Chapter Five

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Advertisement is a sine qua non for the successful launching of a product. When a new product comes into the market, it finds a lot of parity products and thus, the need to inform the customers about this product becomes essential. But the competition among these products is so fierce that information alone cannot increase the sale of the product. Hence, the information needs to be turned into persuasion. For both these purposes, advertising is the only effective method.

It is universally acclaimed that language is the most crucial component of an advertisement. Its role in the persuasive communicative system is incomparable. Naturally, the advertising copywriters try to make the best use of language in their efforts to convince the target customers. The Bangladeshi advertising industry is no exception and, though at its primary stage of development, advertising in Bangladesh does play a major role in consumer persuasion.

Copywriters of Bangladesh make a lot of manipulations with the language. They do all sorts of things with the language at all levels of Linguistics – phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic. Taking
full Advantage of the flexibility of Bangla grammar which allows a lot of scrambling, they make innovative lexical and syntactic constructions. Furthermore, they even cross the boundary line drawn by the prescriptive grammarians to make linguistic improvisation in order to create impact on consumer behavior.

At phonological level, not much significant manipulation is observed. The Bangla phonology is an offspring of ancient Sanskrit phonetic traditions. Thus, it has a reasonably large range of sound system and probably because of that, not much phonological improvisation is observed. In Bangladeshi advertisements, apart from onomatopoeic innovations, no significant phonological deviation is observed.

The most significant area of manipulation found in Bangladeshi advertisements is in the lexical level. The copywriters in Bangladesh coin new words by inflection, compounding, collocations, hybridization, nativization etc. Quite a good number of examples are found in both the electronic and the print media to show how these new words are coined. Neologism is done mainly to increase the level of recall by the audience, because recall plays a big part in purchasing decisions (Thorson & Snyder, 1984). Code mixing is another frequent phenomenon, mostly found in television and print advertising. As the level of education of most of the radio audience is must less compared to the other two media,
code mixing is a less frequent phenomenon here. In code mixing mostly English words are inserted in Bangla phrases, but recently, being influenced by satellite channels where many Hindi and Urdu serials are quite popular to the audience, some copywriters also use a few Hindi/Urdu words as code mixed expressions. Besides, code mixing in brand names has been a popular trend in Bangladesh since long (Banu & Sussex, 2001).

Repetition is another tendency typical in Bangladeshi advertisements. Sometimes to attract the customer’s attraction, the word /Sunen/ ‘listen’ is repeated five times, or in other occasions a brand name is repeated over and again to ensure that the audience remembers the name (e.g., for Olympic Battery, the brand name Olympic is repeated eleven times).

Another popular trend among Bangladeshi advertising copywriters is the use of literary devices like simile, metaphor, personification and hyperbole. While observing the use of these devices it could be found that the copywriter use them because the people commonly use them in day to day conversation. Rhetorical devices like irony, paradox, synecdoche etc. that are found mostly in literature have not gained popularity among the copywriters, as they realize very well that advertisement is meant for general people, not for literary critics.
Linguistic manipulation at syntactic level mainly revolves around word order. Though code switching has begun to be used, it has not yet got the momentum. At sentence level, a number of advertisements are found where scrambling with the Bangla word order is done, sometimes only to make special effects, and sometimes to rhyme with the last word of the previous line.

Finally, linguistic manipulation is observed when the copywriters make unconventional association between a product name a lexical item used in the campaign. These associations generally make the audience more involved with the advertisement as they appeal to the senses of the consumer.

Under linguistic manipulation, classified advertisements found in print media only have been taken up separately. These are personal advertisements that are characterized by brevity of expression, verbal ellipsis and over use of adjectives.

Hidden persuaders is the other area which has been exhaustively studied in the present work. “Hidden Persuaders”, the term first used by Vance Packard in 1957 to refer to the embedded messages the American copywriters used that time to coerce the consumers to buy something they neither needed nor wanted, has been used in this work in
a positive sense. The term is used here for those persuasive elements that do not directly tell the audience to use the product, but somewhere in the message the urge exists in an implicit manner. That is, the persuasion is made in an abstract manner, but it has enough indication so as to make the buyers understand what the copywriters want from them.

In Bangladeshi advertising environment, explicit persuaders hugely outnumber the hidden persuaders. But still quite a handful of advertisements possess this implicit persuasion. As understanding the persuasion here requires a certain level of education, the advertisers accordingly choose the medium through which these persuasions are to be made. That is why radio has a very few number of such advertisements as against its other two media counterparts because of the differences in the audience’s educational background.

It is observed that the copywriters sometimes come under an indirect communicative pact with their audience. Some advertisements are tailor-made for some particular group of audience and the message is drafted in such a way that there seems to be a pact existing between the advertiser and the target buyer.

There are some salient features through which an advertisement can be identified as containing hidden persuaders. Certain
elements of aestheticism are found in some advertisements. Through this aesthetic approach, the copywriter to penetrate into the mind's eye of the consumers and make them inclined toward the product. The copywriters also try to give literary flavor in their campaign for the purpose of making some inroads into the consumers liking towards literature and art. They frequently use literary terms like simile, metaphor, personification and hyperbole in their copy.

Though Bangladesh is a moderate Muslim country, most of the people have deep faith in religion and get motivated by religious issues. This characteristics of majority Bangladeshis is exploited by copywriters quite efficiently. Sometimes they write a copy which matches a religious occasion like the holy month of Ramadan. Sometimes, they exploit the conservativeness of the Muslims by calling their product /halal/ which means permissible in Islam. This attempt is deliberately made to show their solidarity with the religious feelings of the people so that they feel inclined to buy the product.

Knowing that most of the audience in television and print media are educated and are well aware of the contemporary national and international issues as well as the development if science & technology, advertising copywriters take up these issues in their in their campaigns in order to attract these educated customers. They incorporate issues of
politics, sports, environment, entertainment etc. and also write copy scientifically justifying the product value. Their actual target through this, of course, is to increase the sales of the product.

Advertisers in Bangladesh also capitalize on the attitude of the consumers towards products with foreign flavor. So, if the product has minimum foreign touch, it is highlighted with great care. Even products made in countries like Pakistan is emphasized with pride. Also observed as a salient feature of implicit advertisements is the element of vagueness in some messages. This vagueness is purposefully made so that the audience gives some time in thinking what product is being advertised. This ‘extra time’ is actually the target behind this vagueness as it might give the product little bit of ‘edge’ over its other parities.

Advertisers sometimes adopt some communicative strategies to speak on issues socially known as ‘taboo’. For example, to campaign for products like sanitary napkins, birth control products etc., the copywriters make use of this strategy so that the social norm is not violated and the audience is not offended. They strategize their message in such a way that the target audience fully understand what they want to say.

Finally, as part of hidden persuaders, the copywriters make some ‘claims’ which hang in the balance between truth and falsehood.
These claims are not lies as that would create legal problems, but the language is used in such a way that ultimately, the whole message turns out to be meaningless. But they are constructed so cleverly that it is not that easy for an average consumer to comprehend this meaninglessness.

Whatever the discussion is, be it linguistic manipulation or hidden persuaders, the consumer’s response is the ultimate target. So, how do the consumers react to these advertisements? To find this an experimental study was made. A hypothetical advertisement for a hypothetical product was prepared for the experiment and a questionnaire was prepared to find how the audience responds to it. The study was made on two fundamental assumptions. Firstly, it was hypothesized that the consumers’ purchasing desire increases if they are exposed to advertisements. The second hypothesis was that the educated consumers respond more positively to advertisements with hidden persuaders as against explicit advertisements. By applying simple random sampling method some university students were chosen as respondents and were interviewed. After analyzing the data, both the assumptions were found to be justified as they show significant positive trend towards the hypothesis.

So, it was proved that advertisements do change the purchasing behavior of the consumers and if the consumer is educated, he
will prefer the advertisement where the persuasion is hidden rather than explicit.

Thus three ‘body’ chapters make descriptive as well as empirical study on the language of advertisements in Bangladesh. As a pioneering work in this inter-disciplinary area, the present study make a number of contributions in the fields of Linguistics and marketing in Bangladesh. Some of the contributing areas are discussed below:

1. In Bangladeshi linguistic scenario, most of the researches have been in phonology, syntax and sociolinguistics. The present study might create interest among the researchers to work in this unexplored inter-disciplinary area of Linguistics and Marketing.

2. There has been very little research on advertising in Bangladesh. A research on advertising by a linguist might encourage the core people in Marketing and Advertising to work in this area.

3. The present work might prove to be quite useful for the advertising industry. The observations about the state of advertising in Bangladesh might help the people in this area to a considerable extent.

4. The advertising industry has no concrete mechanism to know the effect of their campaigns. The present work should inspire the advertising agencies and the manufacturers to make post-
advertising surveys to know how the consumers are accepting their messages.

5. The study might be a step forward for the development of academic infrastructure in the advertising industry. The persons involved in this industry might start feeling the need of this academic infrastructure and some planning might begin to take place.

6. The copywriters might become a little bit more ‘suggestive’ in their approach when they write a copy for educated customers keeping in mind their response found in this study.

7. The creative group of an agency, after looking at the data analysis in chapters 2 and 3 might come to know formally what they have been doing out of intuition and creativity. The descriptive analysis might also be quite encouraging to them.

8. The government might start thinking to be a little more serious towards this industry.

9. Overall public awareness towards advertising might increase if some portions of the findings are made public. People might start taking a little bit more interest in the language of advertising.

10. The overall standard of advertising might rise if the persons concerned take the outcomes of the present study seriously.
Recommendations for Future Research

It has been mentioned more than once in this study that language of advertising is a completely unexplored area in Bangladesh. The present work has made some sort of beginning. Researchers from both Linguistics and Marketing can contribute a lot in this area.

From a Linguistics perspective, a semiotic analysis of television and print advertising will be a very revealing study. Studies can also be made on Socioloinguistic and Psycho-semiotic approaches towards the language of advertising. A study can be made to compare and analyze the proportions of Bangla and English advertisements with a sociolinguistic point of view. Another approach can be to look at length the communicative dimensions of advertising.

It is suggested to both linguists and marketing experts to make more and more research on the effects of advertising in Bangladesh. This will give the advertisers the much-needed feedback. The manufacturers and the advertising agencies can initiate this type of research too.

A linguist can make experimental studies on a number of issues. A comprehensive study on how the majority populations of Bangladesh react to the language of advertising can be really helpful to the industry. A comparative study of the effectiveness of explicit vis-à-vis implicit advertisements can be made on these consumers. Even a comprehensive effect study on educated consumers should be made.
A number of consumer researches from a marketing perspective can be made. A research on advertisements in prime-time television will give a guideline to the advertisers on how to make modifications so those prime-time viewers do not get irritated. A psychosociological study on reactions to advertisements of products like birth control items, sanitary napkins, men & women undergarments etc. should prove useful. A gender-biased research on how women react to advertisements of toiletries, cosmetics etc. can be quite interesting.

Is the advertising industry in Bangladesh being influenced by alien cultures? A very interesting work can be made in this area. Another study can be done from a religious point of view. Do these advertisements in any way offend the religious norms? What do the clerics say and what are the opinions of the general people? To what extend do they differ from each other? Researchers may take up all these questions.

If the researchers in Bangladesh highlight some of these issues and some other important areas related to this field, the field of knowledge at large and the advertising industry in particular will be hugely benefited. It is a matter of great concern that a kind of ‘research vacuum’ seems to exist in Bangladesh in this area though there is no dearth of talents. It is time that all concerned come up and contribute for the development of the fields of Linguistics and Marketing and the advertising industry reaches the stages where it should reach.