INNOVATION – A SIGN OF MODERNITY IN ROMANIAN ADVERTISING

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ABSTRACT

Advertising discourse has a surprising linguistic dynamics manifested by means of derivation, *pseudo-prefixation*, *conversion*, *new word creation*, *slang and jargon terms. It adjusts to the desires of the public and depends on the cultural context and on the situation of communication.*

Key words: *discourse*, *innovation*, *communication*, *advertising*, *text*

In the last few years Romanian advertising has experienced the following phenomenon: recently come out after a period during which it was neglected, it seems to ignore the role played by *tradition* within the dynamic Romanian society (as it happens in any society). *Innovation* is adopted as a sign of modernity and of synchronising with the spirit of the time. The set of traditional spiritual and material values (Romanian cuisine, for instance), extremely praised by Romanians so far, have made way for *foreign* realities.

For example, a commercial made as part of a campaign for Connex presents getting a *hamburger* or *a McDonalds menu* as a major advantage. The campaign developed for *McDonalds* speaks for itself if we consider the title question: *Tu ce-ai face pentru 20 de mii de lei?*; ("What would you do for 20,000 lei?") The iconic component ingeniously presents us different amusing variants that a young person might appeal to, for the sake of that sum of money, which in fact represents the price of a hamburger. Therefore, it is induced the idea that the *hamburger* is wanted so much by young people, that they wouldn't hesitate to do something unusual such as dancing in a cheerleader costume if they hadn't enough money to buy it.

The campaign made for *Hochland* (manufacturer of cream cheese) presents a good such as *emmentaller* cream cheese as a product which is part of everyday life. The whims of a ten year old girl who can't decide on the type of cream cheese that she prefers in her sandwich indicate that she is accustomed to the product: *...cu smântână*, *ba nu*, *cu caşcaval*, *mai bine cu emmentaller* ("...with sour cream, no, with hard cheese, no, better with emmentaller").

The enumeration is not aleatory but it points out that the product has penetrated our market to such an extent that it is has become known even to a ten year old child.

Cosmetics companies import foreign products: *Camay* soaps and *Dove*, *Elseve*, *Timotei* shampoons have elements which make reference to

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the geographical space of their origin: for instance, at the iconic level, the image of *Camay* soaps is projected against the background of the Eiffel Tower.

Sometimes, the commercial slogan is kept in the original language, as it happens in the case of *Carlsberg* beer: "Carlsberg. Probably the best beer in the world". The adverb *probably* is used as a main, sensitive psychological device. The customer has always wanted to have freedom of choice. If he/she had been faced with the idea that the beer under discussion is ‚the best' in the world, how could his/her fredom of choice manifest itself? By suggesting that this beer could compete with other brands for the title of "the best" beer, the commercial makes the public accept the proposal: they will compare it with the brands they know and choose the suggested option, Carlsberg beer.

Plenty of examples are offered by the campaigns made to promote foreign cars. Romanian advertising companies choose the oldest and most overused method, that of appealing to tradition. Traditional holidays, such as Christmas and Easter, become an opportunity to send season greetings to clients, using as background the image of an adorned fir-tree branch or several painted Easter eggs. This method is visibly a PR strategy. In a society which is very eager to forget its traditional roots, such a formula is quickly becoming void of any meaning.

Today's role of advertising is to make public the *new* tendencies. Nevertheless, advertising campaigns shuld feel free to use traditional elements in their ads. Such elements are to be used whenever the campaigner wishes to point out *the experience as a result of a long practice*. Such an approach obligatorily implies promoting *the quality* of a product/service. Tradition is associated to quality and refinement. In this respect, we could refer to ads made for prestige manufacturers of high-quality watches (for example, *Longines*). That association is also true in case of advertising for furniture, produce (salad oil, pâté, chocolate); in the ad for *Humanitas* Publishing House, as in other similar cases, the supreme argument in favor of high quality products is *the long time since the establishment of the company*: *Împreună de 10 ani* ("Together for 10 years").

Novelty is perceived as a supreme argument in favor of the advantages and technical performances of a latest-generation product (the campaigns for electronic equipment, household appliances, mobile phones appeal to this aspect). Introducing novelty is becoming a difficult task since the public might not be ready for that or there might appear some obstacles due to the fact that novelty is perceived as the enemy of tradition. Our relationship with our own past, one of the fundamental forms of communication, is extremely rarely present in our advertising campaigns.

Advertising is submitted to the laws of demand and supply, that is why it should be adjusted to the needs of the public. Regarding the

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meaning to be communicated, it should be the result of relating *communication* to the *situation of communication.* Any situation, irrespective of its nature, can be decomposed into a set of overlapping contexts.

The discourse used in advertising should consider the cultural, identity and relational context. All these contexts manifest themselves simultaneously in a message. The meaning of the message results from summing up the meanings acquired by the product of communication in all the contexts.

Talking about making up an efficient message means talking about the emergence of a meaning imposed to the addressees and which causes them to act consequently. Any creator of an ad should consider the following aspects:

- the content of a message acts according to a psychist predisposition (need, desire, motivation);
- the content of a message has an effect (its own force);
- the effect on human behaviour is determined by the content of the message;
- if we change the messages (i.e. their contents) we must change their effects accordingly;
- the customer's inner psychic impulse is the ultimate element which determines the action.

The domain of advertising observes the *norms* of the society (understood as rules unanimously accepted by the members of the community). We know that social life comprises many social norms characterised by their immaterial, invisible nature. We live according to these norms, but sometimes we forget them and we don't become aware of them (again) until they are broken, since their breech disturbs or even shocks us.

Individuals and groups seem to be attracted to cultural consensus. All the experiments regarding the presence of another person, the pressure of rules, the processes of changing the attitude/mentality, group manipulation and cultural identity crises have proven people's permanent seeking for the agreement with the group and its norms.

Cultural rules include the **linguistic system.** Language is one of the most powerful weapons in defending cultural identity. As far as ad texts are concerned, they refer to or are based on all text types. To understand the references made in such a text, the reader must have some background knowledge about the culture he/she belongs to. However, different cultures can construct different texts, based on specific rules. For example, in European texts, people's direction of action is from left to right, this rule regulating, before and after' sequences, such as those used in the ads for washing powder, medicines for losing weight or face cosmetic products.

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The most illustrative example of cultural variation is represented by the translation of an ad from one language into another. As it is known, preserving the essence of an ad does not mean the literal translation of the text, but finding the significances which the public of a cultural space will vibrate to. Such an approach was called *adapting the text to the culture of the target public.* This explains why manufacturers are willing to pay large amounts of money to get consulting services regarding their brand name and the making of an impact slogan.

For example, *Rolls Royce* company realized in due time that the model *Silver Mist* wouldn't have been well received in Germany because in German the word *mist* stands for, "excrement". The green colour will never be associated with vegetal freshness in some countries in the south of Africa, where green is the color of mourning. And things can get even more complicated than we may imagine. Why should we look for examples from far away, exotic cultural spaces when we can very well remain in our own "yard" to see what happens.

First of all, the ad maker must master the target language of the advertisment, so that the text translated won't be semantically ambiguous. In 2001, the ads for *Janine* perfume had the slogan: *Janine. Parfumul cu două tăişuri* ("Janine. The double-edged perfume"). As it is known, in Romanian the expression "cu două tăişuri" has a negative connotation, implying the presence of un unpleasant factor: fear, risk, unfavorable development of an enterprise. The natural question asked by the consumer would be: "Why should I buy a perfume which might challenge or even jeopardise my ability as a conquerer?" The meaning intended by the maker of the ad was that the perfume could have been used both by men and women. We found out that after reading a newspaper article containing the statement given by the manufacturer.

Analysing in detail Romanian ads in point of their text structure and meaning, we noticed a surprising linguistic dynamics: unlike other types of discourse (journalistic, political, scientific, legal), the ad discourse is more open towards innovation, both grammatically and lexically. The phenomenon could be explained considering the purpose of this type of discourse: it is intended for a large number of people. Its efficiency is measured by the sales figure of a specific product.

New words formed by derivation

Suffixes already established in the language are attached to roots which are apparently incompatible with them. In 2006 the *Grania* Company (flour manufacturer) came out with the slogan: *Grania. Prăjitureşte de nu se mai opreşte!* ("Grania. It keeps baking!")

The verbal suffix *-i* was attached to a nominal base "prăjitură" (made up of the verbal root "prăji" + the participle suffix *-t* + the abstract suffix *-ră*), thus obtaining the word "a prăjituri". This verb was introduced in the class of the verbs with a weak suffix in the Indicative Mood, Present Tense,

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such as “a iubi”, “a călători”. That is the way the form “prăjitureşte” appeared.

The meaning of the ad text is explained by the syntagm which continues the slogan ...*de nu se mai opreşte*. We conclude that “prăjitureşte” means “a face prăjituri întruna”, which is an indubitable quality of the flour used in the cake dough left to rise. How many times before Christmas haven’t we heard our mothers and grandmothers complaining about the bad quality of the flour? Well, the manufacturers want to assure us that this type of flour is so good that the dough keeps rising and its quantity increases (“nu se mai opreşte”). The slogan underlines two major qualities of the flour which are highly appreciated by housewives:

a. it prepares a dough which rises well and quickly;

b. a small quantity is enough to obtain excellent results (the housewife will be glad to know that she can prepare more cakes with the quantity of flour that she usually used).

Semi-prefixes?

Traditional grammar discusses cases of pseudo-prefixes about which we believe that they get ‚attached’ to the base or stem, whereas, in fact, they are part of the word structure and are nothing else but units with meaning in their language of origin. That is the case of the well-known word *bicicleta*, (“bicycle”) made up of the Latin *bis* (“twice”) and the Greek *kyklos* (“circle”).

In the campaign of August 2007, the ad for the washing powder *OMO* contained the slogan: *Bucură-ți copilul cu o OMOCICLETA!* (“Please your child with an OMOCYCLE!”) The corpus of the text contained the next sentences: *Caştigă una dintre cele 1000 de OMOCICLETE pentru copilul tău!* (“Win one of the 1,000 OMOCYCLES for your child!”) It is clear that we are in front of a promotional campaign. We might consider that the element *omo* is a BRAND semi-prefix, as long as it refers directly to the promoted product.

The creation of new words

When advertising for the soft drink *Fanta*, it has always been used the image of a group of teenagers having lots of fun. In the summer of 2006 the manufacturer launched the slogan: *Bea Fanta!/Fii BAMBOOCHA!* (“Drink Fanta! Be BAMBOOCHA!”)

Our question would be “What should we be like?” If we listen to the TV commercial (the same message appeared in printed ads) we hear a young mulatto exclaiming in ecstasy after drinking a bottle of *Fanta*: *Bamboocha*! It seems that the ad maker assigned this discourse segment the significance of an interjection of admiration. To enter our system of reference, it is as if, after enjoying a tasty soft drink, we exclaim: *Grozav!* (“Great!”) Therefore, the incentive: *Fii grozav!* (“Be great!”) In the summer of 2007, *Fanta* launched a new campaign with a new slogan, which uses the newly created word, making up a whole word family: *Bamboocheşte-te!*

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meaning “grozăveşte-te!” (“Make yourself great!”) The word has entered general use and the proof is that several weeks ago, on the bus, I heard some teenagers saying to each other: *Fii bamboocha*!

Conversion

2006 was also the year when the campaign *Poiana. Delicios de ciocolată!* (“Poiana. Deliciously chocolate!”) was launched.

The common noun *ciocolată* is used as a qualifying adjective. It acquires the meaning “good, savorous”, and the utterance reads “deliciously good and savorous”. This usage of the noun *ciocolată* has never been attested in the Romanian language. By conversion, the promoted chocolate becomes associated to the essential quality of this type of product: the savorous taste. The campaign for *Poiana* succeeded in accomplishing two objectives:

a. to attract people’s attention on an unusual linguistic structure;

b. to express in a concise way (only four words) the essential quality of the promoted product.

Slang terms included in standard language

This phenomenon is evident when the target-public is young and non-conformist. The ad maker will take over words from the language of the target-consumer, and the latter will feel flattered when he is addressed in a familiar way. We refer first to the 2007 campaign for *Coca-Cola* Company in order to launch a new product, *Sprite.* The slogan of the campaign was: *Premiile mici sunt naşpa*, *de aceea noi le facem mari* (“Small prizes are blah, that’s why we make them big”).

At the iconic level, we remember the image of the teenager dressed in a huge T-shirt and dragging a keychain as big as a wardrobe. The image is amusing. The text draws our attention because of the slang term *naşpa*, in our opinion for the first time present in a standard language text. It is a proof that advertising can account for the penetration in language of words with an unfavourable status up to a certain moment. When, in this case, the ad maker addresses a teenager customer, non-conformist by definition, it might seem surprising when a company with a serious target-public uses a similar approach. We refer to *Elvila* who used in 2007 the slogan: *Elvila. Calitate salon la preţuri beton* (“Elvila. Crack quality for neat prices”).

The slogan is short, has rhythm and rhyme, being easy to remember. The qualifying modifiers *salon* and *beton* belong to the slang register and express superlative appreciation: “extraordinary, exquisite quality”, „extremely advantageous prices”. What surprises us is not the synatagm as such (very accomplished indeed), but the fact that the text addresses a target public having the following characteristics:

- is older than 35 (because they buy high quality furniture, being known that young people, at the beginning of their marriage adjust the furniture to their eccentric taste and to their small income!)

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- claims to be refined, stylish, elegant, features appreciated at a mature age;

- is not necessarily interested in buying something very “cheap”, but something very „good”. Something very good can’t be very cheap.

Under these circumstances we ask ourselves: how efficient really was this slogan, when addressing people such as those described above? To what extent did they recognize themselves in this slogan? The campaign also included another slogan: *Fii boier pe bani puțini* (“Be a lord with little money”) Can it be?

In August 2007, *Flanco* Company launched an advertising campaign to promote household appliances at low prices. At the discourse level, the message is: *Ce prețuri plane şi-au tras ăştia! Neam de neamul vostru n-a văzut aşa ceva!* (“What ‘plane’ prices they’ve got! Neither you nor your folks have ever seen anything like that!”)

The syntagms *şi-au tras*, *neam de neamul vostru*, *ăştia* belong to the informal, colloquial register. The target-public will consider the ad familiar since it contains words used by them in everyday speech. The manufacturer and the product will be perceived as being at the same level as them. The public will feel taken into account since the ad maker ‘talks’ just like them.

The Jargon

In Romanian advertising we notice more and more frequently the tendency to use foreign words in Romanian utterances. The phenomenon could be explained by the desire of the ad maker to synchronize with European tendencies, to feel that he/she escaped from anonymacy and became the focus by using western commercials famous all over the world. The campaigns which promote fashionable underwear, clothing or shoes contain the recent Anglo-Saxon qualifying modifier “must have”:

Poşeta albă must have.

Sutienul push-up must have.

Fusta-balon must have.

We understand that we have to acquire these articles or we will be laughed at. We should do anything in order to have them, whether they suit us or not, whether we can afford them or not. Our social success depends on these “must have” articles. Our advice is that you shouldn’t entirely believe the content of these ads. And the examples could go on.

Another frequent phenomenon is the ‘borrowing’ of a foreign word, usually an English word, which is introduced in a syntagm as if it were a Romanian lexeme. *COCOLINO* clothes balm was promoted in the 2007 campaign by using the slogan: *Cocolino. Un boom de parfum* (“Cocolino. A perfume boom”).

The Romanian onomatopoeic interjection *bum* was translated into English by the similar word “boom”. The question is why. Wouldn’t the Romanian word be expressive enough? On the contrary, if we think about

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it, Romanians use the word *bum* to suggest a powerful noise (like that of a storm, an unusual fact, an unexpected appearance). Our opinion is that, in this case, we encounter a semantic incompatibility between the powerful sound of the fact designated by the substantivised interjection („bum") and the common noun "perfume", the latter being by definition the symbol of a suave, pleasant smell... If we add the significance derived from the iconic aspect (the ad mascot is a teddy bear) we notice that „boom" fails to establish relations of discourse cohesion both linguistically and iconically... This is an inadequate example.

Garnier Company promoted a new shampoo in 2007 using the slogan: *Garnier. Prospețime de grapefruit şi lemon grass* ("Garnier. Grapefruit and lemongrass freshness").

The natural question would be: which is the advantage of a half English, half Romanian syntagm? Maybe the ad maker intended it for a segment of target-public which would feel that they are part of the elite-consumers simply because they are addressed to in a foreign language. The phenomenon is visible in case of log-established firms which produce whisky, luxurious watches (see *Longines*), but should it be present in case of a shampoo which is to be changed several times a month, just to try 'something else'?

We found another example in case of promoting cars. 2007 was the year when the campaign *Toyota Yaris Bigsmall* was launched. This is the slogan which makes it clear what target public both the producer and the ad maker had in view: *Toyota Yaris Bigsmall – un accesoriu perfect pentru o poşetă încăpătoare* ("Toyota Yaris Bigsmall – a perfect accessory for a large purse").

In this case, the lexical innovation, based on Anglo-Saxon material, is not annoying. The car is intended for those young women who have an adequate income, are dynamic and involved in business. For young women who need to move fast from one place to another and to look good while doing it.

In the same campaign, another ad presented the slogan: *Bigsmall – un nou cuvânt în vocabularul tău* ("Bigsmall – a new word in your vocabulary").

This time, the ad maker made no reference to the product because he knew that it had already been assimilated with the syntagm "bigsmall". The presence of a new word is also acknowledged: *un nou cuvânt în vocabularul tău*.

Play on words by phonemic change

The products which make appeal to the consumer's jocular spirit and which imply the idea of fun, of amusement, are promoted by using plays on words. In June 2007 *Timbark* juices were promoted with the slogan: (*Timbark. Înfructă-te!*).

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At the iconic level, the message is expressed by the image of a young woman getting into a fruit sea (the fruits vary-oranges, cherries, apples). She is *between* fruits. Linguistically, the message sends to the parasynthetic derivative *a se înfrupta* ("to regale oneself"). By replacing the phoneme *p* by *c*, the huge quantity of fruit in the juice is more emphasized, to underline that it is a natural juice.

Very precise quantitative determinations

Quantitative determinations are used to show the quality of a product and to convince the consumer that buying it is a necessity. In June 2006 *Garnier* launched the shampoo *Fructis Rrepair and Shine* by using the slogan: *De 7 ori mai puternic*, *de 3 ori mai strălucitor* ("Seven times stronger, thrice brighter").

It is hard to believe that one can give an exact quantification of these qualities acquired by hair after using the shampoo under discussion. Even if strengh and brightness could be measured, what would "a six times stronger" hair have looked like?

Well-known syntagms used as metatexts

We are all familiar with the syntagm: (…) *zi de vară până-n seară* ever since childhood, when fairy-tales were part of our world. *Orange* cell-phone company used this syntagm in the summer of 2007 to reach two objectives:

- to create a similitude between the promoted service and the fairy-tale world, meaning that such a high quality is not part of the real world. So extraordinary are the services offered by Orange that you seem to be in an imaginary world.

- to remind the young man (the target of the ad) of the serene days of childhood. The peace and magic of those days could be found using the services offered by Orange. The campaign had the slogan: *La Orange ai zi de vară/Până-n… iarnă.*

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