SPEECH ACTS IN BRITISH AND ROMANIAN ADVERTISEMENTS

Alina Guga-Cotea, Assist. Prof., PhD, "Eftimie Murgu" University of Reșita

Abstract: This article outlines the importance of the analysis of the speech acts in advertising. In order to be effective advertisers have to inform and to persuade and they have to use the right style and language so that the message reaches its effectiveness. This study offers insights into the speech acts present in the messages of 25 British and 25 Romanian ads from the corpus (some of them analysed in detail in the present article). Finally, the results are presented and the conclusions are drawn.

Keywords: language, advertising, speech acts, British advertisements, Romanian advertisements.

1. Introduction

In a previuous article (Guga-Cotea, 2013:262), the influence of the philosophers Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) in the development of the Speech Act Theory was presented. Austin made the difference between constative utterances which can be considered as true/false and are used to describe the world, and performative utterances which are used to perform things (i.e. order, warn, invite, etc.). When producing such an utterance, three related acts will also be performed. The first is the locutionary act, which is the utterance itself and its meaning (a foreigner might fail to produce a locutionary act in English, for example, because of the inability to put words and sounds together). The second is the illocutionary act, which refers to the goal, the purpose of the utterance and also to its communicative force. The last act is the perlocutionary act, which makes reference to the effect produced on the audience through locution and illocution. The reaction to the illocution which leads to the perlocution may differ according to the circumstances. According to Yule (1996, p.49), the most important of the three is the illocutionary force, the term 'speech act" being generally "interpreted quite narrowly to mean only the illocutionary force of an utterance".

2. Speech acts

The functions that were adopted in the previous article and that we are going to adopt for the analysis of the British and Romanian advertisements from the present study, functions that are actually considered to be generally performed by the speech acts, are the following:

- DECLARATIONS: these are acts that change the world through their very utterance: sentence, pronounce, curse, name, etc.

e.g. "Priest: I now pronounce you husband and wife". – the context and the special institutional role of the speaker allows him to perform this declaration appropriately.

- REPRESENTATIVES: acts used to describe what the speaker believes to be true or not: describe, insist, predict, claim, etc.

e.g. "The earth is flat". – the speaker represents the world as he/she believes it is.

- COMMISSIVES: acts that commit the speaker to a future action: promise, offer, refuse, threat, etc.

e.g. "I'll be back". – the speaker expresses what he/she intends to do.

BDD-V643 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 16:59:24 UTC)

- EXPRESSIVES: speech acts that state what the speaker feels: statements of pleasure, joy, sorrow, likes, dislikes, etc.

e.g. "I'm really sorry". – the speaker expresses his/her psychological state.

- DIRECTIVES: acts used by the speaker in order to make the hearer do something: order, command, invite, suggest, etc.

e.g. "Don't touch that". – the speaker expresses what he/she doesn't want the hearer to do (Yule (1996:53).

Based on these speech acts we are going to conduct a comparative analysis of the speech acts used for persuasion and effectiveness in the British and the Romanian advertisement representative of the corpus of this study. Our intention is to find out which speech acts prevail in the language of advertising and whether there are really any cultural differences as to the types of acts used for persuasion in the British and the Romanian advertisements. We expect that that there are similarities between the two countries regarding the types of speech acts that prevail in both British and Romanian advertisements, namely the directives, representatives and commissives. None or few expressives and declarations are to be used in the advertisements from the corpus because these types of speech acts are actually inappropriate for the field of advertising. A preference for directive, representative and commissive speech acts is justifiable because it is in the advertisers' interest and concern to use acts which suggest, invite, claim, assert, promise something about the products/services advertised. It is in the advertisers' interest to capture the addressees' attention, to appeal to their needs and to persuade them into buying/choosing their products/services (Guga-Cotea, 2013:266).

Given the differences in cultural context between England and Romania, and by classifying them as belonging to the low-context cultures and the high-context cultures (Hall and Hall, 1990:6), respectively, we also expect to find some differences as to the types of speech acts that prevail in the advertisements from each country. We expect a greater number of directives and commissives in the British ads and a greater number of representatives in the Romanian ads. The corpus on which the analysis will be conducted comprises 50 print advertisements (25 British and 25 Romanian ads). The statistical comparison will be done with the help of the *Mann-Whitney U* test for non-parametric data.

3. Analysis

We shall now illustrate the way in which the advertisements have been analysed in order to observe and measure the speech acts.

e.g. 1. **Headline**: Save £752 when you trade-in your boiler

Body copy: British Gas guarantees:

- £300 off the price of a new boiler
- £204 of central heating care FREE
- £248 of radiator heating controls and installation FREE

Buy a new energy-efficient boiler from British Gas and you could also save around £235 a year on your heating bills! 08457754754 Offer ends 31 October 2009.

Signature and Slogan: British Gas, Looking after your world.

(Daily Mail, October 2009)

BDD-V643 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 16:59:24 UTC)

Speech acts

The directive speech act in the headline is meant to immediately attract attention because it refers to savings. With the help of the commissive acts in the body copy, the advertisers make a promise for important savings and for an efficient product. There are also directives in the copy which suggest phoning, buying and saving. The commissive in the slogan is a promise on the part of the addressers who engage to take care of their customers' world.

The structure of the ad is: directives – commissives/directives – commissives.

Types and number of speech acts: Commissives (2), Directives (2).

2. **Headline**: free unlimited music on a £26 plan

Subhead: when you choose the Nokia Lumia 800

Body copy: Grab this phone on Panther and you'll get up to two free Swapables, like Deezer, which lets you listen and download music from over 13 million tracks. That's on top of 200 minutes, 750MB of data and unlimited texts. visit any Orange shop. orange.co.uk/shop or call 08000790408.

(The Independent, January 2012)

Speech acts

The speech acts in the headline and the subhead are commissives because they refer to the product and to some of the included deals. Directive and commissive speech acts are used in the body copy of the advertisement. The advertisers suggest taking action and visiting the store, but they also present the offers and the facilities accompanying the Nokia Lumia 800.

The structure of the ad is: commissives – commissives – directives/commissives.

Types and number of speech acts: Commissives (3), Directives (1).

3. **Headline**: Povesteşte-ţi vacanţa în cele mai mici detalii

Subhead: cu opţiunea roaming Permis de vacanţă

Body copy:

- 20 minute şi 20 SMS-uri
- 1 MB internet pe mobil
- bonus 5 minute dacă mergi la schi

totul cu 5,5 euro

apelează gratuit *100# pentru activare

călătoriile se schimbă cu Orange www.orange.ro

Slogan and signature: today changes with Orange

(Ziarul Financiar, December 2012)

Speech acts

A directive speech act is used in the headline in order to make a suggestion to the readers and the solution to this suggestion is the offer mentioned in the subhead. The advertisers describe the service in the copy, but they also promise bonuses and free calls. By mentioning the website address in the last line, the addressers make an invitation to act. The sentence in the slogan is a prediction related to the changes that take place with Orange.

BDD-V643 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 16:59:24 UTC)

The structure of the ad is: directives – representatives/commissives/directives – representatives.

Types and number of speech acts: Representatives (2), Commissives (1), Directives (2).

4. **Headline**: De Sărbători, sună şi fă-i să zâmbească.

Body copy: Vodafone îţi oferă **5000 de minute în reţea cadou** la abonament ca să le faci tuturor Sărbătorile mai frumoase.

În plus, ai mii de email-uri şi pagini de internet **gratuit 1 lună**.

Intră în cea mai tare reţea. Merită!

Signature and slogan: Vodafone, power to you

(Adevărul, December 2009)

Speech acts

A directive speech act is used in the headline in order to encourage the addressees to call their relatives or friends for the Holidays. In the first lines of the body copy the advertisers present their offer and then they use directive speech acts again in order to suggest joining Vodafone. The information written in small types gives details about the service, it encourages the readers to ask for details and it makes a claim about the addressers. The statement of the slogan is a promise for power if choosing Vodafone.

The structure of the ad is: directives – representatives/commissives/directives – commissives.

Types and number of speech acts: Representatives (1), Commissives (2), Directives (2).

4. Statistics

Our analysis reveals the fact that the number of directives, representatives and commissives is indeed greater than the number of expressives (we have found only one expressive speech act in a Romanian advertisement) and declarations (no presence at all) in both the British and Romanian ads that represent the corpus of the study. As expected, the directives and commissives are present to a higher degree (55.4% and 58.5%, respectively) in the British ads than in the Romanian ads (44.6% and 41.5%, respectively). At the same time, the representatives are more present in the Romanian ads (60.7%) than in the British ads (39.3%). The *Mann-Whitney U* test has also revealed that the frequency of the item commissives is significantly higher in the British ads when compared to the Romanian ads. As for the item of representatives, the test has confirmed that the frequency of the item is significantly higher in the Romanian ads than in the British ads. The results confirm our expectations regarding the differences between the use of speech acts in British and Romanian advertisements.

5. Conclusions

In the first part of the article, we have outlined the functions of the speech acts that have been adopted for the analysis of the advertisements from the corpus and also our expectations as to the types of speech acts that prevail in advertising. The second part of this article has exemplified the way in which the analysis has been conducted and has presented the statistical results. As expected, the types of speech acts that prevail in both British and Romanian advertisements are directives, representatives and commissives. However, our

BDD-V643 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 16:59:24 UTC)

analysis has revealed significant differences between the types of speech acts that prevail in each language. The results have confirmed our expectations emphasising our belief that the cultural differences would be reflected by a greater frequency of certain types of speech acts in each language. The statistical results have confirmed our expectations for both British and Romanian ads which means that the strategies are different because the cultures differ. Certainly, a direct or indirect approach does not mean that one message is more persuasive than the other, it means that when trying to persuade the approach is different from culture to culture and that the discourse of advertising reflects these dissimilarities. The different speech acts and the different strategies used in the print ads from Britain and Romania illustrate different cultural values and norms for each country.

References

Austin, J. (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Guga-Cotea, A. (2013). *Speech Acts in English Advertisements*. In: Analele Universitatii „Eftimie Murgu" Resita. Fascicola II. Studii Economice, vol. XX, pp. 261-266, available at *www.analefseauem.ro*.

Hall, E. T., Hall, M. R. (1990). *Understanding Cultural Differences*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press Inc.

Searle, J.R. (1969). *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yule, G. (1996). Pragmatics. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

BDD-V643 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 16:59:24 UTC)