

Grice's Cooperative Maxims and Implicatures in Advertisement Taglines of Selected Products in the Nigerian Malls

Ezinne Agwuama Chima

Abstract

This study centres on examining and analyzing Grice's Cooperative principle in advertisement taglines of selected products in Nigerian malls. An advertisement tagline is a public announcement with the purpose of persuading the public to desire a product or service. Advertisement taglines aim at changing the perception of the public. In the field of advertising; advertisers depend much on the conversational principle to achieve their goals. In most cases, the advertisers in designing taglines flout the conversational maxims expecting their potential customers to search for the underlying messages thus, birthing the present study. This study examined the cooperative maxims flouted by the advertisers in the sampled data and the implicatures generated. The study adopts qualitative research method, five advertisement taglines for different brands of a particular product were purposively sampled. Findings reveal that three maxims (Quantity, Quality and Relation) are flouted at varying intervals and implicatures are generated. The study reveals that the advertisers flouted these maxims deliberately to change the attitude of the potential customers towards the advertised products.

Keywords: cooperative maxim, implicature, advertisement, tagline, brand, product and mall

Introduction

Communication is said to be successful only when the hearer/reader recognizes and understands the speaker's intention, but jeopardized when the speaker's intention and the hearer's interpretation do not correspond. Grice's Conversational Principle provides guidelines which interactants are expected to follow in communicative events. Many a time, interactants mean more than they actually say. Implicature arises when a listener is making an inference as to what the meaning of an utterance could be in a given context. Yule (1996, p.40) notes that "it is

speakers who communicate meaning via implicature while the listeners recognize the communicated meanings via inference”. Implicature is attributed to Paul Herbert Grice (1975), who used the word “Implicature” to explain the pragmatic technique applied in order to unveil the underlying meaning of an utterance. Therefore, implicature is an inference drawn from the interaction between an expression’s context of an utterance and the interpretation of elements within that expression. Wright (1975,p.379) in his opinion proposes that in conversation most times, what is meant is not what is said”. So, Brown and Yule (1983:31), opine that Grice applied the term implicature “to account for what a speaker can imply, suggest, or mean, as distinct from what the speaker literally says”. Also, to Thomas, “To imply is to hint, suggest or convey some meaning indirectly by means of language” (1995,p. 58). Peccei (1999,p.3) defines “implicature as the inferences that cannot be made from isolated utterances”. Above all, Grice asserts that conversational implicatures can be worked out via world knowledge, the linguistic and extra linguistic context of the utterance, general background information, and the Cooperative Principles (CP) of conversation. All that Grice mentioned above regarding how implicatures are worked out centers on pragmatic context.

An understanding of the context in which an utterance is used is important so that the hearer can identify the underlying meanings produced by a speaker. Advertisement as a mode of communication is also best interpreted through its context of use because of the deep interpretation it requires. Well, the relevance of context to the interpretation of meanings cannot be over emphasized. The term ‘context’ is vast, but is defined as the element that surrounds an utterance and determines its meaning. The meaning of the utterance is inferred, that means that the meaning is implicit and is interpreted subjectively which also affects -to a large extent -the number of interpretations that can be derived from one context. According to Lyons (1995, p.265) “context determines meaning”. Also, Odeunmi (2006, p. 22) sees context as “the spine of meaning”. In other words, it can be generally stated that implicature simply means what the speaker intends to communicate to their listener beyond what is literally contained in the utterance.

In Grice’s view, pragmatic interpretation relies heavily on inferences by a hearer about the Speaker’s meaning. In fact, the notion that there is divergence between utterance and speaker’s meanings spurred Grice to come up with the notions of implicatures, entailment, presuppositions, and inference. His argument is, if speakers use words in non-literal or indirect ways, or if they do not structure their utterances to reflect the full propositions or intentions, how then is consensus reached between speaker and hearer?

Advertisement tagline provides valuable information about the advertised products/services; it promotes and supplements selling of products/services to a very great extent. Over time, advertisement has become the key for success in business. The most interesting part of advertisement tagline is that it carries information with fascinating emotional appeal as a compelling force that endear the advertised goods/services to the potential customers. In business, advertisement is considered a prerequisite to making a good sale in the market. One of the ideas

behind the tactful creation of advertisement taglines with very attractive promises is to arouse the potential customers' interest and desire for the said products/services. In the field of advertising, taglines serve as a very productive means of bringing the public's awareness to new products/services especially when there are other brands of that same product. Let us consider the following taglines to buttress the point noted here.

Keystone bank – **Never Say Never**

Sky bank – **The Sky Is Big Enough**

United bank for Africa (UBA) – **Says You Can**

Union bank – **Big, Strong and Reliable**

Zenith bank – **In Your Best Interest**

The examples above are banks which serve common purposes, but have different taglines peculiar to each of them. The taglines to a large extent serve as a differential that make each of them outstanding.

Furthermore, advertisers, through advertisement taglines, bring to the limelight some of the benefits that the potential customers will gain by choosing the advertised products/services to capture their interest. Advertisers make these taglines so enticing to enable them influence the choices of the customers indirectly. In most cases, the tone and language of these taglines position the advertised products/services they represent and make them desirable in the market. Below are more examples of same commodity (tomato paste) of different companies with their varying fascinating taglines.

Tasty Tom – **Strength Comes from Within**

De Rica – **Mom's Magic is Back**

Ric Giko – **For Good Health and Better Economy**

Now, considering the examples above, it is obvious that tagline is a marketing strategy that communicates the unique value of a brand of product.

According to Bovee and Arens, (1983,p.45), “advertisement language is witty and precise sometimes, ... and because of the need for brevity, the words are short”. Oftentimes, the advertisers are more interested in choosing rhyming words, in order to create slogans that can easily be memorized not minding if their messages have been properly communicated to their potential customers. Thus, the researcher wonders if the potential customers actually infer the hidden meanings in these taglines considering their background and perception about life generally. Therefore, there is need to enhance the advertisers' and intending advertisers' competence of the application of pragmatic principles in designing advertisement taglines for

effective feedback and results. Also, many scholars have taken to analysing advertisement taglines of different products like electronics, beverages, telecommunication companies, mobile phones, but there is none on the present topic from the available literatures reviewed. So, this present research, “Grice’s Cooperative Maxims and Implicatures in Advertisement Taglines of Selected brands of a Product in the Nigerian Malls” is geared towards analyzing the conversational maxims flouted and the possible implicatures.

Theoretical Framework

The English philosopher, H. Paul Grice (1913-1988), was so concerned with accounting for how meanings are understood in conversations. He opines that there is an accepted way of speaking which we all accept as the standard behaviour. Grice states thus: make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. (1975:47)

Grice recognizes four conversational maxims:

I. Maxims of Quantity:

Make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange.

Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

2. Maxims of Quality: Supermaxim: Try to make your contribution one that is true. Do not say what you believe to be false. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

3. Maxim of Relation: Be relevant.

4. Maxims of Manner: Supermaxim: Be perspicuous. Avoid obscurity of expression. Avoid ambiguity. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity). Be orderly.

Grice also notes that people fail to observe the maxims, either deliberately or unconsciously. He further identifies five major ways of non observance of these maxims thus, Flouting, Violating, Infringing, Opting out, Suspending. It is only when maxims are flouted that conversational implicatures arise. So, when do we say that a maxim is flouted? According to Mey (1993, p.70), flouting, is when “we can make a blatant show of breaking one of the maxims... in order to lead the addressee to look for a covert, implied meaning”. Also, according to Grice, “flouting of conversational maxims does not necessarily mean a breach in conversation, but rather generates what he called “conversational implicature”.

Basically, Grice introduced the notion of implicature to explain how speakers sometimes mean more than what they actually say in conversations. In his study, Grice considered utterances from two perspectives: ‘what is said’ and ‘what is meant’. However, according to

Grice, Implicature consists of two types: conventional implicature and conversational implicature(1975,p. 44). Lyons (1995,p.272) succinctly discusses these implicatures thus:

The difference between them is that the former depends on something other than what is truth-conditional in the conventional use, or meaning, or particular forms and expressions, whereas the latter derived from a set of more general principles which regulate the proper conduct of conversation.

According to Thomas, Conventional implicature has the same implication no matter what the context is (1995,p.57). This particular implicature is conventional in the sense that it is always associated with literal meaning. The present study focuses on conversational implicatures. Huang opines that a conversational implicature is “any meaning which is implied or expressed by, and inferred or understood from the utterance of a sentence which is meant without being part of what is said” (2011,p.407). In other words, implicature is a covert meaning in an utterance. To support Huang, Meyer opines that a conversational implicature occurs, when “the utterance receives an interpretation that goes beyond the words that are spoken (2009,p.56). Conversational implicature is built on an addressee’s assumption that the speaker is following the conversational maxims. According to Kridalaksana (2011,p. 91), “implicature is what logically is the conclusion of a speech, as well as the shared background of knowing between the speaker and the hearer in a given context”. Thus, Brown and Yule (1983,p.27), state thus, “implicature is the element outside of the text”. Levinson (1983,p.126-129), notes “that there are two types of conversational implicatures based on Grice’s theory, they are generalized and particularized conversational implicature”. The present study focused on the particularized conversational implicature.

Methodology

This study adopted qualitative research method. A total number of five advertisement taglines of different brands of toothpaste in Nigerian malls were purposively sampled. The data were collected from advert fliers available in the internet. The study adopted secondary data collection. The data were analyzed using Grice’s Conversational Principle to search for cases of maxim flout and the possible implicatures generated.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The Five Data sampled in this study are presented for analysis and discussion.

Extract 1:Longrich

Tagline: Pretty Health

Here, the advertiser flouted two conversational maxims, the first is the maxim of quantity. The maxim expects a speaker to make his contributions as informative as is required for the current purpose of the subject but, the advertiser flouted this. Thus, the advertiser could not provide sufficient information on how to achieve pretty health by using the product. Also, the maxim of quality expects a speaker to make his contributions one that is true but, the tagline does not seem to be plausible and realistic. Can health be pretty? That is an overstatement. Therefore, the advertiser flouted the maxim of quality. The advertiser implicitly suggests that the product has the quality that could give the potential customers complete protection from all manner of sickness therefore, guaranteeing them absolute wellness.

Extract 2: Colgate

Tagline: Feel Fresh with Cooling Crystal

Colgate is another product sampled in this study; the tagline reads “Feel Fresh with cooling crystal”. The advertiser flouted the maxims of quantity and relation here. The maxim of quantity commands the speaker to make his contribution as informative as is required for the current purpose of the exchange. But the advertiser could not provide sufficient information to describe how the product could make one feel fresh with cooling crystal. Also, the phrase “cooling crystal” as contained in the tagline makes it sound like the advertisement for air-conditioner and bleaching reagent therefore, the advertiser flouted the maxim of relation. The implied meaning here is that the product could make the potential customers relax and also, their teeth sparkling and glistening.

Extract 3: Oral B

Tagline: Healthier, Stronger Teeth in 1 Week

In the data above, the advertiser ostentatiously flouted the maxim of quality. The advertiser could not provide concrete evidence to support his/her claim that the product could produce the desired result within a short period of time. Is it that the product could handle even serious tooth problems within just one week? Well, I suppose the advertiser made widely exaggerated claims here therefore, flouted the maxim of quality.

By virtue of the maxim flouted above, the implicature that could be generated here is that the product could protect and fortify the teeth against all tooth related problems. It could as well strengthen one's teeth.

Extract 4: Pepsodent

Tagline: Let's Smile Together

The maxim of relation encourages a speaker to be relevant. That is, an utterance should be directly connected to the topic. The advertiser, in this advert tagline "Let's Smile Together" blatantly flouted the maxim of relation, for there is no clear relatedness between the tagline and the advertised product. However, the advertiser may imply that the product could give quality result that can put beautiful smiles on the faces of the potential customers. On the other hand, it could also imply that the product could boost the customers' confidence to smile even in the midst of people.

Extract 5: Sensodyne

Tagline: Beat Teeth Sensitivity Pain Fast

The maxim of quality commands speakers not to say that for which they lack adequate evidence.

For obvious reasons, this maxim is flouted here. The advertiser did not provide adequate logical proof to support his/her assertion about the product. Meanwhile, the "fast" in the tagline implies "in a short time or without delay" in other words, if the tagline is paraphrased would read "beat teeth sensitivity pain without delay" which is not plausible because the product is not that of stain removal like "Jik or Hypo" that produces result without delay. Therefore, the advertiser technically employed hyperbole to magnify the expected result and this is against the maxim of quality.

The implicature here is that the product is recommendable especially, for those who have very fragile tooth and easily develop tooth problems. Also, the product could be an antidote to tooth sensitivity.

Conclusion

In the field of advertising, conversational principle remains the most exploited pragmatic theory and it is considered the most fundamental aspect of the study of pragmatics. Conversational Principle is an indispensable principle of communication that creates expectations that guide a hearer towards the speaker's meaning. Presently, Grice's conversational principle has captured the interest of many scholars giving rise to the present study. This study has established the fact that even in the field of advertising, the advertisers in designing advertisement taglines oftentimes mean more than they say which gives rise to conversational implicature. Conversational implicature occurs when the conversational maxims: quantity, quality, relation and manner are flouted. The study reveals that the advertisers blatantly flouted the cooperative principles to achieve a particular effect. However, the advertisers flouted these maxims to allow the potential customers to draw inferences and assumptions should there be any consequences, they will be held completely responsible. Findings reveal out of the four maxims proposed by

Grice, the maxims of quantity, quality and relation were flouted thus, generating implicatures.

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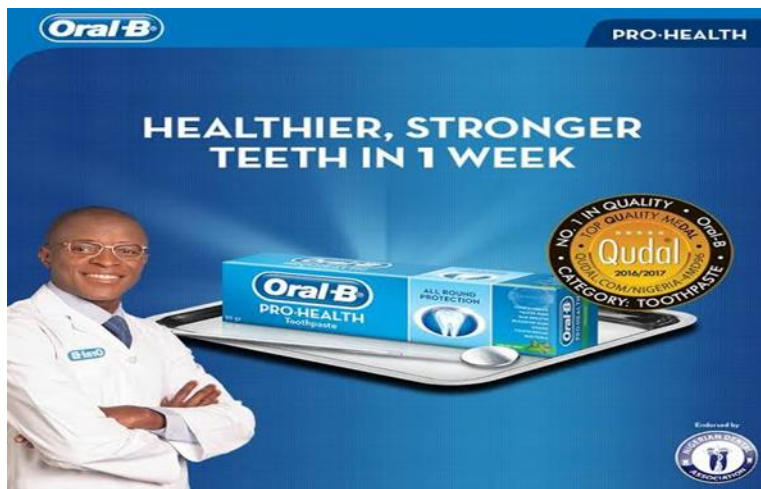
Appendices



Extract 1.



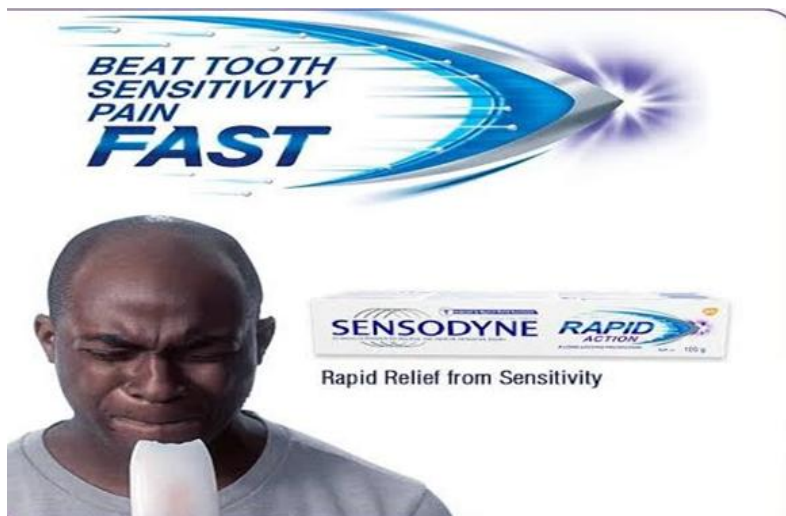
Extract 2.



Extract 3.



Extract 4.



Extract 5.