

# **Euphemism as A Persuasive Advertising Strategy**

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## ***Abstract***

Understanding advertising as a communication process built through persuasive strategies, this work aims to analyze euphemisms, a strategy frequently used in current advertising texts. In this sense, the reasons why this verbal appeal persuades the target audience, as well as why it leads to the buying action, are analyzed. To illustrate the placements, two advertising pieces are used as examples, in order to deduce the facts established throughout the study. It has been found that euphemisms correspond to a persuasive strategy of great utility to attenuate unpleasant expressions and, therefore, avoid situations embarrassing to the target public of the message.

**Keywords:** advertising, euphemism, persuasion

## **Introduction**

More than a large-scale production industry, advertising is the factor that allows us to understand what makes us part of a community and how we should act in it that is; we create our identity from the framework of a common culture that set forth to us. Thus, we accept as ours the precepts presented by the advertisers, since they dominate the cultural and media scene dictating the subjects that must be discussed and the way each individual should stand before the established propositions, demonstrating own agenda of the subjects that must be discussed in society.

The effects of the meaning of the advertising discourse aim, to some extent, to exert a dominion of the real. Through this we construct a parallel universe of suggestions and interpretations, using various voices and senses since language moves fundamentally through polysemic processes (Falkum, 2015). From publicity that reaches high recall, which makes history by innovating in attitudes and concepts, we put in check traditional values and we begin to structure new principles.

In this sense, the advertising message shows an unprecedented strength. It seeks essentially to build a positive and favorable image of the product and/or brand with the recipient (target audience), creating consumer habits in this, through the aspirations and desires that have and also identifies gifts

in the advertised product. The connection between the advertised product, the message that transmits it and the recipient that will receive this information is made fundamentally through the communication process, which integrates the persuasive dimension of advertising par excellence. Persuasion is a synergistic force that exerts power over the recipient - usually implicitly - leading him to take a stand and/or perform an attitude.

Thinking about persuasion through the strategies that constitute it within advertising pieces, we propose here to analyze a persuasive element recurrent in the contemporary advertising text: the euphemisms. We will discuss the ways in which euphemisms, in the composition of the set of strategies of the message, persuade the target audience and induce a purchase action, since it is a verbal resource very useful to block unspeakable words and repudiates, and consequently avoid unpleasant situations to which the message is addressed.

As a basis for the propositions, we will first characterize the communication and the parameters that include advertising as a communicational process. Next, we will theorize about persuasion and how it develops in the advertising context, and then discuss the importance of the lexical work in the composition of the advertising message and its implications in the public's conviction; the definition and characterization of euphemism, the basic element of this analysis and the component of lexical choice, will be dealt with in a special item. In a second section, two advertisements will be analyzed, trying to identify which expressions are being suppressed by the use of euphemisms and the persuasive implications that this exchange of meanings generates in the target audiences.

## **Literature Review**

We know that when a text is created and uttered, it is free from any naturalness or innocence. The speeches indicate much more than information on the subject treated and also ways of conceiving and presenting the worldview of the speaker and which ideological principles are followed. Thus, it is evident that a certain form of language is not only a means by which knowledge is transmitted (Bandura, 1989); it is also the space where ideas and precepts are present and have a total capacity of expression.

Thus, it is verified that every act of language, regardless of the dimension it possesses, acquires meaning in a communicational circumstance. As Kecskes (2010) points out that to evaluate an act of language it is necessary to verify the situation in which it is used and the positions occupied by the communicants. The communicational circumstance is the space where the constraints and obligations that define the values of linguistic exchange are established. The limitations occur due to the understanding of the communicative purpose, the character of the identities of the

communicants, the socio-cultural and economic situation in which they are and what is going to be said. Therefore, the act of language can be understood as a phenomenon that includes speaking and doing.

In this way, it is understood that communication takes place between the people who make it, and not in them or on them. To communicate at the human level is to establish a relationship between one person and another through a material medium commonly called a message, which implies the representations of the communicating subject. That is, communication presupposes finding the other, but it will only meet what is meaningful to it, something that contemplates its needs, thoughts, and desires. Therefore, it can be understood that every message has a persuasive and intentional character (Marková, 2008) since we need to adjust it according to the needs of the interlocutor to approach it and carry out a communicational act.

One of the great phenomena that construct the messages using these precepts is the publicity, composed entirely by the persuasive language, since it has as purpose to persuade the recipient to accept and to want what is being announced, making that the expectations that it has are all reunited in what is intended to be sold. As persuasion is the "touchstone" of communicational acts, especially of advertising, it can be said that persuasion is the decision or the adoption of an idea or attitude by the subjective recognition of the value of the message or object, according to the criteria themselves. There is only persuasion in subjective personal adhesion to the proposed value, and there is no persuasion where there is no subjective object evaluation space (Marková, 2008).

Thinking about persuasion within advertising and marketing, we can understand it as a discursive, sometimes argumentative, way that seeks to structure the message in such a way as to solidify or change the expectations of those who intend to reach, considering reciprocity in the relationship of communicators. However, we should not confuse it with manipulation, since persuading implies giving choices of choice to the receiver, discourse in favor of an option; manipulating presupposes forging the argument, indicating that there is only one way forward (Johannessen, 2010).

It should be noted that the use of persuasion in advertising is based on two essential elements of communication as a whole: the linguistic and the iconic (Zueva, 2016). The presence of the linguistic elements occurs through the discursive and argumentative power of the verbal signs, resorting to structures that actually materialize the persuasion. The iconic elements or the imagery strengthens the linguistic symbols, giving support to the advertising text. The conjunction of the verbal and visual message is the basic concept for understanding the functioning of advertising persuasion.

Persuasion gains strength through these elements to the point of establishing itself in all processes of human interaction, with advertising being the place where it has a greater commitment since the advertising communication needs to arouse the interest of the public and conquer it. Thus, it is sought to formulate strategies that make the interlocutor voluntarily accept what is proposed to him, mainly to have desires to satisfy, because it is through these that the publicity seduction becomes. With these considerations in mind, it is easy to understand why advertising has the power to make products acquire symbolic values, sometimes much larger than the product's own financial value. In addition, it can be concluded that persuasion, in the scope of advertising and marketing, aims to promote consumption and, more than that, includes the individual in a particular social group, indicating that to obtain a certain position in this group needs to consume certain products.

This power to conquer publicity, in order to be effective, operates by always showing happy, fascinating and very successful people in their lives, in such a way that it creates an imaginary universe, and even parallel, in which the public idealizes everything they would like to have and be.

It is in the advertisements that we can verify these meanings since they are made up of promises to the reader, that is, advertising seeks to induce consumption through an imaginary reality, which, in general, hardly resembles the life of each person. In summary, commercials, to a large extent, are very poor informational content and too rich in emotional suggestions to be read literally. If this happens, people will understand their error when the fascinating promises contained in them do not materialize (Marcelo, 2012).

Although everyone knows that advertising creates another world, a non-existent reality (at least for the great majority of the population), they submit this affirmation to their own desire to become people in the imaginary universe, such is the fascination that this fantasy world causes. The ecstasy that is due to the use of persuasion, where the advertisement is constructed in such a way

By compensating for the monotony of everyday life with the use of fantasies, advertising inevitably proves the monotony of everyday life. By showing people how they might turn out to be, the advertisements only show by implication what they are not presently. In this sense, the study of advertising and the products/services that it announces allows us to make a reflection on consumption and communication, as well as on culture.

Kannan and Tyagi (2013) in studying the processes that form the aesthetics of advertising and art recall that propaganda collects meanings present in the cultural domain, developing from this point a new sense configuration,

but not so new that it cannot be understood and/or appreciated by many. In this way, the advertising language seeks to present real and subjective parameters to characterize the product, aiming to organize systems of a chain of ideas that aim to persuade individuals to take advantage of what is proposed to them by the communication (Clow & Baack, 2012). The author also adds that expressiveness is the great concern of advertising, an element that provides greater efficiency and eloquence for language.

In terms of expressiveness, Huertas, and Campomar (2009) state that the advertising language is based on rational, emotional arguments. The logical-rational (referential) arguments aim to demonstrate the practical use value of the product, evidencing its attributes through rational findings, in order to prove that it has utility. In the case of logical-emotional arguments, the factors explored are the feelings, the emotional side of the people, persuading themselves through exacerbated seduction, in order to capture the target audience for the vulnerabilities and psycho-emotional deficits it possesses. Finally, mixed texts are the most usual, because they combine rational and emotional arguments, obtaining greater chances of persuading the interlocutor of the advertising message. This is due to the use of rational (pseudo) methods to represent emotion.

However, even using solid arguments, the audience can interpret the message in different ways and may not reach the intended goal, and it is, therefore, fundamental to outline which paths to follow in order to maximize the reading so that it reaches a single end. In this sense, advertising language structures persuasion through strategies, that is, planned and systematic activities that aim to adjust the message according to the beliefs, ideologies, and values of who it is intended.

One of these strategies, among several, is to use words to construct the message, in a meticulous process of choosing the terms that will compose the advertising text, in such a way that they make their contents close to the public, making them feel familiar with which is being exposed, due to the fact that the lexicon used is similar to or equal to the one used daily, increasing adherence to the proposed objectives. Oyeleye and Adeyinka (2014) call this persuasive strategy "lexical choice" and states that it is one of the most important tactics used by advertising to achieve the intended effects. According to these authors, the construction of a persuasive message is the fruit of a careful research of words, vital in the elaboration of the propaganda text. Opting for this or that term is not an arbitrary attitude, but the result of an ideology. The words that make up the text of an advertisement are chosen not only for its functionality in the narrated story but with the aim of broadening the communion with the audience, as well as often emphasizing the peculiarities of the promoted product, service or brand.

In addition, the correct choice of words provides very effective advertising, as it pleasantly tells the consumer everything he or she expects to hear, producing a kind of delight. At the level of pleasant words, it is possible to highlight an element that composes the lexical strategy and that contributes to making embarrassing, even irritating, subjects more pleasing to the public: the use of euphemisms. As this tactic has been used repeatedly by advertising over the years, and on an increasing scale, it instigates to understand the reasons that lead to its application and, more importantly, to understand how they persuade the public and induce the purchase, since most of the time they deal with delicate subjects.

## **The Euphemisms**

Advertising text, in order to attain its basic function that is to persuade the target audience, must be engendered according to the socio-cultural and psychosocial characteristics of its audience, in order to make it believe that the message was specially made for it, by demonstrating peculiar shared characteristics by the same. However, there are some products that are intended for people who have certain disorders / illnesses that are uncommon among the population, requiring care in the treatment of these subjects, so as not to cause embarrassment and ridicule to these individuals, since such matters are about subjects often considered taboo, as is the case of "sexual impotence" - the notes that make up the corpus chosen for this analysis, an announcement of a brand of yogurts and the other of a tablet that removes impotence. Thus, to achieve this effect, the message of the advertisement is developed through a figure of thought - subdivision of the figures of language - called euphemism.

Figurative language is a resource that facilitates/promotes the linguistic creativity of a people. It is used to give a new tone to the thought that we possess, adding greater vigor and graciousness to human communication and expression. Among the three divisions that it has, the one that interests us refers to the figures of thought, that is, expressive methods that insert an idea different from that of the word commonly expresses. It is within the figures of thought that we find the definition for euphemism: euphemism is using mild, soft and appealing expressions instead of harsh ones.

In order for a word to be considered a euphemistic, it cannot be taken in isolation; the context in which it appears, the effect it intends to achieve with its use and the intentions of the speakers must be taken into account. From the synchronic point of view, a word can only be considered euphemistic if its meaning is ambiguous, allowing, then, two interpretations of the event, one literal and the other euphemistic. The author adds that often a word, even though it is not considered taboo, turns out to be inconvenient or uncomfortable in a given context. In these cases, the use of

euphemism acts as semantic engineering in order to overcome undesirable effects of the word that it is replacing.

## **Methodology**

Two advertisements - one for a brand of yoghurt (we have named it as X to keep it anonymous) and another for a medically approved pill (we have named it as Y to keep it anonymous) - were taken from the web and the euphemistic language used was analysed based on the discussion in literature review.

## **Analysis of the Data**

The language, linguistic and iconic, used in these two advertisements to attract the customers will be analyzed here. We can observe how the categories previously exposed are used in the two advertisements mentioned above.

The advertisement for the yogurt goes on as "X Yoghurt contains in addition to yogurt ferments, the bacillus Dan Regularis, which helps intestinal transit. Dan Regularis is the only probiotic agent that resists the passage through the stomach, thus reaching the intestine actively.

X is a 100% healthy way to make your bowel work again, forget the remedies that harm your body in the long run. Change of Life, Change for X ".

X is a line of dairy products developed by Y and marketed in several countries around the world. It contains an exclusive probiotic culture that helps regulate intestinal transit. It is observed that the announcement is based mainly on the informational language, because it transmits tangible and observable values, using rational arguments to prove the effectiveness of the product, fact verifiable in the sentence "X contains besides the yogurt ferments, the bacillus Dan Regularis , which helps intestinal transit. "

In addition to the informative text, the advertisement is composed of images of fruit and milk, which refer to natural and therefore healthy. As for colors, we see that green, besides being an integral part of the brand, is the chromium color that supports the advertisement, as it makes up almost the entire page. In this context, the green used refers to the lightness, cleanliness, tranquility, calmness, and health, alluding to the fact that using the product, the consumer will reach all these sensations, because he will be free of something that bothers him, obtaining a healthier life and serene

Euphemisms are present, notably, in the linguistic and iconic elements of an advertisement. In the verbal components, we find the euphemisms in the expressions "help the intestinal transit" and "make your intestine work again". As for the iconic or non-verbal part, the euphemism is present in the advertiser's mark, precisely in the yellow downward-pointing arrow, which

helps to compose the letter "I" that comes in the middle of the brand name X.

The three cases of euphemism in the advertisement fit into the first function proposed by Crespo-Fernández (2014), the function of concealment, that is, the use of such euphemisms in the announcement of X yoghurts is given to meet standards that establish good social interaction, avoiding direct mention of unpleasant elements, making the language more gentle and pleasant. Semantic isotopes occur, then, because the subject matter is quite embarrassing. In the linguistic case, the two euphemisms used explicitly allude to the physiological disorder that the product helps to resolve, known technically as intestinal constipation, or popularly as a stuck intestine, lazy bowel, lack of "toes," constipation, other expressions that refer to the word feces. So how do you handle such a nasty, and sometimes disgusting, affair by naming the audience you target at websites, magazines, and television? Nothing is better than replacing some words with others, generating other effects of meaning, but referring to the intended final meaning.

In this way, the great contributor of the euphemisms in the constructions of sense that realizes is the polyphony, because through the use of different voices it makes possible to reach the planned uniqueness. Nølke (2017) states that all text is polyphonic, that is, it expresses a mosaic of voices. Each speech is a platform of expression of a plurality of speeches, some intentionally generated by the enunciator and others that he does not even realize. Therefore, polyphony is voices that emanate from other semantic fields and help us to build the networks of meanings and meanings towards our interlocutor. The concept of polyphony also refers to the textual networks triggered in each enunciation. Thus, in X Yoghurt's announcement, polyphony is present in the verbal part, composing the euphemistic expressions, and in the iconic elements - specifically in fruits and milk - because they allude to how healthy the product is, since they bring the "voice of naturalness" that characterizes the process by which they are produced.

We then perceive that the words that had the euphemisms used in their place were replaced by the fact that on these words and expressions weighs a social, and even moral, a judgment that is inadequate in certain conversational contexts. It is precisely in this fact lies the persuasion factor of the euphemisms used in the announcement of X Yoghurt, because through these attenuating expressions of meaning it is possible to indicate the target audience of the product without naming it explicitly and, more important, without revealing openly and offensively which affects the readers. Thus, we avoid embarrassment and ridicule to those who are consumers of the product, because this is considered as having the "lazy gut" and not as a person with "difficulties to defecate."

The same is true for the iconic language of the ad: there is a yellow arrow pointing down. It can be attributed the same meanings and persuasive

effects present in the linguistic part, but with a differential: integral of the brand, the arrow is the element that more explicitly show the effect of the product, since it refers to the exit of something, due to the indicating that it is half the letter "I" of the brand name, as if the other half had already been "eliminated", in a direct allusion to the effect of yogurt, that is, improvement of intestinal flow after regular consumption of X yogurt. In this way, we find that, in addition to the attenuating role they play, the euphemisms ensure the semantic continuity of the text and the persuasive character of the advertisement.

Another ad used as an example is the drug Y, a drug sold under a medical prescription that has sildenafil citrate as the active ingredient - a pioneer in the treatment of male erectile dysfunction. It was originally synthesized by the pharmaceutical company Pfizer and is present in more than 110 countries.

It is seen that the advertisement is based essentially on linguistic elements, where the pill and the color of support of the page are the only components that indicate iconicity. The language used is subjective, for it evokes the particular interpretations of the reader by means of an emotional argument that refers to sexuality and pleasure, since the phrase can be translated as "Hard Work", so that it induces the public- aim to recall feelings, as well as instigates you to experience this new form of pleasure.

The colors, in soft gradient, obey the very mark of the product, fact verifiable in the phrase, where there is a gradation of shades from blue to black. The background color, a shade of practically white blue, refers to happiness, peace, tranquility, serenity, suggesting that the consumer will obtain all these benefits when consuming the product, but also refers to the sensation of relaxation that men (target audience) will feel.

A very interesting fact is also observed. The advertising strategy used to compose this ad conceals the intention to sell the product to the maximum, for the following reason: the World Health Organization (WHO) prohibits the making of advertisements for medicines that need a medical prescription to be sold. Therefore, in order to be able to advertise, you can not explicitly mention the product or the advantages it provides, everything should be understood. Creativity, therefore, euphemisms and polyphonies are put into motion.

From the foregoing, it is characterized that the euphemism is present in the linguistic or verbal part of the advertisement, in the expression "Hard Work". In this paper, we can classify this case, as in the previous one, as the function of concealment, since it was used to fulfill precepts that organize the forms of social interaction and allow the good relationship between the communicators, since it is replacing the mention of an unpleasant disturbance by a more humored, and by polite extension, of treating on a taboo subject and too uncomfortable to men.

Despite the changes that have taken place over time, the world still demonstrates reflections of the social relations experienced in previous decades, at a time when society was clearly heterosexual, patriarchal and macho, and men were considered superior to women and endowed with all strength and power to work and to procreate. Even so, they still compete with each other to reach the best positions in almost all spheres, with only the strong surviving. Based on this assumption, it is impossible for a man with sexual impotence to be credited as "male" since the concept of man that is conveyed refers to the capacity of reproduction that he has, relating sexual power to manhood.

By these erroneous precepts, many prejudices have been established, especially among men, who ridicule and make fun of those who have erectile dysfunction - all because they feel the need to assert their position and masculinity to others. Like this, it is quite understandable why the euphemism is used in the announcement of Y, since for some men it is outrageous and offensive to treat sexual impotence, because on this fact weighs a very great social and moral judgment, being necessary to use an expression that allows to adapt the language to the proposed communication context, that is, superficially nothing seems to have a similarity between "Hard Work" and erectile dysfunction. However, such is the similarity between terms that make it possible to deal with a taboo subject without causing embarrassment, discomfort or ridicule.

Again, it is clear why euphemisms have such persuasive power in advertising. They make it possible to construct the message in order to attract the attention of the target audience and induce it to action without causing an unpleasant or demeaning situation, because in providing other meanings to the treated mote, they make the language free of pejorative interpretations that will trigger in the readers an attitude of repudiation of the product.

In addition, specifically in the ad of Y, the phrase in question allows for other connotations that go beyond the euphemism frontier and places the advertisement at a higher level of representations because it is constructed through a veiled, intimate, sexuality discourse. The term "hard work" is based on ambiguity and the play of words and the reference made is not correlated with any form of work in the sense of employment, but rather with the sexual act. In this correlation also occurs polyphony, because it brings a "voice" that at first refers to the world of work, but when we look further we realize that the meaning of the word is another. This conclusion is reached through the following considerations: when the pill is ingested, the man will have his problem of erectile dysfunction healed, being able to have a sexual relationship that takes place for hours, requiring great effort and dedication of the same, so the work becomes hard/arduous. The term "hard" also alludes to the effect of the drug that is, obtaining an erection. In addition, the ad mocks the sexual act and the willingness to perform it,

suggesting that it will be wearing because the man will be very willing to do so after consuming the pill.

## **Conclusions**

Initially, it is verified that the advertising language has as a great deal of persuasion, a strategy that seeks through words and/or images to structure a discourse that makes the subject-reader get involved in the message from the suggestion of different meanings. The persuasive process goes far beyond the simple interpretation of the elements and enters the field of relations, putting emitter and receiver in contact, in order to concretize the process of persuasion.

In this sense, the message will only take effect if it is cleverly worked, and it is fundamental to choose the words to use, in order to establish for each word a function and an objective within the textual fabric. It is also through the lexical choice that we indicate the target audience and we address it with propriety on the product/service advertised. However, sometimes it is necessary to deal with delicate subjects or that cause discomfort in certain people, and it is necessary to further refine the vocabulary used to compose the advertising piece. Euphemism helps to achieve this goal.

As shown in the analysis of the corpus, euphemisms are a subtle way of talking about something unpleasant and their use varies according to the words they will replace, the conversational context and the intended audience. Most of the time they work in advertising, reducing as much as possible the discomfort and miseries in dealing with certain disorders that affect some people and therefore manage to take the product even to them, instigating them to buy it. They also conquer individuals because they are usually associated with humor, dispersing undesirable and/or unpleasant interpretations that may occur. Furthermore, they constitute an important expressive function and enable the continuity and fluency of the text.

We can see that euphemisms persuade customers because they reconfigure the uncomfortable character of certain expressions, making even the most unpleasant situations subtle and acceptable since they do not create embarrassment and/or ridicule for the parties involved.

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