. Knowledge of the target readership enables the advertisers to use presuppositions effectively.

Another theory applicable to the discourse of advertisements is Grice's Cooperative Principle that investigates and explains "the ways in which interlocutors were able to

develop agreed meanings from language that was often indirect." (Bex 114) This principle is useful for explanation of how is it possible that the readers of adverts decode the riddles and messages prepared for them. Adverts use the maxim of quantity so that they don't overwhelm and bore the consumer with unimportant information. Indeed, the limited space allotted to an ad sees to it. At the same time, avoiding ambiguity and obscurity is worth discussing here. On one hand, obscurity, understood as incomprehensibility, is really avoided by advertisers. An advert which is too difficult or impossible to understand discourages its readers and the probability of purchase of the advertised product decreases. On the other hand, ambiguity may not be harmful and sometimes it may be a good strategy to attract more readers. Advertisers may want to address the readers in an ambiguous way in order to appeal to a curious reader. As long as the ad is comprehensible, the manner in which it is said could be altered for achieving favourable results.

Ads use rhythm and rhyme to mainly please the reader and contribute to better remembering of the ad. Then there are attention-catching devices such as word play, puns, neologisms and intertextuality which are in fact riddles. The aim of the producer is to provide a riddle which the reader can solve and have a good time by doing so. They hope that by spending more time on an advert, thinking about the riddle, the reader will remember it (and the product and the brand) better, which increases the probability of a purchase. However, solving the riddle requests some time and thinking from the part of the reader. As DeRosia observes in *Go Figure!*, "figurative language requires more time for recipients to process than literal language . . . (and) because comprehension of figures can be difficult, recipients who successfully comprehend figures might experience a sort of satisfaction or self-congratulation." (DeRosia 32) Eventually, the reader is amused, which increases the possibility that he/she will like and remember the advert, brand and the product. All this is done to counter the passivity of the reader in a one-way communication process like advertising.

Advertising is a form of infotainment. Entertainment connotes humour and the verbal attention-catching devices can have humorous effect – they amuse people or please them. As Crystal notes, "humour regularly bends or breaks linguistic rules. . . as does advertising." (Crystal 2002: 151) and humour is the broad term used to describe situations, characters, speech, writing or images that amuse us. It contributes to positive emotional response of the potential customer. Why do advertisers use humour in ads? Zhang and Zinkhan claim, "Fundamental to the practice of employing humour in advertising is the belief that humour helps influence audience responses to the ad and the advertised product in a direction favourable to the advertiser." (Zhang 113) Oftentimes, the difference between the denotative and the connotative meanings of words is an important factor that paves way for an improvisation like pun. So far, the theoretical aspects of advertisements have been defined. Some examples will be given below to illustrate how those theories can be applied to stylistically analyse the ads.

Amul India is an Indian dairy cooperative which is very well recognised for its adverts. Since 1966, the Amul girl, dressed up in polka dots with blue hair and orange face, has ruled the hearts of millions of Indians. Amul set the Guinness world record for the longest running ad campaign in the world. Through her humorous and witty one-liners, the Amul girl comments on a large number of issues like politics, sports, films, consumers and current affairs. In all of the ads, there is a headline, the one-line commentary, along with a cartoon and the Amul brand name, followed by a caption. Select adverts have been chosen for analysis from the "Amul Hits of the year 2017" webpage. Figures have been added for illustration and transcripts of the copy have been stylistically analysed.

Fig 1 Advertisements that Allude to Various Events.
"Amul Hits: Amul – The Taste of India." Amul.Com, 2017,
<http://amul.com/m/amul-hits?s=2017>



"Have OnDeGo! Amul: Can be pan handled!" ad was created when ground staff of Indigo Airlines manhandled and dragged a passenger in October 2017. 'OnDeGo', and 'pan handled' are the key words here that were specifically chosen to subtly refer to the drama caused by the airline. "Waive off loan...Wave of butter! Amul: Farmore happiness guaranteed!" ad alludes to the supposed consideration of the central government to waive

off farm loans. 'Farmore' (for famer) is a typical Amul word play that adds to the uniqueness of the ads. "No high on the way! Amul: Keeps you in good spirits" ad was published on the verge of implementation of the Supreme Court's order to ban liquor shops on national and state highways across the country from April, 2017. 'No high on the way' is a direct reference to liquor and the word 'spirits' in the caption is a pun.

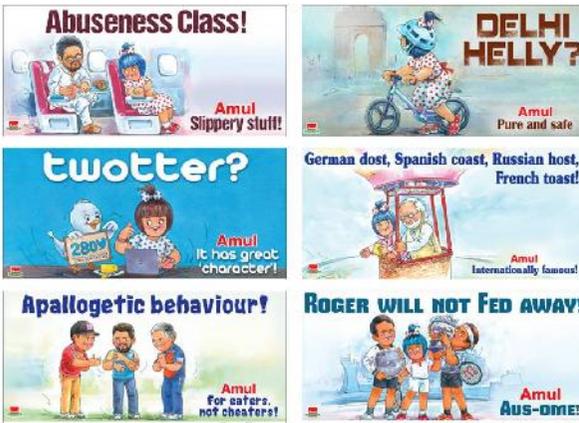
When US President Trump was ridiculed online for his spelling mistakes on Twitter, Amul copywriter wrote, "Have with Covfefe or Tvea? Spelled: A-M-U-L." Sometime later, the President turned the tables on all those who laughed at him by asking them to guess the real meaning of 'Covfefe'! Interestingly though, no such word was found. But, the Collins Dictionary's webpage now mentions that 'Covfefe' might probably be a typo of coverage. This word has become an off-searched one and the incident is a reminder of how new words spread through the web like a wildfire.

When Real Madrid's Portugal striker Cristiano Ronaldo was crowned the best soccer player in the world for the second year running at FIFA's The Best award gala, Amul congratulated the ace footballer in its own way. "Ronaldo's Fifabulous! Amul: Food butter of the year!" In this ad, two occasionalisms have been spotted. Fabulous was rewritten as 'Fifabulous' and footballer as 'food butter'. When cricketer M.S. Dhoni stepped down from the role of ODI and T20 captain earlier this year, Amul eluded to it by writing, "DHONING A NEW ROLE! Amul: DON'T SKIP THIS!"

Fig 2 Rhyme and Word-Play in Adverts

"Amul Hits: Amul – The Taste of India."

Amul.Com, 2017, <http://amul.com/m/amul-hits?s=2017>



In a shocking incident, an MP apparently nursed a grouse that he was forced to travel in the economy class even though he had an open dated business class ticket. Amul immediately hit the nail on the head by writing "Abuseness Class! Amul: Slippery stuff!" This one blend word, abuseness (abuse+business) clearly sums up the whole news item.

"Delhi Helly? Amul: Pure and safe" ad was published in November 2017 when the

capital city became the most polluted city on earth. The air pollution made it virtually impossible to operate flights, and lead to car crashes and multiple pileups. It was reported that the breathing in the Indian capital was like smoking 50 cigarettes a day. Amul expressed its concern by asking whether being in Delhi was helly.

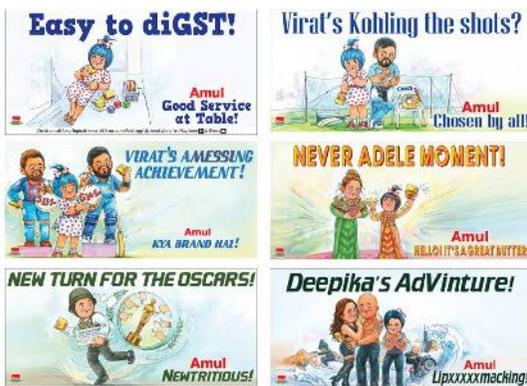
When online news and social networking service twitter, extended its tweet length from 140 to 280 characters, a very creative copywriter from Amul wrote, "twotter? Amul: It has great 'character'" Twitter, a nonce in the ad along with the picture of the twitter bird carrying a '280' board. Furthermore, the word 'character' in the caption is a clever pun. Amul made a reference to PM Narendra Modi's European tour with this ad, "German dost, Spanish coast, Russian host, French toast! Amul: Internationally famous!" The catchy rhyme 'dost-coast-host-toast' allures the readers.

After Aussie cricket captain Steve Smith apologised for his behaviour during the test series held in March this year, Amul retorted by writing "Apollogetic behaviour !Amul: For eaters, not cheaters!" This comeback was highlighted by the blend word, 'Apollogetic'-appalling+apologetic and was well-suited to the controversy regarding Smith. 'For eaters, not cheaters' was a suitable tagline because it was alleged that Smith called the Indian opener Murali Vijay, 'a cheat'. In another sport-based ad, there was a line, "Roger will not Fed away! Amul: Aus-ome". This was a typical reference to Roger Federer, the famous Swiss tennis player's win against Raphael Nadal, his rival in the Australian grand slam. The word 'fed' acted as a pun and 'Aus-ome' was also a clever word play.

"Easy to diGST! Amul: Good Service at Table" ad was written on the eve of the Goods and Services Tax implementation. 'diGST' (a homophone) and 'Good Service at Table' (an alternate expansion) were the keywords that made direct reference to GST complete.

Whether Indian captain Virat was calling the shots became “Virat Kohling the shots? Amul: Chosen by all!” in the ad. There was a delay in the announcement of the Indian cricket coach early this year. Unsure of whether Captain Virat Kohli’s supposed interference was causing the delay, Amul wrote this ad. In another Virat ad, the copywriter wrote, “VIRAT’S AMESSING ACHIEVEMENT! Amul: KYA BRAND HAI!” This ad was published when it was declared that Kohli had higher brand value than the Argentinean ace footballer, Lionel Messi. ‘AMESSING’ was chosen to refer to the amazing achievement and the usage of ‘brand’ in the caption completed the connection.

Fig 3 Homophones in ads. "Amul Hits: Amul – The Taste of India."
Amul.Com, 2017, <http://amul.com/m/amul-hits?s=2017>.



British singer Adele won 5 Grammy awards in the year 2017 for her song ‘Hello’. So, to highlight that there was never a dull moment for her, Amul congratulated her in its own way through, “NEVER ADELE MOMENT! Amul: HELLO IT’S A GREAT BUTTER!” In two different ads pertaining to the entertainment industry, Amul once again enticed its readers by playing with sounds. When the Indian movie “Newton” was nominated for the Oscars, Amul wrote, “NEW

TURN FOR THE OSCARS! Amul: NEWTRITIOUS!” Another homophonic word play is spotted here (‘New’ used in place of ‘Nu’). Bollywood actor Deepika Padukone made a Hollywood debut in the movie “XXX: The Return of Xander Cage” with Vin Diesel. And the ever playful Amul wrote, “Deepika's AdVinture! Amul: Lipxxxxmacking!” The homophonic word ‘AdVinture’ with a capitalisation of ‘v’ in the middle of the word made the reference to Vin Diesel and the word ‘Lipxxxxmacking’, alluded to the XXX movie franchise.

The aforementioned wordsmitheries found on Amul ads clearly demonstrate this. Humans constantly strive to ‘say it in style’. Words have been an object of wonder for all. Words have constantly been formed, transformed or even deformed to make a ‘statement’. Indeed, human communication has always been driven not only by the need to communicate thoughts and feelings, but also by the desire to do it with élan. And to do so, writers constantly try to manipulate the linguistic code and broaden its borders. Such literary embellishments attract the reader to the ad. Thus, studying words can both be an entertaining and a rewarding experience and should be undertaken by all. Any linguistic study is a search for the impossible, since it is required to say something about the whole of language. Nevertheless, it should be accepted that language

conforms to no such rules and never restricts itself to any boundaries. And the English language in particular is a deep, deep ocean where tons of word-fishes live. Each with a new name, face, shape and taste and it is a deep wish and hope of the writer that everybody will someday exclaim that they have tasted as much as they can.

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