THE ANATOMY OF AN AD: BE SONY!

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Abstract

Linguistic analysis of commercial advertisements reveals the rich array of devices such as grammatical parallelisms, lexical repetitions, interplay between ad-internal and ad-external reference, heavily modified noun groups (NG), that are meant to spawn rhetorical effects of attracting attention, persuading and spurring the consumer into action.

Keywords: advertisements, linguistic analysis, parallelism, repetition, interplay, to persuade

As a specific register, advertising has developed its own set of linguistic features, the advertising "grammar", which is unique in its desire to maintain interest and efficiently deliver the message to the target consumers. Linguistic devices such as grammatical parallelisms, noun groups with multiple modification (NG_{mm}), two NGs in apposition, lexical repetitions, make equal demands for obtaining such rhetorical effects as attracting attention, persuading, and spurring into action a modern, jaded consumer.

An in-depth linguistic analysis of a Romanian advertisement for Sony TV sets will demonstrate the hypothesis that advertisers tempt us by selling two pieces at the price of one: the product and an idealized version of ourselves.

Headline: "Acum îţi poţi permite să fii Sony!"

Body copy:

„Se presupune că acasă familia se relaxează. Se presupune că acasă familia se simte bine. Presupunem multe lucruri bune când ne gândim acasă. Şi totuşi, de multe ori relaxarea nu a fost decât o lungă plictiseală, iar iritarea şi-a făcut loc între noi. În jurul unui televizor Sony imaginea se schimbă cu desăvârşire. Totul se vede mult mai bine, totul devine mult mai clar. Televizorul Sony cu ecran mare Super Triniton şi sunet stereo impecabil. Pentru familiile care îşi respectă propriile valori...."

Slogan: „Sony. O mare familie."



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The body copy of Sony advertisement is based on a succession of **grammatical parallelisms**[1] reinforced by **lexical repetitions**. These parallelisms establish an internal norm: two nominal clauses requested by similar passive constructions with generic value and functioning as logical subjects („se presupune că" – expresii verbale impersonale) are alike at the higher level:

"Acasă familia se relaxează"/"Acasă familia se simte bine"
Adv-p + NP + VP but different at the lower level
VP_1= V_{i1}; VP_2= V_b + substantive

From the point of view of **engagement theory**[2] expressions with generic value („se presupune) can be conceived as gramatically marked, positioning the author's voice with respect to the propositions he conveys. In Bakhtian terms, the monogloss – is abandoned in favour of the more **objective heterogloss diversity** ("it is supposed", "they suppose"). The parallelism is still present with a significant shift yet similar heterogloss, towards higher personalization in the next sentence:

"Presupunem multe lucruri bune"
VP_3= VT VT=V_{t1} + NP,

The pattern is thus violated on behalf of obtaining foregrounding effects, which, together with heteroglossia objectivity, impart undeniable truth to the initial assumption of socially acceptable values (judgement):

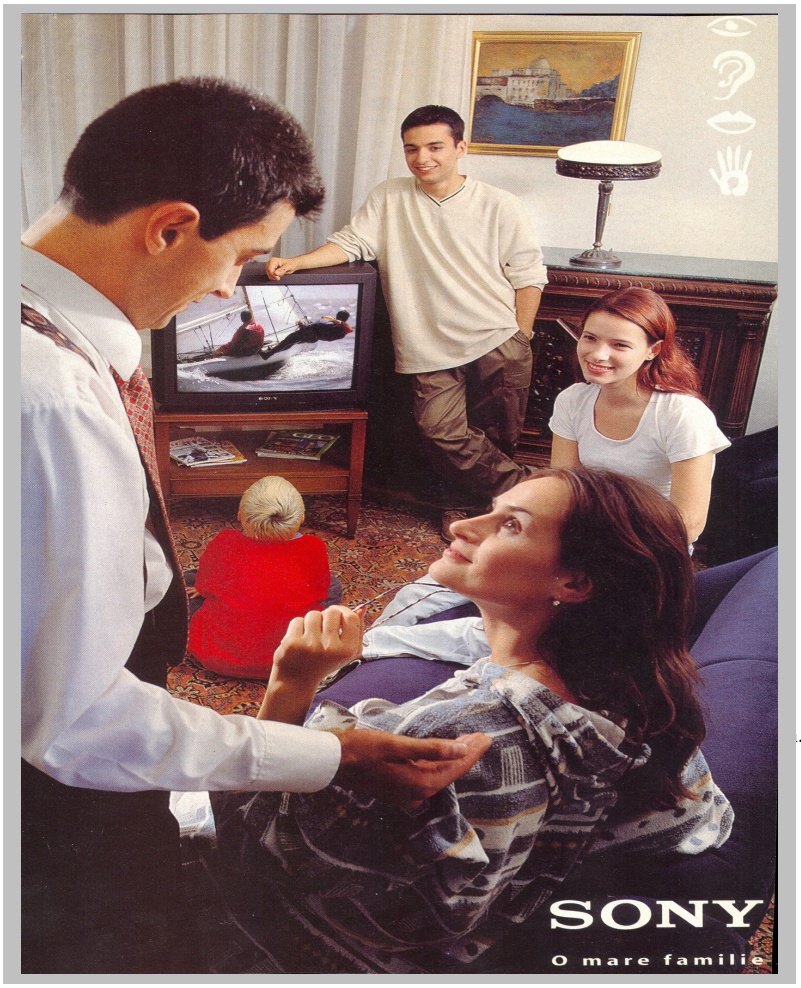
„acasă familia se relaxează", „acasă familia se simte bine" = good things.

The foregrounded construction introduced by a contrastive concessive conjunct „cu toate acestea" highlights the two sentences which stand for equally important reasons of choosing the product: „(because) relaxarea a fost o lungă plictiseală" and „iritarea şi-a făcut loc între noi".

There is a captivating similarity operating at the image level between the black-and-white picture ("anchorage"), a momentary nightmarish flash-back into the past without a Sony TV, and the past tense verbs, associated with events finished in the past. On the other hand, the transition to present tense verbs is accompanied by a vivid full-page happy family picture and the higher order similarity:

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Sony. O mare familie



The antithesis is reinforced by lexical repetitions of the all-including, indefinite noun head „totul" and the boosters (intensifying adjuncts) in comparative modification: „mult mai [bine]", „mult mai [clar]". It is the NG_{mm} denoting the object/helper in the actantial model, able to foster asistance for YOU – the subject/receiver, that is now set into relief through this system of parallelisms:

„Televizorul Sony cu ecran mare super Triniton şi sunet impecabil".

The heavily post-modified NG includes both informational and commendatory attributes and is given prominence through punctuation marks of greater separative force of the full stop type.

If the above NG_{mm} „Televizorul Sony cu ecran mare super Triniton şi sunet impecabil", defining our product, is assessed from the point of view of the appraisal theory, the heavy post-modification or qualifier (apposition:"Sony" + Prep phrase with embedded sub-modified noun groups:"cu $ecran_{\text{noun head}}$ *mare super* Triniton" + coord AND + NG: „$sunet_{\text{noun head}}$ *impecabil*") will display compositional, as well as aesthetically-related qualities. Appreciation is formulated in terms of the TV's positive impact of high force

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and intensity: ”impecable”, „super” in antithesis with the former negative values of boredom and irritation.

Another standard salience not found in other registers, is the apposition of two NGs: „*Sony”*/NG_{mm1}(*is)” for”*/NG_{mm2}:

NG_{mm1}.For NG_{mm2}

1. the NG_{mm1} defining the product: „Televizorul Sony cu ecran mare Super Triniton şi sunet stereo impecabil.”
2. the NG defining the beneficiary, usually associated with material action processes in the surface structure, appears here with a relational process of the ”be” type: ”Prep phrase [for/NG_{mm2}:families who respect their own values”].

There is also a discoursal parallel between the family in the vivid picture and the ”you” addressed indirectly through the copy. Undoubtedly, the Sony has become a symbol of values, family, feeling good, although the lack of semantic cohesion in the parataxis of the two NGs above (NG_{mm1}. For NG_{mm2}) exempts the copywriter from making explicit claims since here, as in other cases of disjunctive language, the true/false assessment does not apply.[3]

The headline „Acum îţi poţi permite să fii Sony”, here in non-standard post-copy position, thematizes on the time circumstantial adjunct and focusses on an unusual collocation obtained through functional conversion: „Be Sony” - NG → Adj G[4] which has to be interpreted as “you can afford to be stylish” “to be a big family” “to respect your own values”. That in buying a Sony TV you will also buy an ideal of family harmony, is a remarkable conclusion, also sustained by the apposition {Brand name: “Sony” /NG_c: “O mare familie”} of the slogan - linguistic construction, which, as previously demonstrated (Pop, 2004), is specific/standard advertising “grammar” as standard is also the transition from the poetic function (system of parallelisms) through the informational to the directive function of the language in the end.(Be Sony!) (Vestergaard and Schroder, 1986:52).

This incursion into the grammar of an ad entitles us to conclude that advertisers sell us not only a product but an idealized version of ourselves, values of harmony, stylishness, respect, and family.

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Notes:

[1] Defined by Cook (1992:131) as parallel linguistic structures, "instruments of destruction", which entail deviation from normal usage, foregrounding, etc., and by Jakobson (1960) as the hallmark of poetic messages.

[2] Appraisal theory is concerned with the linguistic resources by which a text/speakers come to express, negotiate and naturalise particular inter-subjective and ultimately ideological positions. It is concerned with the language of evaluation, attitude and emotion and with a set of resources which explicitly position a text's proposals and propositions interpersonally (Martin, 2000).

[3] Minor clauses are aspects of disjunctive language which communicate on a sub-logical plane to which judgements of truth and falsehood are not applicable. The copy-writer does not have to face "Is it so?". Such language operates at the associative rather than cognitive level. (Leech, 1966:160)

[4] Functional conversion is an example of external deviation from the grammatical norm of English. Romanian advertising has introduced many such deviant collocations used especially by adolescents: „Fii profi!", „Fii cool!", " Be Orange!".

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