DECLARATION

This is to state that the research work for the thesis entitled ‘Language and Ideology in Advertising: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Advertisements in Selected Indian Print and Electronic Media’ has been carried out by me. I affirm that the work done in the thesis is original and has not been submitted earlier for the award of any diploma or degree in this or any other university.

Vandana Lunyal
Ph.D. Scholar
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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to critically analyse the discourse of advertising to reveal that language is not innocent and that discourse is inflected with power and ideology. The critical branches of linguistics, discourse analysis and semiotics in particular do not look at language as passive medium; but as an active agent that shapes our thought. For the critical language practitioners, language is a complex phenomenon, a transparent conduit that reflects reality. It is more a structuring, inflected and a constitutive medium.

The critical discourse analysts view language and society as one rather than two different entities as one cannot be understood without the other. Language and society are produced dialectically and they continually shape each other. Discourse, therefore, may be viewed as a form of social action that does not merely reflect a pre-existing reality but also produces one. It is a major reality-constructing medium that shapes the relations and the knowledge systems of a socio-cultural context. Fairclough drawing on the works of Foucault defines discourse as “a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning” (Discourse and Social Change 64). Language is the commonest form of social behaviour; the preoccupations of a society can be studied by studying its discourse which is also considered to be institution specific use of language. Every social institution/genre has specific repertoire of symbols which makes each discourse different from the other. As such discourses of chat shows, TV news, advertisements, magazines, books, textbooks are all different. For the reason that discourse is institution specific, it differs from institution to institution. The discourse of a wedding ceremony cannot be similar to the discourse of school assembly. The reason for this is that social institutions also have their own sets of commonly held beliefs or common sense assumptions called ideologies. During the production of discourse, these ideologies play an important part and therefore they also have an important place in the critical study of discourse.

Why Advertising?

As a prominent discourse type in the late modernity, the study of advertising discourse not only helps us in unravelling the context in which it occurs but also helps to comprehend how the cultural context determines the linguistic choices made in the discourse
of advertising. Through the study of advertising discourse, an attempt has been made to discover how meaning-potential texts (both verbal and nonverbal) and society are dialectically produced, that is, how language and society shape each other.

This study critically analyses the advertising discourse to bring to light agendas which are not visible on the surface level. The market culture in general and advertising in particular are endowed with the objective of invoking, reinforcing and safeguarding the interests of the modern culture of consumption. The study of the advertising discourse, therefore, helps to decode the coded world views and the relations of power that naturalize certain behaviours and exclude others. The study also looks at how the concepts of power and ideology are symbolically negotiated for the maintenance of the capitalist relations of production, exchange and consumption of goods as well as meaning. The discourse of advertising, acts in covert and subtle ways, as status quo maintaining apparatus of the state by taking on ideological and hegemonic contingencies. Therefore, the study attempts to ascertain whether the advertising discourse participates in the activity of naturalizing the dominant ‘ways of seeing’ to protect the current socio-political ideologies of the capitalist market.

The advertising discourse is considered to be a one-sided communication process because the advertisers, supposedly, decides and then delivers the context and its meaning when presenting an advertisement. Advertising messages are intended to make the receivers notice and process these messages into positive inferences and stimulate or develop the interest of the target receiver in the advertised product. However, it may be observed that people are free to respond to these texts in their own way. As advertisements are directed towards the readers/viewers who are also potential consumers, their response to the advertisements or their side of communication with the advertisements, becomes equally important. Advertisers, therefore, try to control the meanings and the reactions that the recipients may have by using their insights into the prior knowledge of the audience, and by setting message parameters. Message recipients are then more likely to construct inferences and similar presuppositions, which results in readers perceiving them as the kind of realities that the advertisers intend. Advertising is a means to generate interest in products through which manufacturers try to alter the needs of consumers to suit their products. Advertisements so constructed work on implicature rather than state explicitly that people should buy their products. This indirect approach succeeds in influencing consumers more than the direct approach. This approach builds a need in the consumers which the product promoters promise to fulfil through their product.
Another strategic approach adopted by advertisers is to raise a problem for the consumers wherein they feel inadequate about what they have, what they are, and how they look. Advertisements offer a resolution of tensions, that is to say, a freedom from problems. This freedom comes to them by default on consumption of the advertised product. “Every time a tension differential is created, which leads to frustration and action, we can expect a product to overcome this tension by responding to the aspirations of the group. Then the product has a chance of success” (Poster, “Baudrillard and TV Ads: The Language of the Economy” 13).

This is observed especially in advertisements that promise to transform the consumers from their existing, undesirable state. The advertisements have solutions to the imaginary, hypothetical problems and promise to turn ‘an ugly duckling’ into a swan thus exploiting the ‘Cinderella myth.’ Advertising helps the advertisers to create a world which is not real but a simulation of the real – a hyper-real world in which people or potential consumers are made to become emotionally vulnerable due to their imagined physical inadequacies. Through the advertising discourse consumers are forced to constantly watch themselves for their imagined physical imperfections that they take for real and look for answers to their problems.

It also brings the argument to another important aspect of the analysis of advertising discourse i.e. to find out how close it is to reality. In the postmodern world and in the era of postmodern advertising, it is significant to point out that advertising discourse, to create consumption needs of people, is fast changing to suit the needs of time. Today advertising sells the public an image with the expectation that they will buy the proposed lifestyle not only because it will bring about some change in the way they live but also to persuade the public to think that the proposed lifestyle is what they ultimately desire. Advertising uses an unreal world to define in each person a character that he or she wishes to be – a model, an air hostess, an actor or a successful business icon. It will be therefore useful to analyse how advertisements influence readers/viewers through a linguistic construction of ‘hyper-reality’ (Baudrillard) which would highlight the deceptive nature of advertising discourse.

Data

For the analysis, eleven product advertisements published in the Indian print media (English magazines and newspapers) and appeared on the electronic media (TV) in the past ten years have been selected. The advertisements of beauty products, accessories, shampoos,
cars, clothes, household products that promote consumption with a promise to bring about some transformation or give solution to a problem have been taken up for the analysis.

Though the main focus of analysis is on the print advertisements, two electronic advertisements (television) have also been analysed in order to achieve a holistic picture of how advertisements work ideologically by constructing a reality through an intelligent use of the verbal and the visual which may appeal to the different ideological positions of readers and convert them into consumers. The selected advertisements have been taken from magazines in English and television (English) that have a wide readership/viewership and are generally targeted at men and women. Some of the advertisements discussed are instances of code mixing also. The bilingualism in advertisements adds to the appeal of advertisements especially the electronic ones. Such advertisements have been discussed in the thesis but not taken up for a detailed analysis. The analysis reveals the existing power relations and gender stereotypes prevalent in society on which the advertisements thrive in order to promote consumption.

Approach

For a critical analysis of the advertising discourse (CDA), an eclectic framework has been used as no single unified model of critical language studies may prove to be productive enough to understand the constitutive nature of language. Fairclough in his *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* maintains that there is no such thing as CDA. He explains that there is no single theory or method which is uniform and consistent throughout CDA. Weiss and Wodak observe that “the whole theoretical framework of CDA seems eclectic and unsystematic” (*Critical Discourse Analysis: Theory and Interdisciplinarity* 6). The reason for this could be, as Titscher et al point out, the fact that the concern of CDA is social rather than purely linguistic. They observe:

CDA is concerned with social problems. It is not concerned with language or language use per se, but with the linguistic character of social and cultural processes and structures. (*Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis* 146)

What is, therefore, most striking about CDA is its concern with social life and the part that discourse plays in it. CDA views language as social practice and social life can be seen as networks of diverse social practices that always include discourse. Fairclough (*Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* 231) argues that CDA developed as a response to the traditional divide between linguistics and areas of social science such as
sociology. While linguistics was primarily concerned about detailed analysis of texts and interactions or the interactional dimension of analysis, social science was concerned with the social practice and social change or the structural dimension. Fairclough, in his *Critical Discourse Analysis* (2010), points out that the CDA includes a combination of the interactional and the structural analysis of social life. Teun A. van Dijk in *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* also observes that CDA is concerned with social problems and may be considered to be a “discourse analysis with an attitude.” He goes on to say that “CDA does not deny, but explicitly defines and defends its own socio-political position. That is CDA is biased – and is proud of it” (96).

CDA aims at recognizing social problems that are mediated by mainstream ideology and power relationships, through the use of texts (both written text and oral speech) that people come across in their everyday lives. It aims to expose the hidden ideological assumptions that texts hold for the purpose of resisting and overcoming the inherent power relationships. Fairclough (*Discourse and Social Change*) asserts that CDA is a systematic investigation of covert relationships among discursive practices, texts, and events and wider social and cultural structures, relations, and processes and aims at finding how such opaque relationships methodically ensure power and hegemony, and also draws attention to the disparity in power-relations, social discriminations, non-democratic practices, and other biases with a hope to urging people to adopt remedial actions. As such, critical discourse analysis is acknowledged as a social research method which emphasises the systemic nature of social phenomena in order to reveal ideology at work, while also taking a position on its practical consequences. It, therefore, recommends itself as a methodology to explore and understand the discourse of advertising that urges people to consume and thereby construct subject positions for themselves. CDA tries to highlight ways in which the dominant forces in a society construct versions of reality that favour their interests. By unmasking such practices, CDA helps consumers discover the difference between the real world and the fake and how they are tricked into believing in the projected version of reality.

As mentioned earlier, the eclectic analytical framework of the study is based on Fairclough’s textually oriented discourse analysis (TODA) for developing which he draws on Foucault’s concept of language and power and Althusser’s ideological state apparatuses and interpellation; and Gramsci’s hegemony and the writings of Volosinov, Kristeva, Saussure, Searle, Austin, Pierce, Grice, Barthes, Halliday, Kress and Hodge, Teun van Dijk, Guy Cook and many other discourse analysts.
Structure

The thesis has six chapters followed by conclusion. The first chapter, entitled ‘Advertising Discourse and its Diverse Strategies: An Overview’ deals with advertising in general. It illustrates with examples the use of different persuasive strategies by the makers of advertisements to have the desired effect on the readers. These strategies include the use of verbal in conjunction with the visual. The chapter also discusses use of verbal and the non-verbal strategies such as images, the written text and also the intertextual strategies that advertising generally adopts in order to sound familiar to the audience. It discusses how advertising encourages consumerist activities by promoting the myths of beauty, femininity, masculinity and other such ideologies that are hand in glove with structures of power.

Chapter 2 entitled ‘Approaches to Discourse Analysis’ discusses the non-critical approaches to discourse and also the explanatory power of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a critical tool to unfold the hidden agendas of linguistic actions. The chapter introduces CDA as a way of doing discourse analysis to expose the ideologies and relations of power that go unnoticed in the advertising discourse. A detailed study of CDA has, however, been taken up in Chapter 3 wherein ensues a discussion on the concepts of ideology and power along with ways in which they are embedded in the forms of language use. By examining the discourse of advertising, an attempt has been made to discover the coded world views and relations of power that naturalize certain behaviours and exclude others. Chapter 3, which is entitled ‘Workings of Language and Ideology in CDA: An Eclectic Research Framework’ mainly discusses CDA as an analytical framework for the research. This chapter also discusses various concepts that have been used to critically analyse the selected advertisements and how they converge to reveal ideological underpinnings in advertisements and make CDA an effective research tool. Concepts such as nonverbal and verbal, semiotics, implicature, intertextuality, speech acts, hegemony, modality, transitivity, nominalization, presupposition, intertextuality and their role in CDA have been discussed at length.

Chapter 4 is entitled ‘Analysing Advertising Discourse: An Unconcealment’. It attempts an analysis of some selected advertisements from the Indian print media. It focuses on the analysis of texts, interplay between the verbal, the non-verbal and the visual and also its relation to ideology. It is an attempt to expose gender disparity and biases, objectification of women, power relations and hegemony. It shows how advertisements work towards maintaining the existing biases and disparities in society through carefully chosen discourse.
Chapter 5 is named as ‘Extending the Analysis: Focus on Stereotypes in the Discourse of Advertisements’. It revisits the stereotypes in advertisements. A few more advertisements have been taken for analysis with main emphasis on revealing how gender biases, stereotypes and objectification of women through public texts such as advertisements get naturalized and become part of the social psyche. Besides the analysis of the visual and the verbal elements, the chapter also uses transitivity analysis as one of the analytical tools. The main focus of analysis in this chapter is how as a result of invasive intervention of media discourse, such obvious gender inequalities rampant in society stop getting noticed and become part of the common sense of people. Chapter 6 is called ‘Television Advertisements through the Lens of Critical Discourse Analysis’. It looks at two TV advertisements in detail. The aim of this chapter is to show how television advertisements also perpetuate ideologies to promote stereotypes. Television being a different channel from the print media needs a different treatment. For a better comprehension of TV advertisements therefore the verbal transcripts along with the non-verbal elements of each shot have been provided in as Appendix 1 and Appendix 2, which have been interpreted and explained. The conclusion focusses on the findings of the research and highlights the use of critical discourse analysis in foregrounding the ideological function of advertisements.