# A Pragma-discoursal Study of Stereotypes in Selected English Commercial Advertisements

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## ABSTRACT

The current study deals with an investigation of stereotypes in terms of pragmatics and discourse analysis especially in English advertisements. This study aims at showing some linguistic features of the English commercial advertisements regarding some issues in pragmatics as well as discourse analysis. The current analysis is restricted to those adverts that contain gender serotypes in some sorts of advertisements. The data collection is primarily based on those written texts in the adverts that mostly contain generalized sentences of stereotypes. Seven sentences are picked up for analytical part. Each sentence will be examined in two axes: pragmatics and discourse analysis.

## الخلاصة

تتعامل الدراسة الحالية مع تفحص للاساليب النمطيه في سياق تداولي وخطابي المستخدمه في الاعلانات التجاريه. تهدف الدراسة الحالية الى بيان بعض الخصائص اللغوية للغة الاعلانات وبما فيها امور في السياق التداولي والخطابي. حُددت الدراسه الحاليه في نطاق تلك الاعلانات التي تحتوي على استخدام اساليب التذكير والتأنيث.البيانات المجموعة هي قائمة اساساً على تلك النصوص في الاعلانات التي تحتوي على نوع من التعميم في الاساليب النمطية. سبع جمل اخُتيرت للجانب التحليل من الدراسة. كلُ من هذه الجمل سُتحُلل في نطاقينَ": تداولي وخطابي.

## ١.Introduction

First of all, the sentences that contain serotypes generas can be found in most of texts, such sentences have the property of generalization ideas or beliefs. It is important to know that , however, the pragmatic theory can be regarded as a subfield of linguistics and semiotics which mainly explores the ways that a context contributes to meaning whereas discourse analysis deals with what is beyond a sentence , it investigates texts longer than a single sentence.

Consequently, the topic of stereotype in some news or headlines in magazines would possibly constitute difficulty for the students and the learners of English, especially the students of English department .Hence, infinitive can be regarded as a problematic area in the field of linguistics.

The present study aims at defining the term stereotype in linguistics., showing the most significant pragma-discoursal features used in the selected gender advertisements regarding the stereotypes.

The study is confined to the cohesive ties in terms of discourse and Searle's classes of the illocutionary force in the light of some selected advertisements of commercial products.

This study gives a detailed account about one of the prominent issues in linguistics that are discourse analysis and pragmatics. Therefore, it is hoped that it will be of a great significance to those who have concerns in the English department, teachers and those who are specialized in linguistics.

## 2. Stereotypes

### 2.1. Basic Concepts

Stereotype can be defined as a linguistic feature which speakers are so aware of as a distinctive feature that it has taken on an iconic status for them. In other words, it is a marker which is highly salient for the speech community as a sign of identity. Stereotypes often have the appearance of caricatures and are in fact often historically outdated features which a speech community has not in fact used for a while. In grammar, a stereotype is a sequence of words which appears to be made up of separate lexemes but in fact is treated as a formulaic sequence. As such, it is unproductive of further variation. Proverbs, quotations, aphorisms and other idioms might be seen as stereotypes in this sense (Trask, 2007:274).

Moreover, Crystal (2008:452-3) defines stereotypes as:

> ***"It refers to a linguistic variable which is a widely recognized characterization of the speech of a particular group, which may or may not reflect accurately the speech of those it is supposed to represent. Examples include the imagined universality of chap in England; look you in Wales and begorrah in Ireland. Some stereotypical features, such as ain't, may become stigmatized as substandard or incorrect within the speech community".***

## 3. Pragmatics and Advertisement

Pragmatics usually looks to explain aspects of meaning that is not found in the plain sense of words or structure. As a field of language study, pragmatics is new. The origins of this field lie in the philosophy of language and the American philosophical school of pragmatism.

Additionally, Charles Morris, in his three main divisions of Semiotics (syntax, semantics, and pragmatics), defines the latter as "the study of the relation of signs to users" (1938, 29). As a field within language science, its origins stem from Grice's work on conversational implicature and the Cooperative

Principle (CP), and from the work of Levinson, Brown, and Leech on politeness. In the 1970s and 1980s, a classical division of labour distinguished semantics as a discipline of rules, conventions and literal language (or propositional or sentential meaning), and pragmatics as the discipline of strategies, intentions and Ss' conveyed meaning.

One of the powerful and main motivations for the interest in pragmatics is the increased awareness that the linguistic theories of language are incapable of providing an adequate account of linguistic communication. Levinson (1983:39) emphasizes this point by introducing many examples which highlight the need for a theory or theories that are able to provide a relatively full account of how we use language to communicate. Consider the following conversation:

A: *I could eat the whole of that cake.* [implication: 'I compliment you on the cake'.]
 B: *Oh thanks.*

To this effect, Crystal (1991: 271) defines pragmatics as:

*"The study of language from the point of view of the users, specially of the choice they make, the CONSTRAINTS they encounter in using language in social interaction, and the effects their use of language has on other participants in an act of communication".*

Thus the domain of pragmatics has to cover many categories among which are speech acts, implicature, deixes, politeness, and conversation analysis. This explains the diversity in defining pragmatics, which is considered one of the criticisms directed towards this domain of study.

Pragmatics then is the science that attempts to reveal the strategies employed by the S to "solve problems and attain desired goals" (Beaugrande, 1981: 38). In this respect, Beaugrande (1985: 49) defines pragmatics as "a special case of goal planning: setting up an intended state of the world and implementing steps to attain it". The strategies utilized for the implementation of steps to reach certain results are said to be elective and serve particularly in influential contexts, and more normally to attract or manage the attention of the recipient. What Dijk (1998: 208) says is relevant here, "metaphors could be selected to indicate the negative appeal of our enemies, comparisons in order to mitigate the blame of the people, and irony to test the negative models of our rivals".

## 4. Speech Act Theory

The theory of speech acts describes how language is used to do things i.e. we are able to use language to make promises, lay bets, concern warnings, christen boats, place names in nomination, offer congratulations, or swear testimony. For instance 'I prohibit you that there is a sheepdog in the closet', you are saying something only, but also you are preventing someone. Verbs such as 'promise', 'bet', 'warn', and so on are considered as performative verbs. By using them in a sentence does something extra over and above the statement. Every language has hundreds of performative verbs. The utterances below clarify their usage:

- I bet you five dollars the Yankees win.
- I challenge you to a match.
- I dare you to step over this line.
- I fine you $100 for possession of oregano.
- I promise to improve.
- I resign!
- I pronounce you husband and wife, and
- I nominate John for mayor of New York City etc.

In all these examples, there are actions which are performed by the speaker, such as darling, nominating or resigning. These utterances show the syntactic structure of English sentence like affirmative and declarative. So, these are typical performative sentence. There is an informal test to show whether a sentence contain a performative verb or not, this test is to begin the sentence by 'I hereby' because only performative verbs take this type of expression. In the sentence like 'I hereby apologize to you' is generally taken as an act of apologizing than 'I hereby know you' (Fromkin, *et al*, 2003: 214-15).

## 4.1 Searle's Classes of the illocuitonary Forces

 Searle (1979, 12-17) distinguishes classes as follows:

## 1. Declaratives

Declaratives are those kinds where the successful performance of one of its members carries the communication between the propositional content and truth or they change the world via their utterance. Examples of verbs denoting this class are to declare, appoint, christen, marry, etc.

## 2. Expressives

Expressive speech acts are acts that state what the speaker feels and attitudes verbs denoting this class are apologize welcome, thank, congratulate, etc.

Example, "I thank you for coming".

## 3. Assertives

Assertive speech acts can be stated as acts that state what the speaker believes to be the case or not. Verbs denoting this class are like: state, affirm, describe, deduce, etc.

Example, "I affirm that Ali is a doctor"

## 4. Directives

Directives are one of the kinds of speech acts that comprises in the fact or they are attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something "I'm asking you to give me the book", verbs denoting this class are: ask, order, request, invite, etc.

## 5. Commissives

Commissives are acts that the speakers use to commit themselves to some future course of action. Verbs denoting members of this class are: promise, swear, commit, threaten, etc. Example, "I promise that I will bring the book tomorrow".

## 4.2 Felicity Conditions

Searle (1969: 57-61) gives a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for the successful performance of an act. He suggests these conditions in the light of the "speech act" of 'promising'. The conditions are as follows:

1- **Preparatory conditions**: those have to do with presupposition and contextual requirements. A speaker who promises to do something presupposes that his future action in the hearer's best interest and that the speaker can do the act.

2- **Propositional content conditions**: the propositional conditions of a promise, for example, is that the speaker predicates a future act.

3- **Sincerity conditions**: they are the intention beliefs, and desires required by the speaker as they are exposed in the performance of an illocutionary act. In promising, for example, the speaker intends to do what he/she commits himself/herself to doing.

4- **Essential conditions**: they are relate to the way the speaker is committed to a certain a kind of believe having performed a speech act. A speaker who promises to do something undertakes that promise as an obligation to that act.

To sum up, '**felicity conditions**' denotes specific criteria which must be fulfilled if the speech act is to attain its purpose (Crystal, 2003: 178).

## 5. Discourse Analysis and Advertisements

Discourse analysis is a wide discipline that is related to many other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, machine translation and artificial intelligence. Brown and Yule (1983: viii) show that the term "discourse analysis" "has been used with a wide range of meanings and covers a wide variety of activities. It has been used to describe activities at the intersection of disciplines" as diverse as sociolinguistics, psycho-linguistics, philosophical linguistics, and computational linguistics. Brown and Yule (1983: 1) state that the analysis of discourse is essentially the analysis of language in use. As such, it cannot be limited to the description the forms of the linguistic independent of the purpose or functions in which these forms are intended to serve in human matters. Schiffrin (1987: 1) sees discourse analysis as vast and ambiguous. This is due to the fact that some linguists emphasize a particular perspective towards language (functional vs. structureal) which focuses on people; whereas others emphasize a particular unit of analysis (above the sentence) which also leads them to a similar pragmatic emphasis on language in use. Firth (1951 in Coulthard, 1985: 1) regards language as basically a way of performing and making others behave and therefore the linguist should concern himself with the verbal process in the context of situation, for him language is only meaningful in its contexts of situation.

Widdowson (1979: 23) states that discourse has three distinctive meanings. First, it may refer to spoken meaning organized into hierarchy employing some or all of the terms like act, move, exchange and others. Secondly, it may refer to a stretch of language either spoken or written, analysis of which will consider

aspects of sentence connection, or cohesion. This is one way of looking at language beyond the limits of the sentence; it deals with texts. The third meaning is the use of sentences to perform acts of communication which cohere into larger units. This is the other way of looking at language beyond the limits of the sentence, it deals with discourse.

## 6. The Textual Features of Stereotypes

According to the model of Halliday and Hasan (1976), the cohesive ties of any text can be explained as follows:

### 6.1 Substitution

It is the replacement of one item by another to a void repetition and to make the text shorter. The difference between substitution and reference is that the former is a relation in the phrasing instead of the meaning. It is a relation between linguistic items such as words or phrases, e.g.:

-My *ax* is too blunt. I must get a sharp *one.*

It is clear that the lexical item "*one*" substitutes for the preceding lexical item" ax". As for reference, it a relation between meanings. The first is a relation on the lexico grammatical level, a grammatical relation because the substitute is used instead of the repetition of a particular item. Reference, on the other hand, is a relation on the semantic level. Compared with substitution, ellipsis is the omission (not a substitution) of an item. It is then a kind of substitution. Every occurrence of a substitution then is a source of cohesion. What has been said is well illustrated in Halliday & Hasan (1976:89), Consider:

**Table No.1: Differences of Cohesive Relations at**
**The Linguistic Level (Halliday & Hasan, 1976)**

| Cohesive Relation | Level |
|---|---|
| | |
| n(including Ellipsis) | al |

In English the substitute may be a noun, a verb or a clause. Substitution, then, falls into three categories, namely: nominal, verbal and clausal. **Nominal substitution** presupposes the substitution of an entire noun group, and is expressed by using *one, ones, and same.* As for v**erbal substitution** is characterized by  the verb do and **clausal substitution**, as the name implies, is a substitution for a whole clause by using "so" and "not". The examples below illustrates the three types respectively:

-These **biscuits** are stale. Get some fresh **ones.**

**-When you finish your assignment** let me know you have **done** so.

-Is **there going to be an earthquake**?

   -It says **so**.

### 6.2  Ellipsis

Compared with substitution, ellipsis refers to the substitution of a word by a zero item (replacement of nothing). Halliday & Hasan (1976:144) state that ellipsis might be illustrated as a relation inside the text, such as substitution, and in the great majority of occurrences the presupposed marker is present in the preceding text. According to this regard, ellipsis is an anaphoric relation. Ellipsis entails the omission (as opposed to substitution) of information which is implicitly referred to an identified item by the reader or listener from the context of situation (Lascar, 1997: 22). Like substitution, ellipsis is classified under three headings. The first is **nominal ellipsis** which means that the omission occurs within the nominal group. The second type is **verbal ellipsis** which means ellipsis within the verbal group, while the third type is c**lausal ellipsis** which means ellipsis from another angle by taking the clause as the point of departure. Examples of the three types are shown below:

-How did you enjoy **the paintings**?

   -**A lot** (of the paintings) were very good, though not all.

-Have you **been swimming**?

   -Yes, I **have.**

-Has she **taken her medicine**?

  -Yes, she has **done.**

## 6.3 Conjunction

Halliday & Hasan (1976:226) state that conjunctive fundamentals are cohesive not in themselves but incidentally by feature of their specific meanings. Conjunctions, therefore, establish a relation in which what is followed is systematically related to what has gone before. This is so because cohesion is the relation between sentences in a text which follow one after another (Blagoeva, 2000: 21, and 2004: 60). Halliday & Hasan (1976) classify conjunctions into four types of relations. **Additive** is a relationship which is characterized by using connective devices such as and, also, further, etc. **Adversative** means a contrary to expectation relation which is realized by using yet, though, but…etc. **Causal** means relations of result, reason, and purpose and are expressed by using lexical items as so, thus, hence, therefore…etc. **Temporal** is a relation between two successive sentences, one is subsequent to the other and it is expressed in its simplest form "then". The following are examples on each type respectively:

-My client says he does not know this witness. **Further**, he denies ever having seen her or spoke to her.

-She studied hard. **Yet**, she failed.

-He won **because** he tried his best.

-He knocked at the door. **Then** he left silently.

In brief, the cohesive of conjunctions are considered as one of the various resources in a language to express logico-semantic relationships between propositions, sentences, and parts of texts. However, Sanz (2003: 293) points out that they are not an essential part of the text as they have no additions to any propositional information to it; the information they provide is already retrievable by the reader of the text. She adds that they facilitate the readability of texts, i.e. the writer makes it easy for his reader to work out the logical relationships.

## 7. Data Analysis

This section presents the data selected to be analyzed in light of the aspects mentioned in the previous section.

**Example 1**

**This mother's day, get back to the job. That really matters**

1. **Pragmatic analysis**

The kind of speech act is a direct speech act in which all the sentences are declarative and their functions are statements , the class of the illocutionary force is representative /assertive speech acts in which this sentence is to describe the importance of the mother's day.

**2. Textual features**

Ellipsis can be clearly seen in this advertisement since it the operator 'is' is left out from the context. This kind of ellipsis is verbal ellipsis.

**3. Meaning**

This ad shows the importance of the mother's Day as well as her house and child together. So, it reflects the important job that the mothers should do even on the day that they are supposed to celebrate and even when they have a day off. Mother's duty is to look after her family and their needs.

**Example 2**

**You are not a man unless you are whipped**

**1. Pragmatic analysis**

The kind of speech act is a direct speech act in which the function of the sentence is statement, the class of the illocutionary force is representative /assertive speech acts in which this sentence is to describe this kind of product.

**2. Textual features**

In this sentence, there is specific use in this sentence concerning the textual features.

**3. Meaning**

The text pretends that you are a man only if you are whipped, otherwise you are not. It is a vague text since the meaning of "whipped" may refer to alcohol. According to most gender stereotypes, the idea is the opposite. They claim that you are not a man if you are "whipped" by your girlfriend, wife or anyone. In this case, the text in the ad prejudices to most gender stereotypes.

**Example 3**

**So easy a husband could do it**

1. **Pragmatic analysis**

Regarding this advertisement, the class of the illocutionary force in this advert is representative /assertive speech acts in which this sentence describes this kind of product.

**2.    Textual features**

In this advertisement, there is a use of verbal ellipsis that can be clearly recovered since the original structure of the sentence can be as 'it is so easy, a husband….etc.'

**3. Meaning**

This example appropriately portrays the stereotype that men should be dominant and woman should be submissive. Most disturbing is the text which is heavily colored with the idea of rape.

**Example 4**

**Men never listen, stills it's nice to know they can**

**1.    Pragmatic analysis**

In this advertisement, this kind of stereotype is formed by the assertive class of the illocutionary force, since the verb here is to state or express a kind of generalization concerning men.

**2.    Textual features**

Ellipsis is used in this sentence, one can clearly notice that the kind of ellipsis is verbal ellipsis since the verbs after the modal 'can' has been dropped out of the context.

**3. Meaning**

This ad shows that most gender stereotypes claim that men always disobey and close their ears when women talk or ask to them. For women, it is funny to hear about men in case of their rarely listening. Women can feel what this ad wants to deliver.

**Example 5**

**Your greatest health threat, must men know**

**1.    Pragmatic analysis**

In this advertisement, this kind of stereotype is formed by the directive speech act because the verb used here is to give order or it directs men about a specific kind of regarding men's health.

**2.    Textual features**

Ellipsis is used in this sentence, one can clearly notice that the kind of ellipsis is verbal ellipsis since the verbs after the modal 'can' has been dropped out of the context.

**Example 6**

**You mean a woman can open it**

**1.    Pragmatic analysis**

In this advertisement, this kind of stereotype is formed by an assertive illocutionary force because the verb used here is to describe a special kind of order or it directs men about a specific kind of regarding men's health.

**2.    Textual features**

There are no prominent aspects used in this sentence regarding the textual features.

**3. Meaning**

The beauty of that woman was described as if she is a doll. This doll is so beautiful that it looks unreal. Woman are always beautiful but they have to know where and when they should use make up and other adornment accessories only on certain occasions.

**Example 7**

**Women must be delicate and passive**

**1.    Pragmatic analysis**

In this advertisement, this kind of stereotype is written by an assertive illocutionary force since the verb indicates a use of description.

**2.    Textual features**

Conjunction is employed in this sentence by the use of 'and' to link two adjectives regarding the noun phrase 'women',

**9. Conclusions**

This study leads us to the following conclusions:

1. Advertisements of gender include uses of stereotypes more than other kinds of stereotypes.

2. Assertive class of the illocutionary force is to , a large extent, employed in the sentence carrying stereotypes.
3. Directive speech act is rarely found.
4. In terms of textual features, ellipsis has the majority of co-occurrence in the advertisements.
5. Conjunctions are not largely employed in gender stereotypes.

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