

A Critique of Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Innovative Techniques of Contemporary Nigerian Advertisements

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Abstract: Various goods or products and services of producers or/and manufacturers compete with those of other producers or/and manufacturers. Hence, various advertisement techniques are often used by advertisers of goods or products, services or ideas to distinguish theirs, captivate the attention or arouse the interest of the target audience and ultimately make them desire or buy the advertised goods or products, services or ideas. This study therefore, attempts an examination of a number of selected contemporary Nigeria advertisements. It equally explores the presentation techniques of the advertisements in question. Finally, it establishes and criticizes the use of innovative linguistic and non-linguistic advertisement techniques.

Key words: Critique, innovative techniques, Nigerian advertisements, manufacturers, captive, criticizes

INTRODUCTION

The isagogic semantic interpretations of basic words or terms like critique, linguistic, innovation, technique and advertisement are very pertinent because they constitute the essential components of the study. Hence, an appropriate approach to the commencement of this presentation/discussion will be the definition or interpretation of these fundamental terms or concepts. This is necessary especially because of the susceptibility of (some of) these terms or concepts to multiple interpretations determined by contextual usage. Hence, there is the need to specifically state their intended meanings that will be considered as far as the discussion on innovative techniques of contemporary Nigerian adverts is concerned.

The lexeme critique can either be a noun or a verb. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English edited by Wehmeier and Ashby (2000) defines the noun form of critique as a piece of written criticism of a set of ideas, a work of art etc. where criticism means the work or activity of making fair, careful judgement about the good and bad qualities of something or somebody. The verb form of critique according to the same dictionary means to write or give your opinion of or reaction to a set of ideas or a study of art. This therefore, corrects the misconception that a critique or criticism is all about fault finding or pointing out short comings and that to critique or criticize is just to express severe judgement or to pass unfavourable comments. Rather it is a pro and con evaluation of something, somebody or an idea.

The word innovative is an adjective derived from the noun innovation. To innovate according to the New Lexicon Webster's Encyclopaedic Dictionary of English

Language is to make changes or introduce new practices while innovation means the act of innovating or something newly introduced. Hence innovation is synonymous with invention introduction, modification, variation and newness. To Doghudje (1997) innovation from the view point of advertising simply refers to creativity which he further describes as breaking new grounds being different, new, superior, better, unique; change brought about by man. To him, this is all about destroying the god of orthodoxy, embracing change or seeking new ways of doing things.

The term technique or technic according to Barnhart and Barnhart (1994) can refer to the method or way of performing the mechanical details of an art, technical skill or a special method or system used to accomplish something. Technique according to the New Lexicon Webster's Encyclopaedic Dictionary of the English Language is a way or method of achieving a particular purpose or the entire body of procedures of a science, art or craft. Innovative technique therefore can refer to new, unique, superior etc. ways or methods of getting things done or of achieving target goals or desired objectives.

Advertising is susceptible of a number of closely related definitions ascribed by experts in the field of Advertising and related fields like Marketing, Business Administration etc. as well as professional bodies. Kotler and Armstrong (1997) define advertising as any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services by identified sponsors. Wells *et al.* (1989) defines, advertising as paid non-personal communication from an identified sponsor using the mass media to persuade or influence an audience. An advertisement according to the first edition of the Code of Advertising Practice of 1993 by the Advertising

Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) is a communication in the media paid for by an identifiable sponsor and directed at a target audience with the aim of imparting information about a product, service, idea or opinion.

Linguistics, the word or noun from which the word or adjective linguistic and its opposite non-linguistic are derived as simply defined by Oluga (2001) is the study or science of language. The New Lexicon Webster Encyclopaedic Dictionary of English Language also defines linguistics as the scientific study of language or languages whether from historical and comparative (diachronic) or from descriptive, structural (synchronic) point of view. Linguistics operates at five basic levels namely lexical level, morphological level, phonological level, syntactic level and semantic level. So, the innovative techniques of contemporary Nigerian advertisement are said to be or described as linguistic techniques when they have to do with language use or the way advert language is used. The non-linguistic techniques, therefore are those that are not basically about the way language is used but about some other modes of presentation.

This study, therefore critically examines the innovative techniques of contemporary Nigerian advertisements using these two main parameters-the linguistic and the non linguistics techniques.

LINGUISTIC INNOVATIVE TECHNIQUES OF NIGERIAN ADVERTISEMENTS

These are the various language-related devices or techniques uniquely used by copy writers or advertisers of products, services or ideas to make them stand out. Those identified in the course of this study are indigenous language technique, Nigerian pidgin technique, linguistic deviation technique, vulgar language technique, lexical abridgement technique, ambiguous language technique, figurative language technique and idiomatic language techniques.

Indigenous language technique: Until recently, mass media advertisements of goods, services and ideas were predominantly in the English language. This is because the adoption of English in Nigeria as an official language presupposes that it is the major language of mass media. However, there are many people who do not understand English. Hence when advertisements of goods, services and ideas are mainly in English such people who are among the intended audience of the advertisement messages or the prospective customers are being marginalised or alienated. It is interesting today to witness the increasing rate of advertisements done in the major

indigenous Nigerian languages including poster and bill board advertisements. It is important to point out however, that such advertisements often make use of code mixing and switching techniques so that the messages will be meaningful to those who speak/understand the languages used. Below are some of the examples of such advertisements are:

- Vedan-Na cika son (Hausa)
- Omo-Ma nwo gbogbo kolofin idoti (Yoruba)
- Close up-Fun eemi to fanimora, lo close up (Yoruba)
- Semovita-Ounje ti ko l'egbe (Yoruba)

Nigerian pidgin technique: This, like the already discussed indigenous language technique is a linguistic technique adopted to ensure that advertisers messages reach as many people as possible. Pidgin, according to Reinecke (1964) is a minimum of make shift language which arises when people of different speeches are thrown into contact and must reach understanding. The use of pidgin helps to reach out to even people who do not understand or speak Standard English and any of the commonly used major Nigerian languages. The use of Nigerian pidgin as a means of communicating advert messages is not limited to private organizations only. This is because even government also adopts its use especially when such adverts have to do with mobilization, enlightenment, health care programme etc. Examples of adverts that use or code mix/switch with the Nigerian pidgin are:

- Phensic, Na carry go. E dey comot headache and pain for body
- Raid insecticide, raid power, e no get photocopy
- Semovita, beta chop for everybody
- Elephant, dis perfume na wa
- EFCC Nobody dey above the law
- Home cup tea New home cup tea, na the only one for us

Linguistic deviation techniques: This simply refers to a situation where copy writers or advertisers in wording their advert messages, deviate from the existing rule/use of the language of communication. This can be in form of an expression that negates the convention of starting a sentence with a capital letter and ending with a full stop or a period, a question mark or an exclamation mark. It can be in the form of a lexical fabrication of a non-existing word from a word that already exists in the language of communication. It can be in form of malapropism i.e., using a word that is similar in spelling or pronunciation to the correct word.

A recent M T N advert copy message go join the winning team is an example of a deviation from sentence construction convention. This is because the sentence is written in small letters from A-Z whereas the S of the first word go should have been capitalised. The copy messages of Celtel Join. The World and Have. More fun are cases of faulty or improper punctuation of sentences. The sentences should be Join the World and Have more fun. The use of Chocolatey and Oolalacious in the advertisement copy messages of Bournvita and Mr Biggs, respectively are cases of lexical fabrication. The copy of Bic The write choice is a case of intentional malapropism because the word write is used as pun in place or right because they sound alike.

Vulgar language technique: Some advertisements now violate the provisions/principles of the code of Advertising practice in Nigeria by using vulgar and indecent language that offends or has no good taste. Such advertisers believe implied appeal to sex using vulgar language is what can captivate some people hence, they choose to be negatively unique by using morally offensive vulgar language. A good example of such an advert is that of Vono Spring Foam whose copy message reads, Who is your sleeping partner tonight? To which another expression Weke, Weke, Weke has been added. A sleeping partner ordinarily refers to a silent partner who is not actively involved in the running of a business organisation. However, it is wrongly used to refer to one not legally married to but only engaged in sexual intercourse. The context of the use of the expression-advertisement of a foam, use of the word tonight and the onomatopoeic use of weke, weke, weke the sound made when people are on the bed, presuppose the vulgar interpretation. The advertisement of vono spring form has been slightly modified possibly because of the reaction of some members of audience. The copy message is now who are you sleeping with tonight? I am sleeping with Vono Foam. Weke! Weke!! Weke!!!. The modification is not even faultless because the relative pronoun Who is used for a human being while What can be appropriate if the referent is an inanimate thing like a foam.

Linguistic abridgement techniques: This is one of the means of achieving/observing the principle of advert message brevity or conciseness however, two main forms of linguistic abridgement can be identified in the advertisement of products/goods, services or ideas and these are lexical abridgement and sentence abridgement. Lexical abridgement has to do with the reduction of the

length of a word or the number of the letters that make up the word but still having the same or similar pronunciation. Sentence abridgement on the other hand has to do with the reduction of the length of a sentence used as the copy message of a product, service or an idea by removing some words that will not hinder or inhibit the communication/comprehension of the advertiser's intended meaning.

The advert copy message of the then Vmobile Xpress Urself and that of Legend Extra Stout its your life xpress it can be used to illustrate the case of lexical abridgement. This is because in the copy message of these adverts, the word express has been shortened to xpress which creates no problem especially because the two still sound alike. The advert message of Nunu milk go get it and that of M T N go join the winning team can be used to illustrate the case of sentence abridgement. This is because in the two adverts the coordinator and has been removed and the copy messages compressed. However, the full expressions should be Go and get it and Go and join the winning team. The omission of and here is peculiar to the spoken English especially of the American English.

Figurative language technique: A figurative language according to Oluga (2001) refers to a non-literal language use, the meaning of which depends on implied translation or interpretation which of course may deviate from the basic or original language use and meaning. Specifically, figurative language can refer to language which employs or relies on figures of speech like simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, alliteration, pun, onomatopoeia etc. Many advertisers in order to give vivid description of advertised products, services or ideas or to uniquely communicate advert copy message now adopt the use of figurative language.

The expression complete care for complete confidence which is the advert copy message of Maclean is a good example alliteration because of the repetition of the letter C or the phoneme /K/. The expression as tough as rhino used as the copy message of Union Battery because the advertised battery is compared to a rhino using as is an example of simile. The expression the car that cares used to advertise KIA is an example of personification. Also, the expression Rub it on used in the advert of Robb ointment is an example of pun because the advertiser plays on the similar pronunciation of the words rub, a lexical verb and Robb the Trade Mark (TM) of the product being advertised.

Ambiguous language techniques: Ambiguity, according to Oluga (2003) is a linguistic situation which has to do with the use of a word or expression that is susceptible to

double or multiple semantic interpretations. It can occur at the various lexical of language analysis hence, we can have lexical, phonological, syntactic and semantic ambiguity. The ambiguous language technique when properly used enables advertisers to achieve brevity of information and at the same time maximize information disseminated to the target audience. This is because it enables them to use short and captivative copy massages that say a lot about what they advertise.

The advert of Vitalo with the copy message complete family food drink can be used to illustrate the ambiguous language techniques. The copy message communicates two ideas with just a single expression because it can mean vitalo is a food drink meant for a family that is complete or vatalo is a family drink that is complete in terms of its nutrients or nutritional components. It is however, important to note that ambiguity can negate the advert fundamental principle of semantic preciseness or clarity especially when the copy communicates confusing messages, i.e., both the intended and unintended meaning. For example, the expression with 28 vitamins and minerals used to advertise Peak Milk can mean peak has 28 vitamins and 28 minerals, peak has 28 vitamin and unspecified number of minerals or peak has vitamins and minerals that altogether are 28 in number.

Idiomatic language technique: An idiom according to the new Lexicon Webster's Encyclopaedic Dictionary of the English Language refers to a construction or expression having a meaning that is different from the literal one or that is not according to the usual patterns of the language of communication. An idiomatic language according to Oluga (2003) is a language that is based on the use of an idiom which is an expression that is made up of different lexical constituents but the meaning of which can not be derived or determined by combining the meanings of all the constituent parts of such an idiom.

It is important to note that while the meaning of some idioms can be determined by contextual usage, some cannot. Some contemporary Nigerian adverts to be unique in language use, now use idiomatic language to word their copy messages but with contexts that can aid comprehension. A good example of such an advert copy message is that of Hollandia Milk keeps you on the go idiomatically to be on the go means to be very active and busy hence what the advertiser is saying is that Hollandia makes you to be strong/active and busy or hard working.

NON-LINGUISTIC TECHNIQUES OF NIGERIAN ADVERTISEMENTS

Apart from the above discussed language related innovative techniques of Nigerian adverts there are some

other innovative techniques which advertisers still use to uniquely communicate vital information about advertised products, services or ideas to the target audience. These are the product packaging technique, dramatisation technique, culture promotion technique, home video technique, eminent personality technique, serio-comic animation technique and promotional advertising technique.

Product packaging technique: One thing that has been discovered by many is the innovative use of product packaging as a medium of advertisement. Hence, the packages of many products now perform dual function of serving as product containers or protective devices and as means of communicating visual/written advertising messages to customers. It is in the light of this that Wright (1982) defines packaging as significant advertising medium that shoots products into lime light of profitable patronage by the target consumers or users. Wells *et al.* (1989) also describes packaging as an important part of the advertising strategy which serves as a constant communicator in terms of colour, aesthetic design, functional information to complement the product and enhance the advertising effort.

The packaging of the various herbal drugs and products now fast gaining recognition by many people in the society is a pointer to the advertising power or function of packages of products. These usually attract many to such herbal drugs or products unlike in the past when they were not properly packaged making people to see them as juju. The packages of some products sometimes arouse the interest of customers to the extent that they may not want to dispose them in good time. The recharge card of MTN which is also like a package does not only contain some advert messages but now has pictures of people which makes it more attractive. Many people therefore, still keep the attractive recharge card even after use.

Dramatisation/mini movie technique: Dramatisation is an advertisement technique that is now more frequently used in the advertisement of various goods or products and services in Nigeria. Some award winning Nigerian advertisements that were noted because of their dramatic presentations were these: Equatorial Trust Bank about the use of tally number, Universal Trust Bank on electronic money transfer and Bagco Super Sack. Many other recent adverts that employ the dramatic technique include the advert of Malta Guinness showing a bank cashier who is stressed attending to endless number of tired people on a long queue; the advert of Storex plastic water tank used by a boxer to train and who eventually defeats his opponent as well as some of the adverts of the mobile communication companies like Globacom and MTN.

However, another dimension has been introduced by the advertiser of Guinness Stout in the advertisements featuring Michael Power. There is one where Michael Power uses a helicopter to rescue some people who are about drowning and there is another where he delivers the wife of an athlete who has been kidnapped to distract the athlete's attention and prevent him from winning the race. As he announces this the athlete who has been lagging behind other athletes quickly braces up and eventually wins the race. These two adverts can be described as mini-movie because at a glance a viewer watching such adverts for the first time will take them for movies. These unique adverts are likely to attract the interest of many prospective customers but they are also likely to exceed the 60 sec/1 min time guide for typical adverts.

Culture promotion technique: Contemporary innovative Nigerian advertisements now usually try to promote or propagate indigenous African, more specifically, Nigerian culture as opposed to directly or indirectly promoting foreign cultures within an indigenous setting or environment. It is not surprising that the Maggi chicken commercial won the NTA award for the seasoning category. The food used for the advertisement as can be seen on the billboard advert is/was a traditional food with egusi soup. The advertisement of Prudent Bank also promotes indigenous culture because it has two people in traditional attires, the first person carries a talking drum while the second person carries a sekere which are traditional instruments of communication and entertainment, respectively.

We have two people in the relatively new bill board advertisement of Close-up tooth paste, a man and a woman also wearing traditional aso ofi. Also in the bill board advertisement of Trans International Bank there are two people, one beating the talking drum and the other person dancing to the music of the talking drum. The use of culture promotion technique displayed in the above mentioned adverts and many others is in line with the provision of the Advertising Practitioner's Council of Nigeria's (APCON'S) Code of Advertising Principles of 1993, page 4 that all advertisements in Nigeria should be legal, honest, truthful and should be respectful to Nigeria's culture.

Home video film technique: One of the means of advertising various products and services in the seventies and eighties in Nigeria was cinema film interlude advertisement. Then many of the films were usually foreign Indian, American and British films hence, many of the products and services were foreign ones. However, there was a significant reduction in the number of people patronizing the various cinemas in Nigeria in the late eighties because of the introduction of video

film/movie/cassette hence, the cinema/film advertisement became less popular. Going to cinema then became unpopular as those who continued to go to cinemas were seen as miscreants, rogues or hooligans.

Today, a wind of change is blowing as advertisements have changed from cinema advertisements to video advertisements. This is effective because of the preponderance of the Nigerian video/film/movie lovers against the background of which about or not less than ten video/films/movies are released every month following the decision to control the industry. Most video films usually have other films, cassettes advertised in them either at the beginning i.e., prelude video adverts or in the middle i.e., interlude video adverts. These have been good means of advertisement often used by video films producers/marketers in Nigeria like Corporate Pictures and others. The home video technique is good in that it gets the attention of the intended recipients of the advertisements.

Popular music/dance technique: The use of music in advertising cannot be said to be completely new except for the fact that there have been new ways of using popular music/dance technique in recent times. There is also an increase in the use of such popular music (not just background music) and dance in the advertisement of products, services and ideas in Nigeria. This is because an acceptable advert technique as put by Omojafor (1997) is usually embraced by others and usually becomes the fashion of the advertising world until another trailblazer comes along. A good example of an advert that makes use of the popular music technique is one of the adverts of Globacom done by King Sunny Ade and members of his band. Listeners, especially fans of the musicians usually enjoy the music/message of the advertisement.

The popular dance technique is illustrated in the adverts of Delta medicated soap with a beach setting as well as in the advertisement of Globacom featuring the popular Daddy Shokey. The former shows a kind of contest with some of the contestants displaying popular dance steps. The latter is more or less a two-in-one as we have both the popular music of Daddy Shokey as well as his popular dance steps displayed firstly by dwarf or miniature Daddy Shokey and later by the real Daddy Shokey himself who drives away the fake Daddy Shokey.

Eminent personality technique: This is also another technique that may not be regarded as a completely new technique because the use of celebrities is common in the world of advertising as people of integrity or popularity often testify to the goodness or efficacy of advertised products and services. However, the technique is considered to be innovative in that there have been new ways of using such eminent personalities and especially

because innovation covers new ways of doing something already existing. The use of some eminent people to advertise some ideas has really aroused the interest of the Nigerian audience. For example, Pastor Enoch Adejare Adebayo, the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) and Prof. Wole Soyinka the Nobel laureate have been used in some HIV-AIDS campaign advertisement. This without doubt will touch the hearts of many people because of the integrity, credibility or personality of the two people.

Closely related to the use of eminent personality is the use of stars in various fields of human endeavours like sports, music and film making. For example Jay Jay Okocha, the then captain of the Nigerian Eagles features in the advert of Western Union Money Transfer, Kanu Nwakwo the immediate past captain of Nigerian Eagles also features in the advert of Peak Milk, Olumide Oyediji a U.S. based NBA star features in the advert of Mouka Foam, Zark Orji a Nigerian movie star in one advert of Simba and Charley Boy the former PMAN president in another one, Racheal Oniga a Nigerian movie actress in the advert of Hollandia Milk, Chief Mike Okpala Zerubudiah alias 4:30 a foremost Nigerian comedian features in the advert of Vasoprine tablet and many others. It is believed that the use of the star sportsmen, artistes etc in the adverts in question usually captivates the attention of the audience in a special way.

Serio-comic animation technique: This is a product of film technology which involves the presentation of animated cartoon resulting in the movement of drawings and models of animal and people. Animation therefore is now part of movie, film or video making made possible by computer/electronic communication technology. Some advertisers who want to be unique now opt for animated advertising which does not use human beings but moving pictures, images or drawings of human beings.

Some of the contemporary Nigerian adverts that have used the animated technique are Elephant Detergent, Ribena, Onga and Bobo NAPEB. In the said advert of Elephant there is animated image of an elephant. In that of Ribena there is an animated image of a boy riding a bicycle which changes intermittently to real image. In the advert of Onga there is an animated image of a woman demonstrating how to cook with Onga. The advert of NAPEB has the animated image of two boxers. Bobo NAPEB and Poverty and that of former president Olusegun Obasanjo Baba NAPEB jumping as Bobo NAPEB beats hell out of Poverty in the ring. These are serio-comic in that they give important information about what is advertised and amuse the target audience at the same time.

Promotional advertising technique: This technique has elements of both sales promotion and advertising which are two of the three forms of marketing mix. This happens to be the combination of two of the three main marketing mix/strategy namely, Sales promotion and advertising.

Sales promotion is all about the strive to secure greater sales of given products or services by offering special sales opportunities like bonanza, discount etc. to prospective customers. Most producers or manufacturers have now discovered the power of promos to drive more sales hence they now organize promos from time to time and not just during Xmas, Easter or Salah. Fresh in the memories are the Guilder snake Island/Ogudu cattle ranch promos, CocaCola promo relayed on NTA, Star beer promo in which people won fantastic gifts on weekly basis, Royco Happy fiesta promo in which twenty people won ₦2,000, 000 and other gifts, key soap promo which gave people the opportunity of winning 10,000 bundles of key Ankara; 33 double excitement promo which gave people the opportunity of winning ₦108 million; High Malt winning splash which gave people the opportunity of winning money and things worth ₦72,000,000; the just concluded Glo 40 millionaire promotion etc.

Most of these promos now amount to promotional advertisement because information about these products are now advertised on the bill boards on which products are usually advertised and in the various dailies/magazines and sometimes with advert copy messages of the products being promoted. For example, the said key soap promo is advertised on the bill board with the expression Look Great, wash with key soap-the smarter way to cleaner wash which is advert copy message of key soap. Also the advertised promos usually remain on the bill boards even months after the organised promos because of the additional advert messages they still communicate. It is therefore not surprising that promotion is like competition among producers or manufacturers and they offer promos from time to time and one after the other.

CONCLUSION

Advertisers of various products or commodities, services or ideas in Nigeria have recognised the fact that we are in a competitive world or environment of advertising/marketing. Hence, they have been devising innovative ways or methods of distinguishing their products/adverts so as to attract desired customers response and/ or action. It is against this background that some contemporary Nigerian advertisements now adopt various innovative techniques. These include the already discussed linguistic techniques like indigenous language

technique, Nigerian pidgin technique, linguistic deviation technique, vulgar language technique, figurative language technique, ambiguous language technique, linguistic abridgement technique and idiomatic language technique. We also have the non-linguistic techniques, like product packaging technique, dramatisation technique, culture promotion technique, home video technique, popular music/dance technique, eminent personality technique, serio-comic animation technique and promotional advertising technique. These innovative linguistic and non-linguistic techniques enable advertisers to uniquely pass intended messages or ideas to target audience or prospective customers in order to have corresponding responsiveness.

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