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## STYLISTIC FOREGROUNDING IN THE LANGUAGE OF ADVERTISING

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### ABSTRACT

The language of advertising has often been characterised as loaded language with emotional and directive intent. In its powers of persuasion, it is foregrounded by its restricted variety of orthography, lexis and grammar. It is in advertising discourse that the stylistic concept of foregrounding is, perhaps, most exemplified. This paper studies the way in which peculiar patterns of rhetorical devices such as phonology, graphology, lexico-semantics and grammar are foregrounded in the language of advertising. The research is supported by the stylistic theory of foregrounding a Prague School of Poetics term translated from its Czech equivalent *aktualisace* (actualise) by Paul Garvin. It appraises the process of defamiliarisation of specific common rhetorical strategies such as rhyme, alliteration, assonance, consonance, spelling, capitalisation, puns, metaphor, hyperbole, imperatives, interrogatives, etc, in a list of twenty common advertising slogans. It observes that more than any other field of discourse, advertising, by its elliptical and non-formal language, seeking to appeal to a wide variety of audiences, most closely resembles spoken language. The study concludes by highlighting the remarkable paradox of creativity instantiated in the supposed deviations of language which effectively return this variety of written discourse to the norms of everyday spoken discourse, and, thus, establish closeness with consumers.

**Keywords:** Foregrounding, Advertising, Phonology, Graphology, Defamiliarisation, Metaphor

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Stylistics and Foregrounding

Stylistics is primarily the analysis of the language of texts. To undertake such an analysis, it often employs theoretical models from linguistics. As the linguistic study of style, its function is the descriptive potentiation not just of the processes through which texts of all kinds, including advertisements, project meaning, but also the instantiations of the cognitive manner by which the audience (readers and consumers) construct meaning as well as respond the way they do to these texts. The versatility of stylistics means that it

is characteristically and psychologically suited to the analysis of the language of a variety of disciplines, and for which endeavour it often has recourse to a variety of context dependent theories. Jeffries and McIntyre (2010, p.3) observe, for instance, that:

Stylistics draws upon theories and models from other fields more frequently than it develops its own unique theories. This is because it is at a point of confluence of many sub-disciplines of linguistics, and other disciplines but not seeking to duplicate or replace them.

This versatility, as well as the reference to psychology above, is especially apt for any discussions of the language of advertising, which thrives essentially on the cognitive processes of marketing discourse.

Thus, stylistics is about creativity in language use in, especially, literary works providing, according to Simpson (1992, p.48) as cited by Mills (1995, p.4), a window on the devices which characterise a particular work. But, as Simpson himself points out in a later publication, creativity and innovation in language use should not be seen as the exclusive preserve of literary writing. For, many forms of discourse (**advertising**, journalism, popular music – even casual conversation) often display a high degree of stylistic dexterity, such that it would be wrong to view dexterity in language use as exclusive to canonical literature (Simpson, 2007, p.3). It is instructive that for Simpson's instances of non-literary language, advertising tops the list. We see a similar opinion when Leech (2008, p.55) argues that:

The study of style is essentially the study of *variation* in the use of language. Over the whole range of language use, certain major parameters for classifying domains can be considered: e.g. the parameter of formality..., that of medium (especially spoken versus written language), and that of communicative function (**advertising**, scientific, legal, conversational use, etc.)

One of the most significant theories of stylistics on account of its emphasis on the figure/image and background matrix – a crucial feature of advertising discourse itself – is foregrounding. Foregrounding is basically the technique of deviating from the norm in which a piece is written (or spoken) often in order to draw attention to a specific property or a broad range of properties, as well as functions, of language itself. When foregrounding is employed, a writer or copy-writer deviates from the style in which the work as a whole is expected to be written or the rest of the work, as different from the earlier parts, is written. As a significant stylistic theory of writing, it is the style of making something – a sound, word, phrase, sentence, text, discourse, symbol, image, etc – stand out from the surrounding cotext, context,

images or text. It is a device employed to deautomatise (defamiliarise) everyday language. As Leech (1969) argues, it is a very general principle of artistic communication that a work of art in some way deviates from norms which we, as members of society, have learnt to expect in the medium used.

Based on the Russian Formalist notion that the very essence of poeticity lies in the deformation of the language, the term 'foregrounding' was introduced by Paul Garvin in 1964 (Wales, 2011,p.166) in translation from the Prague School term of the 1930s 'aktualisace' (actualisation). As a linguistic strategy, it draws attention to itself often shifting attention from what is said to how it is said. It is generally employed to highlight more important or significant parts of a text in order to aid memorability and, also, to invite various interpretations.

Several stylistic scholars have commented extensively on the character and uses of foregrounding. These scholars include Leech (1969), Douthwaite (2000), Leech and Short (2007), Simpson (2007), Leech (2008), Jeffries and McIntyre (2010), Wales (2011) and Abrams and Harpham (2012). Leech (1969), for instance, suggests that foregrounding 'invokes the analogy of a figure seen against a background', and goes on to say:

As a general rule, anyone who wishes to investigate the significance and value of a work of art must concentrate on the element of interest and surprise, rather than on the automatic pattern. Such deviations from linguistic or other socially accepted norms have been given the special name of 'foregrounding'.... The artistic deviation 'sticks out' from its background, the automatic system, like a figure in the foreground of the visual field.... The foregrounded figure is the linguistic deviation, and the background is the language – the system taken for granted in any talk of deviation' (p.57).

Conceding to the Czech scholar, Mukarovsky, that literature is distinguished by the 'consistency and systematic character of foregrounding', Leech argues that in non literary writing, foregrounding may be 'just as pervasive and as violent' (p.57).

According to Douthwaite (2000), cognitive psychology has proved that habituation in perception and comprehension being a normal human phenomenon, routinises life, and dulls the senses and the critical faculties. For this reason, he says, one way of combating habituation is to experience an entity in a novel fashion so that our attention is arrested, and our automatic mode of processing, as well as the standard response we produce to the familiar stimulus, is **impeded**, slowed down, surprised even. We are then obliged to examine the entity more closely and from a new perspective resulting in a new interpretation of reality. As Douthwaite explains it further, impeding normal processing by presenting the world in an unusual, unexpected or abnormal manner is referred to as defamiliarisation achieved by subverting the rules governing perception and behaviour. The **linguistic technique** employed in subverting the world in this manner is termed foregrounding (Douthwaite, 2000, p.178).

Leech and Short (2007) proffer interesting perspectives on foregrounding. Referring to it as artistically motivated deviation, they relate it closely to the psychological notions of deviance and prominence which, according to Halliday, are the phenomena of linguistic highlighting, whereby some linguistic feature stands out in some way. For them, therefore, foregrounding involves saying something in a new and creative way. It is the aesthetic exploitation of language in the form of 'surprising a reader into a fresh awareness of, and sensitivity to, the linguistic medium which is normally taken for granted as an "automatised" background of communication'. It may occur in 'the form of denying the normally expected clues of context and coherence' (pp.23-24).

Foregrounding may be qualitative, that is, deviation from the language code itself described by Leech and Short as deviation from a rule or convention of the language, for example. It may also be quantitative involving a deviation from some expected consistency or frequency. Leech and Short go on to distinguish foregrounding from normal stylistic variants by arguing that whereas normal stylistic variants contrast a stylistic effect or a style marker against a background of other equivalent

variants, that of foregrounding contrasts a stylistic effect against a background of more normal or expected expressions which could have occurred. They say that each foregrounding model provides 'a standard for comparing choices', so that differences of style can be registered.

The foregrounding model here characterises the special interpretative act undertaken in order to wrest the meaning from activities or utterances which would otherwise appear strange and arbitrary. Each occurrence of qualitative foregrounding provokes the reader or consumer to wonder precisely why the author or copy-writer has chosen to express himself or herself in one particular exceptional manner and not the other. Also, as Leech and Short point out, foregrounding, like most other style markers, can occur at different levels of the linguistic code: tropes, such as metaphor, being chiefly associated with category violations (syntax and semantics), and schemes being chiefly associated with structural patterns (syntax and phonology). Tropes, according to them, are therefore matters of content, whereas schemes are those of expression (Leech and Short, 2007, p.111).

Other scholars like Simpson (2007) see foregrounding as a form of textual patterning which is motivated specifically for literary aesthetic purposes. According to Simpson, it is capable of working at any level of language and typically involves a stylistic distortion of some sort, either through an aspect of the text which deviates from a linguistic norm or, alternatively, where an aspect of the text is brought to the fore through repetition or parallelism, in other words, foregrounding as 'deviation from the norm' and foregrounding as 'more of the same'. Thus, for him, it is essentially a technique for 'making strange' in language, a method of 'defamiliarisation' in textual composition.

One other point argued by Simpson in this review is that whether the foregrounded pattern deviates from the norm, or whether it replicates a pattern through parallelism, as a stylistic strategy, it should acquire salience in the act of calling attention to itself. It is not the simple by-product of any writer's idiosyncratic predilections in style. Simpson proceeds to state that the theory of foregrounding

raises many issues to do with the stylistic analysis of text such as its reliance on the concept of a 'norm' in language. The functional diversity of language makes it difficult to determine precisely what a 'normal' sentence in English is, for instance. Since the theory of foregrounding presupposes a notional yardstick in language against which stylistic features can be measured, this constitutes a problem. And then there is the question of what happens when a once deviant feature becomes established in the rest of the text. Would it still be an instance of foregrounding or it gradually merges with the background? (Simpson, 2007, pp.50-51).

Leech (2008) points out that 'deliberate linguistic "foregrounding" is not confined to creative writing, but is also found, for example in joking speech and children's games'. He goes on to re-echo Douthwaite's psychological characterisation of foregrounding by suggesting that 'the metaphorical term "foreground" suggests the figure/ground opposition of gestalt psychology: the patterns of normal language... providing a "background" for the structured deployment of deviations from the norm'. For Leech, therefore, foregrounding is a term for an effect brought about in the reader by linguistic or other forms of deviation which, being unexpected, comes to the foreground of the reader's attention as a 'deautomatization' of the normal linguistic processes. It invites an act of *imaginative interpretation* by the reader, provoking him or her to consciously or unconsciously wonder about, and make sense of, any perceived 'abnormality' (Leech, 2008, pp.18, 61).

On their part, Jeffries and McIntyre (2010, p.31) describe foregrounding in the following way:

Foregrounding was established early on by pioneers in the application of linguistics to literary analysis as the mechanism by which defamiliarisation takes place... although it is by no means absent in non-literary genres.... Foregrounding refers to features of the text which in some sense 'stand out' from their surroundings. The term itself is a metaphorical extension of the concept of foregrounding in the visual arts (e.g. painting and photography). Essentially, foregrounding theory suggests that in any

text some sounds, words, phrases and/or clauses may be so different from what surrounds them, or from some perceived 'norm' in the language generally, that they are set into relief by this difference and made more prominent as a result. Furthermore, the foregrounded features of a text are often seen as both memorable and highly interpretable. Foregrounding is achieved by either linguistic **deviation** or linguistic **parallelism**.

In foregrounding, we are invited to look for significance that goes beyond the surface level understanding. The phenomena of deviation and parallelism provide the most significant impact on stylistic foregrounding. As Jeffries and McIntyre go on to point out, whereas deviation is unexpected *irregularity* in language, parallelism is unexpected *regularity*, the other means by which foregrounding effects can be created in texts. In parallelism, the foregrounding effect arises from a repeated structure. But a problem arises in foregrounding, according to them, over the status of the large majority of the words of a text, which by definition are not foregrounded.

Still on the character of foregrounding, Wales (2011) observes that it is a popular term in stylistics which was introduced by P. L. Garvin (1964), and formed the basis of Mukarovsky's and Havranek's opinions that it was the function of poetic language 'to surprise the reader with a fresh and dynamic awareness of its linguistic medium, to de-automatise what was normally taken for granted, to exploit language aesthetically'. According to Wales, foregrounding refers to the 'throwing into relief' of the linguistic sign against the background of the norms of ordinary language. Continuing, she says that it is achieved by a variety of means grouped largely into two main categories, deviation and repetition; or **paradigmatic** and **syntagmatic** foregrounding respectively. Unusual metaphors or similes produce unexpected conjunctions of meaning, forcing fresh realisations in the reader or consumer, and this includes repetitive patterns (of sound or syntax) such as alliteration and parallelism which, by their over frequency, strike the reader's or

consumer's attention as unusual. Such devices, she adds, are not unknown, of course, in non-literary language such as **advertising**, jokes, oratory, etc (Wales, 2011, pp.166-167).

For Wales then, the fact that it is the reader/consumer whose conscious attention signals the perceptual prominence of the foregrounded features places the reader-response theory at a vantage position in foregrounding. It is, she argues further, interesting that reader-response studies appear to confirm that foregrounding increases interpretative salience and emotional effect, regardless of readers' training. She also alludes to the fact that the terms foregrounding and backgrounding are cognitive linguistic concepts analogous in visual arts to **figure** and **ground**: focused objects against background spaces, thwarting mental expectations and grabbing attention (p.167).

Finally, Abrams and Harpham (2012) aver that to foreground is to bring something into prominence, to make it dominant in perception, and that the primary aim of foregrounding is to **estrangle** or **defamiliarise** by disrupting the modes of ordinary linguistic discourse, making strange the world of everyday perception and renewing the reader's/ consumer's lost capacity for fresh sensation. The foregrounded properties (artistic devices) which estrange such language are, according to them, deviations from ordinary language, and such deviations consist basically in setting up, and afterward violating, patterns in the sound and syntax of discourse. These patterns include speech sounds, grammatical constructions, rhythm, rhyme, etc. An author, they say, is said to transform the raw material of a story into a literary plot by the use of a variety of devices that violate sequence and deform and defamiliarise the story elements with the effect being to foreground the narrative medium and devices themselves. The ultimate effect, then, is 'to disrupt and refresh what had been our standard responses to the subject matter' (Abrams and Harpham, 2012, pp.139-140).

From the foregoing, it is clear that in the theory of foregrounding, there is a fundamental opposition between specialised (literary or poetic) use of language and its literal (ordinary or practical)

use. The former is self focused in the sense that it does not necessarily convey a message or information by references to the extra linguistic world as the latter does. Rather, it characterises the special modes of experience by drawing attention to the formal features, qualities and internal relations of the linguistic items themselves. But the question arises: to which of the two functional categories does the language of advertising belong? Which of these two sets of functions does it perform and how does it perform those functions? These questions are taken up in the next sections of the study.

### 1.2 The Language of Advertising

Advertising refers to the creative linguistic endeavour in which information is presented in a series of short, catchy, attractive and mostly hyperbolic phrases, statements or even questions in order to help the addressee or customer to remember the key characteristics of a product, brand or even the campaign itself. The ultimate aim is, thus, to encourage the addressee to take action such as acquiring the advertised product. The creator of the advertisement is often referred to as a copy-writer, and the linguistic creativity often demonstrated in his craft is equivalent to that of any other work of imagination. Dyer (1995) defines it as the process of 'drawing attention to something or notifying somebody of something' (p.2) while Goddard (1998) says that 'adverts are texts that do their best to get our attention, to make us turn towards them' (p.17).

Globalisation and industrialisation have resulted in the massive production of goods and services internationally. Also, the massive vortex created by round-the-clock news about momentous events, as well as competing social media fora, all struggling for mankind's attention, has placed enormous distractive burdens on the global audience's attention. This has imperativised advertisements as a part of the global discourse especially for a truly international language such as English. This is why Russell (1996, p.176) states that the language of advertising is designed to grab and hold our attention, stamp a message on our minds and create images that will forge a link between our emotions and the products on offer. The challenge, thus, has always been how the copy-writer can grab



and hold the attention of the addressee and stamp the message on his or her mind. In order to achieve this, the copy-writer must deliberately devise and foreground several rhetorical linguistic strategies. More importantly for this study, the language of advertising instantiates cognitive linguistics because it thrives on psychology. It is basically emotional. It is dominated by rhetoric. Indeed, as Russell suggests further, 'truth is irrelevant in advertising' (p.180).

The creative potential of advertising discourse locates it in the realm of literary, figurative language. Yet in its structure, it almost always attempts to reproduce ordinary, practical spoken discourse by its persistent preference for the conversational style. It does this, as Goddard (1998, p.123) suggests, in order to recreate the elliptical nature of spoken language and, thus, establish closeness with the addressee. In fact, David Ogilvy cited in Russell (1996,p.176), specifically urges advertising copy-writers to write their advertisements 'in the kind of colloquial language used by their customers in everyday conversation'. Pretentious words such as *obsolete*, he says, go over the heads of many people, and that every word, especially those in the headline or slogan introducing the advertisement, must impact the readers'/viewers' minds and make them want to buy. For Jeffries and McIntyre (2010), 'the more obvious uses of semantic foregrounding tend to occur in advertising campaigns' (p.58).

There are generally a number of linguistic characteristics often foregrounded in advertising discourse. Schaffner (2001, p.213) and Goddard (2003, pp.30-31) identify some of them to include imitation of spoken language; short elliptical sentences; positive evaluative expressions and an abundance of stylistic devices affecting the audience such as alliterations, rhyme, proverbs, puns, metaphors, etc. Metaphors, for instance, find a pride of place in virtually all advertisements, as they are, in the words of Leech (1972), usually suggestive of 'the right kind of emotive associations for the product' (p.182). Yet Russell appears to disagree somewhat with this assertion when she posits that 'metaphor demands imagination on the part of the ordinary consumer... and is usually replaced by easier, visual, images', despite having

earlier conceded that copy-writers occasionally use metaphor to create the kind of emotional associations they want to implant in our minds' (Russell, 1996, p.178).

The constituents of a typical advertisement often include headlines, slogans, subheads, illustrations, main text, blurbs, panels, identification tags and closing ideas. Of these, however, the most important to the consumer or addressee as the copy-writer knows are the headlines and the slogans which must strike the reader first. The headlines are the words which summarise and lead the principal notion of an advertisement. In most cases, the majority of readers do not go further than reading these headlines. And for the slogans, according to Trehan and Trehan (2006), these are simple phrases or catchy sentences which are easy to remember, 'sweet, easily pronounceable and pleasing to the ear', increasing the memory value of advertisements and acting like the headlines (p.123). A slogan is, therefore, a memorable phrase associated with an advertised product which makes a key point about the company's image to the customer.

Some of the qualities of a successful advertisement are the recourse to unconventional language to be in the limelight, euphony and memorability which sustain consumer interest and the perlocutionary force which compels the customer to purchase and even promote the advertised product. In order to achieve this, copy-writers frequently break linguistic rules whenever they so wish on the grounds, as argued by Russell (1996), that 'it is sometimes necessary to do something "wrong" in order to get it "right"'. Here is an account of the copy-writer as reported by Russell:

His writing style is unlike any other. He seldom writes complete grammatical sentences, but uses words and punctuation and their typographical presentation like a painter uses colours and shapes. He can write a one-word one-sentence paragraph that grips the reader's interest and desire. He can virtually mutilate the English language for effect. He can write a thousand words and make every word count (Frank Jeffkins in Russell, 1996, p.171).

Furthermore, advertisers employ journalistic techniques of treating nominals as though they were adjectivals. And so we come across compound nominals/adjectivals foregrounded such as *jelly-addict*, *man appeal*, *coffee-fresh*, *fresh-roasted*, *fast-foaming*, *jaw-dropping*, *one-action-cleaner*, as well as other attention-grabbing lexical items such as *How to*, *Introducing*, *Improvement*, *Revolutionary*, *Offer*, *Challenge*, *Bargain*, *It's here*, *Amazing*, *Quick*, *Hurry*, *Now*, *Just arrived*, *Sensational*, *Miracle*, *Easy*, *Last chance*, *Announcing*, *Remarkable*, *Magic*, *Wanted*, *Compare*, *Fabulous*, etc. Thus, the sum of our argument is that advertising copy-writers employ a chatty, friendly, 'neighbourly', tone to tell their audience what to think and do, and they often do this by foregrounding some of the most imaginative features of the English language. These features are formally and broadly classified into phonological (rhyme, alliteration, consonance and repetition), graphological (capitalisation, bolding and spelling), lexico-semantic (metaphor, hyperbole, pun and antithesis) and grammatical (affixation, imperatives, interrogatives and parataxis) levels. In the next section, the study exemplifies these foregrounded features in a selection of twenty common advertisements.

### 1.3 Foregrounded Features of Advertisements

In this section, the paper studies the foregrounded linguistic features in a list of advertisements/slogans. The slogans, which are arranged alphabetically, are as follows:

1. **Airtel:**The SMARTPHONE network
2. **Anthisan:** (Bite and Sting Cream): Anthisan Bite & Sting cream helps relieve the symptoms of insect bites, stings and nettle rash, allowing you to get on with your day – don't leave home without it.
3. **Bic Lighter:** Flick your Bic when I wanna call my chick all I do is flick my Bic.
4. **Bounty:** The Taste of Paradise
5. **Colgate:** It cleans your breath while it cleans your teeth Unleash an intense rush of freshness.
6. **Energizer Battery:** It keeps going, and going, and going

7. **Esso Petrol:** Put a tiger in your tank
8. **Ford:** Everything We Do Is Driven By You
9. **Gillette:** Gillette The Best a man can get
10. **Glo:** Glo with pride Grandmasters of Data
11. **Harp Lager Beer:** sHARPenS
12. **Head and Shoulders:** Dandruff? Sensitive skin? Let the new Head & Shoulders Sensitive take care of your scalp
13. **Honda Civic:** Better gas mileage. A Civic Responsibility
14. **Irish Cream:** Be a woman for a cause Not for applause
15. **KitKat:** Have a break, have a KitKat
16. **Nokia:** Connecting people
17. **Palmolive:** Brings back that school girl complexion
18. **Panadol:** Tough on pain, easy on you
19. **Seven Up:** Freshen Up With 7-Up
20. **Volkswagen:** Trust Volkswagen to put a spoiler where no one can see it. Will we never learn that cars are male virility symbols? That spoilers should jut out the back looking mucho macho? Frankly, gentlemen, isn't that what the ladies really look for in a virility symbol?

#### 1.3.1 Phonological Foregrounding

Phonological features refer to sound devices. It is often useful for the study of linguistic features to commence at the phonological level where possible since speech is often considered the primary medium. The most commonly foregrounded phonological features in advertising discourse, as mentioned earlier, are rhyme, alliteration, consonance and repetition.

##### a) Rhyme

Rhyme is the correspondence between the nucleus (vowel) and coda (final consonant) of two or more words mostly at the end of lines of verse (end rhyme) or sometimes within the same line (internal rhyme). Wales (2011) describes it as a kind of phonetic echo, a phonemic matching, and proceeds to refer to it as 'two units matched by identical sequences of sounds stretching from the vowel (usually stressed) to the end of the word, with the initial sound (i.e. onset) varied' (p.371). For Jeffries

and McIntyre (2010), rhyme 'most typically occurs when there are two (or more) words which end with a stressed syllable, where the vowel and the final consonant(s) are the same' (pp.38-39). It is most probably the most memorable and, thus, the most foregrounded sound device employed in the introduction of a brand name in advertising. It effectuates better memorisation of the product on offer because it continues to resonate phonetically in the consumer's mind long after the advertisement has ended. It is indeed in rhyme that advertising most resembles poetry underscoring its literariness.

The slogans in texts **3**, **8**, **9**, **14** and **19** exemplify the use of rhyme to attract attention in advertising. We have in:

**3. Bic Lighter:** Flick your **Bic**  
When I wanna call my **chick**  
All I do is flick my **Bic**

a correspondence between the nucleus and coda /ɪk/ in the words 'flick', 'Bic' and 'chick', and it is this phonological correspondence which occurs both internally ('flick' and 'bic') and finally ('Bic', 'chick' and 'Bic') that the audience most recalls about the slogan. The short vowel monophthong /ɪ/ and the final voiceless velar stop /k/ combine to provide a memorable 'phonetic echo' and 'phonemic matching' of the sound made by the lighter as it is depressed to produce flame. Thus, these sounds are deliberately foregrounded by the copy-writer to grab the consumer's attention. Slogans thrive on this kind of phonological effect, and we see more examples in the following:

**8. Ford: Everything We Do**  
Is Driven by **You**

Here, the rhyme is foregrounded by the nucleus /u:/ in the words 'Do' and 'You'. Indeed, the strong vowels in the two stressed syllables 'Do' and 'you' strike the consumer first, and reinforce the pun which is inherent in the lexical items 'do' and 'driven', i.e. 'we make the car, you drive it' and 'you make us make the car/we make the car because of you'.

In text **9. Gillette:Gillette**

The **Best** a man can **get**  
the rhyme is obtained from the nucleus /e/ and the coda /t/ in the second syllable of the word 'Gillette' and the monosyllable 'get'. Again, the distinctive

fortis quality of the /et/ foregrounds not only the sharp edge of the shaving equipment but also its superlative quality which is reinforced by the /e/ in the word 'Best' in the minds of the consumers. Text

**14. Irish Cream** says:

Be a woman for a **cause**  
Not for **applause**

from which the reader cannot fail to be arrested by the /ɔ:z/ rhyme in the foregrounded words. Here again, the rhyme clearly dominates the entire textual background enabling its memorability as well as the positive decision of the customer. Sometimes, the rhyme may be feminine, deriving from unstressed, polysyllabic words such as in slogan **19**.

**Seven Up:**

**Freshen Up**

**7-Up**

The unstressed syllables in the words 'freshen' and 'seven', which consist of the syllabic nasal /n/, combine with the particle 'up' to produce the foregrounded rhyme.

Sometimes, also, variations on the full rhyme, often referred to as half rhyme, are foregrounded in the identity between the coda of the two or more syllables and a different nucleus in each syllable. This is exemplified in text **5. Colgate** in the words 'breath' and 'teeth' which foreground the final voiceless dental fricative /θ/, when the onsets in both words /br/ and /t/, as well as the nucleus /e/ and /i:/ are different. Thus, the phoneme /θ/ sticks out as the foregrounded element in an automatic background of their respective onsets and nucleus in particular, and the rest of the slogan, in general. More importantly, the foregrounding of the sound in the two words effectuates a revelation of the reader's dentition as his/her lips must part to reveal the teeth – an integral part of the copy-writer's message – while reading out the advertisement.

**b) Alliteration**

This is the recurrence of a particular initial consonant in several words in a slogan. As a deliberate phonological device, it is, as Wales (2011) suggests, associated primarily with literary (poetic) language. But it is often a foregrounded feature of advertising discourse in which it is usually employed for emphasis and to aid the memory. In the



following texts, the alliteration foregrounds the most important descriptive information in each slogan, sometimes alliterating with its brand name:

**5. Colgate:** cleans /k/ (brand name)

**7. Esso Petrol:** tiger... tank /t/

**10. Glo:** Grandmasters /g/ (brand name)

**12. Head and shoulders:** Sensitive Skin /s/

**17. Palmolive:** Brings back /b/

**20. Volkswagen:** virility /v/ (brand name)

As Myers (1997) observes, alliteration in advertising with its similarity in sound often accents the dissimilarity in meaning making the listener more conscious of the contrast in the process.

### c) Consonance and Assonance

Consonance and assonance are species of half rhyme similar to alliteration. The former occurs when final (coda) consonants or indeed prominent consonants in any position (word-initial, syllable-initial or word-final) are repeated elsewhere in succeeding words with variations in the nucleus (vowel). This is the definition favoured by Cuddon (1999, p.176) but which Leech (1969) refers to as pararhyme, and other scholars characterise as apophony. The latter is a recurrence of the (stressed) nucleus but with different final and/or initial consonants flanking it in several words. These two phonological features are foregrounded in the following texts.

**5. Colgate:** unleash... rush... freshness// (consonance)

cleans...while...unleash/l/ (consonance)

cleans... teeth /i:/ (assonance)

**9. Gillette:**Gillette...best... get /e / (assonance)

**15. KitKat:**break... KitKat /k/ (consonance)

**18. Panadol:**Panadol... on /ɒ/ (assonance)

The qualities of these brands are foregrounded in these phonological devices.

Apart from these specific instances of phonological recurrence, general lexical repetition involves the recurrence of any linguistic item, and this is also an instance of deliberate phonological foregrounding on the part of the copy-writers in the sense that the repetition creates rhythm. In the following texts, repetition is for the purpose of emphasis and memorability.

**5. Colgate:** It, cleans, your

**6. Energizer battery:** going, and

**12. Head and shoulders:** sensitive

**14. Irish Cream:** a, for

**15. KitKat:** have, a

**18. Panadol:** on

**20. Volkswagen:** that, virility, symbol(s)

### 1.3.2 Graphological Foregrounding

Graphological features are the written equivalent of phonological features in speech. Graphology is often conveyed through the visual medium rather than the aural, and in advertising, foregrounding occurs most especially in lettering (capitalisation and bolding), as well as spelling and images. In all cases, the writing format is designed to stick out from the automatic background and arrest the reader's attention. For instance, in text **11**:

**Harp Lager Beer:** sHARPenS

The variation in the graphic medium communicates the entire message of the advertisement. In the slogan, the only clue that the consumer has of this message is in the upper case letters that spell the name of the brand 'HARP' flanked by lower case letters. And these tell the consumer that a drink of Harp beer sharpens the mind. As a rhetorical aid to the advertisement, it does not matter whether the information is completely true or not, for, as indicated earlier in the quoted opinion of Russell (1996), truth is irrelevant in advertising.

Sometimes, the upper case foregrounding functions to call attention to morpho-phonemic emphasis, and we see this in text **15. KitKat** in which the reduplicative and emphatic pronunciation of the two syllables of the brand name is indicated by upper case letters for the 'k'. In text **1. Airtel:** the **SMARTPHONE** network, the word 'smartphone' is foregrounded by bolding, a feature which contrasts sharply with the fact that the name of the brand is rendered in only initial capital. This is supposed to pointedly direct the attention of all smartphone users to the Airtel network.

### 1.3.3 Lexico-semantic Foregrounding

As may have become apparent, lexico-semantic features refer to the choice of words, as well as the large questions of meaning and context. The most commonly foregrounded features under this level in advertising, as indicated already, are, by far, metaphor, hyperbole and pun.

**a) Metaphor**

The metaphor is a favourite rhetorical trope of advertisers chiefly on account of the implicit nature of its comparison. Indeed, metaphor is often employed as a very general label for different kinds of figurative meaning including metonymy and synecdoche. As Wales (2011) posits, when words are used in a specific metaphorical sense, one field or domain of reference is carried over or mapped onto another on the basis of some perceived similarity between the two fields. Specifically, Leech (1972) describes metaphors as invaluable to advertising discourse because they suggest the right kind of emotive associations for the product. Also, Simpson (2007) defines it as a process of mapping two different conceptual domains, namely, the *target* domain and the *source* domain. The target domain, he says, is the topic or concept to be described through the metaphor while the source domain refers to the concept drawn upon to create the metaphorical construction.

In advertising discourse, it is the perceived similarity between the advertised product (target) and the entity to which it is compared (source) which forms the basis of lexico-semantic foregrounding. In the following advertisements, the predominant rhetorical device foregrounded is the metaphor.

- 1. **Airtel** ———> SMARTPHONE
- 4. **Bounty** ———> Paradise
- 7. **Esso Petrol** ———> tiger
- 10. **Glo** ———> Grandmasters
- 15. **KitKat** ———> break
- 17. **Palmolive** ———> school girl complexion
- 20. **Volkswagen** ———> male virility

In each case of foregrounding, the source domain (on the right) carries with it positive connotations, somewhat hyperbolic, to characterise the target domain (on the left). Thus, for instance, the Airtel network, the Glo network, Bounty Chocolate Bar, Esso Petrol and Palmolive are implicitly characterised by the superlative excellent qualities inherent in the smartphone (can do almost anything); grandmasters (players/exponents of the highest quality); paradise (perfect situation or place); tiger (fierce, determined, ambitious or

dynamic force); and school girl complexion (fresh, young and beautiful) respectively.

What the copy-writers try to achieve here is to associate, in the consumer's mind, each product with these desirable qualities until the consumer begins to cognitively perceive not just the product advertised but also the desired quality foregrounded. The metaphors are employed, as Russell (1996) agrees, to build bridges in the consumer's minds between the product and the highly desirable person, object or situation to which buying it will lead. And in doing this, a good many of the metaphors incorporate metonymy which, in slight contrast to metaphor, is based on a semantic transfer within a single conceptual domain.

**b) Hyperbole**

As already hinted above, a good number of the slogans simultaneously foreground the tropes of metaphor and hyperbole. Hyperbole occurs in deliberate overstatement or extra vagantex aggeration for rhetorical purposes. In the texts, hyperbole is foregrounded mostly in the superlative description of the brand such as 'grandmasters' for **Glo**; 'paradise' for **Bounty**; 'tiger' for **Esso**; 'school girl complexion' for **Palmolive**; 'the best' for **Gillette**; and 'sharpens' for **Harp**. When the copy-writer characterises the **Honda Civic** as 'Better gas mileage' and 'A Civic Responsibility', the question can be asked: 'Better than what?' The answer, of course, is that in petrol consumption, the Honda Civic is better than all other brands of cars, and so it is an obligation on the part of all citizens (civic responsibility) to acquire it. It is, of course, a moot point whether all consumers or addressees always recognise the exaggerations inherent in such advertisements before making a decision about the product.

**c) Pun**

As a trope which involves a play on the meaning of words, the pun is employed sparingly by copy-writers for fear of unintended ambiguities. Indeed, as Russell (1996) puts it, David Ogilvy advises against puns on the grounds that 'anything too clever in an advertisement distracts attention to itself and away from the product (p.179). Russell herself states that 'puns are comparatively rare' in advertisements because 'ads have to appeal to our

lower drives and desires rather than to our intellectual centres'. Still, there is in the selected texts evidence of exploited lexical ambiguities foregrounded in the words 'civic' and 'break' in:

**13. Honda Civic:** ...a Civic Responsibility

and **15. KitKat:** Have a break. Have a Kitkat

The ambiguity in **13** has already been explained in the preceding section, but in **15** there are at least three lexico-semantic variations which are foregrounded, namely, 'a cut of the product to eat' (break), 'a period of rest/recreation' (break) and 'a change in fortunes' (break), all of which must be the consequences of 'having a KitKat'.

**d) Antithesis**

Antithesis contrasts ideas by juxtaposing them in a parallel order. In an antithesis, a positive idea may be placed side by side with a negative one in order to underscore the importance or effect of the positive. Abrams and Harpham (2012, p.15) describe it as 'a contrast or opposition in the meanings of contiguous phrases or clauses that manifest parallelism'. Wales (2011, p.25) says that it 'effectively contrasts ideas by contrasting lexical items in a formal structure of parallelism'. Antithesis is foregrounded in the following texts:

**8. Ford:** Everything We Do  
Is Driven By You

**14. Irish Cream:** Be a woman for a  
cause  
Not for applause

**18. Panadol:** Tough on pain, easy on  
you

In each case, the foregrounding occurs in the way in which the second parallel structure – 'is Driven By You', 'Not for applause' and 'easy on you' – contrasts with the first, and thus setting it off as the focus of the slogan.

**1.3.4 Grammatical Foregrounding**

The underlying principle behind the grammar of advertising discourse is brevity and ease of communication, i.e. colloquialism. The copy-writer's goal is to reach the greatest number of prospective consumers within the shortest possible period, and to achieve this, he or she is often compelled to dispense with cumbersome and pedantic grammatical rules concerning word formation (morphology) and word combination

(syntax) processes in the English language. This is often most noticeable in affixation, word classes, phrases, parataxis, imperatives and interrogatives.

**a) Affixation**

Morphologically, words in advertising discourse often imitate the short, everyday word corpus of speech, consisting chiefly in monosyllabic stems such as:

do, you, flick, chick, taste, clean, teeth, breath, put, best, get, have, cause, new, take, care, tough, etc

However, often, derived or inflected expressions are no more than the simple present and present participle tense affixation which indicates the continuity in the present of the positive quality of the brand. Copy-writers reinforce this impression with the simple present/present continuous affixation that the benefits derivable from the product are continuous, long lasting and infinite. That is why the following tense inflections are foregrounded in some of the texts as follows:

**2. Anthisan:** help(s), allow(ing)

**5. Colgate:** clean(s)

**6. Energizer Battery:** keep(s), go(ing)

**11. Harp Lager Beer:** sHARPen(s)

**16. Nokia:** Connect(ing)

**17. Palmolive:** Bring(s)

This minimal affixation ensures that the message of each slogan hits home with very minimal impediment to the consumer's comprehension. The same principle is observed in pluralisation which is restricted to the regular Anglo-Saxon affixation 's' in the following examples:

**2. Anthisan:** symptom(s)

**10. Glo:** Grandmaster(s)

**20. Volkswagen:** car(s), symbol(s), spoiler(s), lad(ies)

Greek and Latinate affixation have no place in advertising morphology.

**b) Word Classes**

Nominals, adjectives and verbs clearly dominate the word classes of advertising discourse for obvious reasons. Nominals foreground the brand name, adjectives with their corresponding superlatives characterise the quality of the brand, and verbs suggest for the consumer the action to

take. And so in the selected slogans, we have the following:

**nominals** (smartphone, network, cream, taste, paradise, man, woman, people, data, cause, school girl, complexion

pain, applause, cars, virility, pride, etc.)

**adjectives** (intense, best, new, sensitive, better, civic, tough, easy, etc.)

**verbs** (helps, get, don't, leave, flick, call, cleans, unleash,

put, do, keeps, Glo, sharpens, take, be, have,

connecting, brings, freshen, trust, learn, look, etc.)

**c) Phrases and Minor Sentences**

Syntactically, the sentences of most advertising slogans are often dominated by short, minor, paratactic, imperative and, sometimes, interrogative structures. Russell (1996, pp.99-100) points out that 'copy-writers can happily use incomplete sentences... fracture conventional sentence structure... deliberately ignore the rule that a dependent clause cannot stand alone... and leave it to masquerade as a sentence in its own right'. This assertion that advertisers have little patience for complete sentences but rather a preference for slogans which foreground short descriptive phrases is exemplified in the following texts:

1. **Airtel:** the **SMARTPHONE** network

9. **Gillette:** the Best a man can get

10. **Glo:** Grandmasters of Data

11. **Harp Lager Beer:** SHARPens

13. **Honda Civic:** Better Gas Mileage. A

Civic Responsibility

14. **Irish Cream:** Be a woman for a cause, not for applause

16. **Nokia:** Connecting people

17. **Palmolive:** Brings back that school girl complexion

18. **Panadol:** Tough on pain, easy on you

Texts **1, 9, 10, 13,** and **18** are nominal groups with varying **modifier, headword** and **qualifier (m h q)** structures as follows:

1. **m** = the **m** = smartphone **h** = network

9. **m** = the **h** = best **q** = a man can get

10. **h** = Grandmasters **q** = of data

13. **m** = Better, **Am** = gas, **civich** = mileage, responsibility

18. **h** = Tough, easy **q** = on pain, on you

while texts **11, 14, 16** and **17** exemplify minor sentences whose subject constituents, presumably the pronouns 'it' and 'you', have been omitted, thus foregrounding the predicator (verb), which is the copy-writer's goal for the consumer.

**d) Parataxis, Imperatives and Interrogatives**

Parataxis occurs when clauses are linked chiefly by juxtaposition, rather than by explicit subordination which is known as hypotaxis, or coordination, although some writers like Fowler (1996), according to Wales (2011, p.303), include coordination under parataxis. Imperatives are typically sentences which contain a form of the verb predicator marked by no special grammatical suffix of any kind and the absence of an overt subject, which is usually understood to be the pronoun 'you'. They are often used with the illocutionary force of directives i.e. commands or requests, but in advertising discourse, imperatives are rarely employed as commands, polite persuasion being the imperative of choice for the copy-writer. Similarly, interrogative sentences, especially open interrogatives requiring a direct verbal response from the consumer, are rare in advertising. Whenever an interrogative occurs in an advertisement it often has the illocutionary force of a declarative, for instance a rhetorical question.

As we have in effect observed in the section on antithesis, texts **8, 10, 13, 14, 15** and **18** contain paratactic structures exemplified by the parallel juxtaposition of short phrases and clauses:

**10.** Glo with pride/Grandmasters of Data

**13.** Better Gas Mileage/A Civic Responsibility

**14.** Be a woman for a cause/Not for applause

**15.** Have a break/Have a KitKat

**18.** Tough on pain/easy on you

On the other hand, examples of imperatives include:

**3.** Flick you Bic (**PC**)

**7.** Put a tiger in you tank (**PCA**)

**10.** Glo with pride (**PA**)

12. Let the new Head & Shoulders Sensitive take care of your scalp. (PCPC)

14. Be a woman for a cause, not for applause (PCAA)

15. Have a break, have a KitKat (PC, PC)

19. Freshen Up With 7-Up (PA)

20. Trust Volkswagen to put a spoiler where no one can see it. (PCA)

where **P** represents predicator (verb); **C**, complement; and **A**, adjunct, showing clearly the absence of the **S**, subject element understood to be the pronoun 'you'.

Texts 12 and 20 foreground instances of interrogatives employed with declarative illocutionary force:

12. Dandruff? Sensitive Skin? (If you have dandruff and sensitive skin, try Head and Shoulders Sensitive).

20. Will we never learn that cars are male virility symbols ...virility symbol? (The Volkswagen car is a male virility symbol because it is what ladies want).

Thus, advertising discourse as seen in these texts is dominated by sentences in the indicative and imperative moods. It is also important to point out that all slogans are usually in the active voice eschewing passive constructions. The reason is that the logical subject of the predicator of each sentence (the brand or the addressee) is an important part of the information foregrounded in the advertisement, even by ellipsis in the case of 'you'. And passive constructions which omit this information, negate this goal of the advertisers. Yet an exception occurs in text 8:

**Ford:** Everything We Do Is Driven By You in which the passive voice occurs only as the second parallel adjunct constituent.

#### 1.4 Conclusion

Foregrounding is the meeting point between stylistics and advertising discourse because it enables the deliberate contemplation of formal linguistic features in themselves. As this paper has revealed, the language of advertising demonstrates the kind of rhetorical creativity whose features stick out like an image in the automatic background of the expected cues of the English language. These include, at the phonological level, patterned sound

devices such as rhyme and alliteration which ring in the consumer's ears long after the slogan has ceased; and at the graphological level, arresting symbols such as capitalisation and embolding which transcribe the advertised ideals into the written medium for the consumer's sight.

Other features of advertising discourse are, at the lexico-semantic level, metaphorical and hyperbolic comparisons mapped from ideals and entities of the highest qualities onto product brands whose purchase the consumer is advised to undertake, and, at the grammatical level, colloquial word formation and combination devices designed to appeal to the 'less intellectual desires' of customers. These features collectively function to reveal that the products on offer are the ultimate solution to the specific problems of the consumer. Since every advertisement seeks to appeal to the widest variety of audiences, the foregrounded features of the data selected for this study highlight the paradox of creativity instantiated in the linguistic deviations. By emulating how people speak at large, the language of advertising, which is essentially a complex medium (aural and visual), establishes remarkable closeness with the consumer, and so illustrates a paradox.

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