

# Linguistic Effects on Television Advertisement: A Stylistic Approach

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## Abstract

In the language of television advertising, it is discovered that there are observable linguistic elements stylistically conditioned by the copywriters to create effects on the viewers. It is therefore possible and necessary to find a simple statistical model that will explain, in a clear term, what makes advertisements on television typified and unique. Attempt is made, in this paper, to observe the style used in eight television advertisements selected as samples in order to identify the distinctive stylistic features used in the advertisements at the level of language. The stylistic features of the language of advertisement identified in the sampled advertisements are ellipsis, substitutions, coordination, contraction, repetition, simple sentence and declarative sentence; all used distinctively as style.

**Keywords:** advertising, linguistic elements, copywriters, stylistic.

## 1.0. Introduction

Over the years, a specialized form of language has developed within the Nigerian context of advertising. It is an English language, yet a language already subjected to purposive and medium variation. This has, in turn necessitated some substantial, structural and semantic variations. According to Crystal and Davy (1969:11), 'any use of language displays certain linguistic features which allow it to be identified with one or more extra-linguistic contexts'.

Advertisement as a form of business communication has wide spectrum of outlets such as film, television, radio, fax, newspaper, magazine, telephone, face-to-face conversation, etc. Television as a channel of communication has become a veritable medium through which advertisers transmit the messages on their products to teeming viewers because of its peculiarity of being able to combine visual and pictorials for the purpose of communication. The aim of the advertiser is quite specific. He wishes to capture the attention of the members of the mass audience and by means of a short message, often written or verbal, but sometimes visual, to persuade them to buy a product or behave in a particular way. In order to achieve this, the language of television advertisement is usually characterized by identifiable distinctive linguistic features, stylistically conditioned to pass persuasive messages to viewers. These distinctive features distinguish the English Language used in advertising from other standard varieties, thus, worthy of academic attention. This paper, therefore, examines the language of television advertisement and brings to the fore, the overtly observable linguistic features which characterize it and their usages for analysis by looking at the grammatical and lexical distinctions that differentiate the language of advertisement from other modes of discourse.

The focus of this paper is to identify and analyze the striking stylistic features that are prominent in the language of television advertisement. Since a Stylistician looks at a text from the point of view of how it deviates from the norms; the general rules and standard features of the English language, therefore, serve as the basis of reference in the analysis the style of the language of television advertisement in this paper. Stylistic approach to text analysis involves looking at, and analyzing a text, by taking statistics of occurrence of deviations from standard linguistic features at the graphology, syntactic, phonological and semantic levels in order to justify the occurrences as deviations used as style by an artist or in a genre to give stylistic effects. Leech and Short captures the above by defining stylistic as 'the linguistic study of style'. To them, the goal of literary stylistic is to explain the relationship between language (normal form) and artistic features (style). Also, Widdowson (1975), describes stylistics as the study of literary discourse from a linguistic orientation. Hendricks (1976) and Widdowson (1975) see stylistic in terms of linguistic theory and methodology. To them, the intention of the Stylistician is to study a text using the linguistic therein available to analyses the methodology and approach of the writer, for the purpose of identifying that, which suggests linguistic and literary highlights. The style of a text resides in the linguistic highlights, which are the distinctive linguistic features used for artistic purposes and form the basis of stylistic analysis of the text.

Since the focus of this paper is to examine the language of television advertisement as a distinctive linguistic features marked from other forms of communication; it is necessary to look at the features, the substance, the form and the language meaning of the television advertisement and identify the patterns of usage as purposive usage. Stylistic analysis is important for the purpose of understanding the possible meaning of a text and analysing the pattern of elements combined to achieve the meaning. In writing an advertisement piece, a copywriter stylistically manipulates the linguistic features that are ordinarily unmarked in daily usages as a device to create style. Analysing these features will give further insight into the various artistic and stylistic

devices used by writers to give beauty to their structures while style is examined as an artistic competence. This paper examines the language component, i.e. grammar and vocabulary as one of the elements contributing to the extra-ordinary effects of advertising.

## **2.0. Aims and Objectives of the Study**

The paper seeks to identify the distinctive linguistic features of television advertisement that marks it off from other standard forms; determine whether the linguistic features are used purposively as a strategy to create style in television advertisements where they occur. It also seeks to locate advertisement as a text in the domain of stylistics, which can be studied fully and analyzed with stylistic standards of study.

## **3.0. Research Methodology**

The television advertisements samples used as texts in this paper are recorded from the Ondo State Radiovision Corporation (OSRC), UHF Channel 23, Akure, over a period of time during advertisement belts. The texts are chosen at random, watched and listened to over a long period on the channel above. The texts, caption as appendixes in this paper are transcribed; numbering each sentence and phrase (a stretch of spoken or written language used by one person) that makes up the advertisement samples and refer to them as utterances. In all, there are 140 utterances in the texts used as shown in the appendixes.

The utterances are critically studied to identify distinctive linguistic patterns that are marked, that is, those whose structure do not follow the grammatical principle of Subject/Predicate/Compliment/Adjunct (SPCA) or Subject/Verb/Object (SVO) /Subject Predicate Object (SPO) structure, but are grammatically restructured to deviate from the norms in order to create an impression. Using stylistic analysis, observable marked linguistic patterns in the texts are subjected to statistical analysis to determine the frequency of occurrence of such distinctive features at the sentential and/or inter-sentential level that make each instance of the language of advertising on television distinct. The identified distinctive features are analyzed at various linguistic levels to show that they are purposely adapted to suit the persuasive method of the language of advertizing, particularly in television.

## **4.0. Sample Analysis**

The paper studies the advertisement recorded from television during advertisement belts. For this quantitative stylistic study, eight advertisements of products and services aired on OSRC television, as shown in the appendixes are considered. Seven linguistic features are considered in this paper.

The study of advertisements shows that copywriters, particularly in television advertisements, employ some linguistic features, conditioned stylistically to make the message attractive and effective. As observed by Holmes and Forsyth (1995), the style of an author can be quantified by counting his/her choice of words for expressing his/her ideas under the assumption that the writer favouring a stock of words for the expression of ideas is regarded, to some extent, subject to chance. Also, Bailey (1979) says that the stylistic features of a matured writer will be salient, structural, frequent and easily quantifiable. According to Mealand, (1997), the stylistic markers which occur most frequently in a given text are identified through the process of stylistic analysis. The style of television advertisement, as observed in the choice of linguistic features at the levels of sentence and inter-sentential structures in the advertisements selected for this study shows that the occurrence of the identified features cuts across the eight advertisements selected, this is to show that the features are choices made by copywriters, in place of the unmarked linguistic patterns, deliberately to suit the media through which the advertisement is broadcast. Analysis at this level helps to find out whether television advertisements really have distinctive methods of linguistic components and peculiarities.

Crystal and Davy (1976:44) identify the fact that it is usually difficult to delimit sentences of spoken texts. However, this problem is not acute here in that most of the sentences in these texts are utterances, which Crystal and Davy see as an "ad hoc term for a stretch of (spoken or written) language, used by one person that is capable of being formally characterized in some way". The appendix, which is the referent point for this paper is, therefore, numbered in utterances. The clipping 'utt'., is used as a prefix marker. Thus, 'utt'. is used when making references. An utterance can be a sentence, a phrase, a clause or others that express a thought.

### **4.1. Analysis of the Linguistic Features of Television Advertisement**

Through the study of the data collected for this work, it is discovered that television advertisements involve the mixture of linguistics and extralinguistic features to make the advertisements effective. The linguistic features of television advertisements, as identified in the data collected are characterized by marked linguistic elements used as style whose analysis resides in stylistic domain. The linguistic features identified in the eight selected television advertisement samples are analysed using a Stylistics' Statistical Analysis technique to justify that television advertisement is a text on the domain of stylistics and to show the effectiveness of these features in the advertisements where they occur.

To analyse the selected advertisement samples for this study, totaling eight in number, a statistical analysis of the linguistic (the inter-sentential features) that make each instance of the language of the selected television advertisement samples of this work a distinctive structure is done. The purpose of this is to place in the domain of stylistics, the distinctive features identifiable as linguistic choices, used as style by the advertisers for the purpose of making their advertisements effective. The identified linguistic features, which are subjected to stylistic study, are: ellipsis, substitutions, coordination, contraction, repetition, simple sentence and declarative sentence; all used distinctively as style. All the five features are present in most of the eight advertisement samples used in this paper.

#### 4.1.1 Inter Sentential Pattern

**Ellipsis:** One of the ways in which cohesion is achieved in texts, especially spoken texts, is the ellipsis of either some lexical words, or noun phrases (acting as a subject or object). In sentences constituting answers to a question or a request, the whole predication might even be removed. The occurrence of this feature is not common in texts of advertising pieces. This is mainly because there is no face-to-face contact between the interlocutors; so, most of the syntactic units have to be explicitly stated. In the language of television advertisement, however, this feature occurs because the advertisement pieces are usually written out to be spoken, and sometimes acted out. The selected texts for this work contain such distinctive linguistic features. They are referred to as distinctive because they are marked, from the formal written pattern, where details are given to all elements that make up ideas. Out of the 144 utterances in the selected texts, there are 37 cases of ellipses in the selected advertisements. 2 of them are the ellipses of verbs, 3, that of determiner, 1 ellipsis of preposition, while 31 of them are the ellipsis of object (noun). In *utt. 11*, Harpic advertisement, there is an ellipsis of the demonstrative determiner “that” in the utterance “*You can see \_\_\_ my toilet is clean*”; that of determiner “a” in *utt. 121*, Eagle Aromatic Schnapps’ advertisement: “*Eagle Aromatic Schnapps is \_\_\_ blessing and success story*” and in UNTL advertisement in *utt. 127*: “*UNTL wax, \_\_\_ superior wax made in Nigeria*.” The ellipsis of the finite verb “is” at the word initial occurs in *utt. 24* “*\_\_\_ five times better than detergents*”. The finite verb “is” which ought to connect *utts. 23 and 24* is omitted in this utterance. The instance of ellipsis here is to show the attempt of the advertiser to simulate a conversational mode. Because the script is acted out (dramatization), this instance of the ellipsis as shown above shows the attempt of the advertiser of Harpic trying to create a chatty approach. In the advertisement of Royco in *utt. 31* “*\_\_\_ every meal he’s asking me for some more \_\_\_*”, there are two instances of ellipsis, one is the ellipsis of the preposition “at” at the word initial of the utterance and the ellipsis of the noun “food” at the word final of the utterance. There is also the ellipsis on noun “inside” in *utt. 10*: “*Come \_\_\_*” in the advertisement of Harpic. Also, in the advertisement of Royco, there is the ellipsis of noun (home) in *utt. 27*: “*That’s right, he hurries \_\_\_ from far*.” In the advertisement of Always, ellipsis is generously used. There are 28 instances of ellipsis of the word “stain” in the advertisement. *Utt. 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 67, 69, 74, 76*, as shown in appendix 3.

**Substitution:** There are 6 cases of substitution in the selected advertisements used as text in this work. *Utt. 93, 94, 96, 12, 21*, are these instances. There are 4 instances of substitution in the advertisement of Ariel as shown in *utts. 93, 94, 96*, “*With Ariel, it’s very simple, it washed it and the stain was totally off...And I lined it outside...They just fall in love with it*”. The lexical item “it” is used in the three utterances, four times, in place of the stained cloth. In fact, cloth or dress is not mentioned in any of the utterances in the advertisement. The lexical item “it” as used in these utterances would have made the message of the advertisement vague, but because of the peculiar characteristic of television advertisement, which is the ability to combine visual display with audio. The visuals show when the cloth gets stained during the accident, when the cloth is being washed and when the cloth is spread on the line that all give meaning to the use of “it” in these utterances. In the advertisement of Harpic, The subject is substituted with “it” in *utt. 12*: “*Is it really sparkling clean?*” Also, in *utt. 21* “*I...I can’t believe it*”. This utterance is capable of generating the question: *believe what?* The use of the pronoun “it” would have made the utterance vague, but for the use of visuals, which display the toilet that has been washed with Harpic, sparkling white.

**Coordination:** In most of the texts examined, coordination is preferred to subordination. This inter-sentential structure is, at times, used for emphasis to show the strength or the capability and efficiency of a particular product. Also, the use of coordination in television advertisement is effective because of the combination of the linguistic features with such extralinguistic features as visuals, which makes it easy for the viewers to have a vivid imagination of the items listed using coordination. Coordination is identified in the selected television advertisement samples: “*...Keeping your toilet sparkling white...and free from all germs...*” (*utt.19, 20; Harpic advertisement*), “*...Canon Extra, gives quick relief from headache and body pains...*” (*utt. 106, Canon Extra advertisement*), “*...May you achieve success and the might of an Eagle...*” (*utt.116; Eagle Aromatic Schnapps advertisement*), “*...Eagle Aromatic Schnapps is blessing and success story...*” (*utt. 121; Eagle Aromatic Schnapps advertisement*). As shown above, coordination is used 5 times in *utt. 19, 20, Harpic keeps toilets sparkling white and free from all germs and utts.116 and 121, Eagle Aromatic Schnapps is not only a blessing*

*but also a success story. In the like manner, coordination is used in utt. 106 to itemize what canon extra can do: "gives quick relief from headache and body pains"*

**Contraction:** There are 8 cases of the use of contractive forms of words in the selected advertisements as shown in utts. 26, 27, 28, 31, 32, 38, 99, 101. This puts the advertisement in conversational mode. In utts. 26, 27 and 28 in Royco advertisement, the use of music makes this informal mode of communication effective : "...And it's like, he smells it from far...That's right, he hurries from far....I could teach you, I won't even charge". There is a contraction of the verb "is" with the pronoun "he" in "...Every meal he's asking me for some more..." utt. 31. Also, the verb "s" in contracted with the pronoun "it" in utt. 32, 38 "...I can tell you why, it's not that hard...It's really tasty..." There is another instance of the use of contraction in the advertisement of Canon Extra in utt. 99 "...Let's go..." to show that television advertisement is usually conversational and utt.101 "...Hello, where's my husband..." Note the contractive form of the question maker "where is".

**Repetition:** Repetition is one of the linguistic features of the language of television advertisement. It records 24 instances of occurrence in the selected advertisement texts. Even though the characters used in television advertisement pieces are there on the screen for viewers' view delight, the script writers do not underestimate the fact that the audience may be overwhelmed by the action of the characters at the detriment of the subject matter due to the transitory nature of spoken form of language. They, therefore, use repetition as a style and device to keep the attention of the viewers and imprint the image and concept of the product in the minds of the viewers. Lexical items, especially names of goods and products advertised are constantly repeated instead of the use of the pronominal reference form for them, to link the sentences together. In all the sampled television advertisements used as text in this paper, repetition is noticeable. Ariel is repeated 6 times in appendix 4: utt. 78, 90, 92, 93, 97, 98. In the advertisement of Harpic, there are 5 occurrences in utt. 1, 2, 16, 22, 23. In Royco, 2 times, in utt. 36 and 40. Also, Canon Extra, repetition occurred twice in utt. 105, 106. It is only in the advertisement of Always that we identified a single occurrence of the mention of the product's name in utt. 60. In the advertisement of Eagle Aromatic Schnapps, the word Eagle is mentioned 8 times in utt. 110, 111, 112, 114, 116, 120, 121 and 122. Because of the constant use of repetition in the language of television advertisement as noticed above, adverbial contrasts such as *however, although, even though*, etc., which are used for cohesion in normal dialogues and prose are rarely used,

On the whole, a television advertisement text is mostly cohesive because it is mainly written in either the simple present tense or written to reflect future time. This trait is unique to television advertisement texts and it sets them apart from several other discourse texts. It is mainly done to show the important features of the services, goods and business concerns being advertised. This is quite in opposition to the language of conversation which features varied tenses and aspects without any affinity for one specifically.

#### 4.1.2. Sentence Pattern

**Simple Sentences:** The analysis of the sampled texts shows that television advertisements are laden with simple sentences as it takes an appreciable percentage of the sentence types used in some of the texts selected in this paper. For example, in the advertisement of Eagle Aromatic Schnapps, most of the utterances are in simple sentences, short and easily remembered statements. There are 4 occurrences of this as shown in utts. 108, 109, 110, 111. There are 8 occurrences of simple sentence in the advertisement of Always in utts: 42, 50, 52, 54, 56, 58, 59, 73. Only an occurrence in Harpic advertisement in utt. 10. This is used to attract the attention of the addressees and to make the utterances easy to memorize and recount. The total occurrences of simple sentence pattern identified in the texts selected is 15.

**Declarative Sentences:** In addition, most of the utterances are simple statements or declarative sentences. Statements are mainly used to pass on information to the addressee. While a normal dialogue is full of give - and - take rather than statements, mainly; television is a mixture of the two, but it is most times made up of statements because it is mainly verbal reports. In the advertisement of Harpic, 2 occurrences of a declarative sentence is identified in utts. 1 and 2...*Harpic remains the number one cleaner in Nigeria... And the new Harpic is five times better than detergent...* There are also 2 occurrences in the advertisement of Royco in utts: 25 and 29. In Ariel advertisement, there are 7 occurrences of a declarative sentence in utts. 78, 81, 82, 88, 92, 93, 98. The feature occurs once in the advertisement of Canon Extra in utt. 106. In the advertisement of Eagle Aromatic Schnapps, the use of a declarative sentence is recorded 3 times in utts. 108, 121, 122. All the 7 utterances in the advertisement of UNTL Wax are declarative sentences as shown in utts. 123 to 128. There is an occurrence of this feature in the advertisement of MTN in utt.140: ...MTN offers you unbeatable coverage on all ways...

	Harpic	Royco	Always	Ariel	Canon Extra	Eagle	UNTL WAX	MTN	Total
Ellipsis	3	3	28	-	-	2	1	-	37
Substitution	2			4					6
Coordination	2				1	2			5
Contraction		6			2				8
Repetition	5	2	1	6	2	8			24
Simple sentence	1		8			4			15
Declarative sentence	2	2		7		3	7	1	22
Fragmented Clause Pattern									
Percentage	15	13	37	17	5	19	8	1	117

*From the Present Study*

**5.0. Conclusion and Recommendation**

This study reveals that television advertisement, as a text, has distinctive linguistic features which can be identified at the level of style. Any piece of language that is operational as far as performing a function or functions are concerned and does this in a peculiar and distinctive manner that can easily be recognized can be said to be stylistic. The language of television advertisement no doubt displays these. The piece of language, the structure, what makes it a piece of language and the way the internal pieces have been made coherent together in unity, have all been investigated in this work, with special emphasis on the distinctive features of the language of television advertisement.

The analysis done confirms that the linguistic elements used in television advertising are modified by copywriters by their function and style, containing short and cryptic words that perform complex functions. This study discovers that the language used in television advertisements has, to a considerable extent, been based on modifications of contemporary speech habits and linguistically conditioned elements. As noticed above, advertising is a dynamic and a fast-growing field. The language used, as a vehicle of communication in advertisement is equally dynamic. Innovation is encouraged at the level of the use of language in television advertisements because advertising language is extant. There is, therefore, the need to frequently observe and study the tool of communication in a television advertisement. This is necessary so that linguists, Stylisticians, and communication experts can keep abreast with the latest features of this language variety.

As a complex marketing strategy that involves subtle persuasion through the use of carefully packaged messages directed towards the consumers; the copywriters, on whom the beauty and meaning of advertisement depend, must price in improving the quality and strategies used in advertisement plan, especially in the area of language, which is a vehicle of communication.

The use of linguistic elements such as ellipsis, coordination, contraction, emphasis, catchy phrases, coinages, etc. are all germane in order to make television advertisements appeal to the viewers. They serve as the chief means of showcasing the products and appealing to human psychological phenomena like value, class distinction, taste, interest, love etc.

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**Appendix 1: Harpic**

1. Harpic remains the number one cleaner in Nigeria/
2. And the new Harpic is five times better than detergent
3. Preach it live across cities in Nigeria
4. Wait, there is no one from this house
5. Grannnn
6. Ha! What are you doing here?
7. I'm here to check if your toilet is completely clean
8. Of course! I use detergent now
9. Let's have a look at it
10. Come
11. You can see my toilet is clean
12. Is it really sparkling clean?
13. Ha!
14. Detergent cannot remove tough stains or kill germs, it only covers them
15. Germs and stain are still there
16. That's why you need the new Harpic power plus
17. With its advance formulation
18. Just one application is five times better than detergent
19. Keeping your toilet sparkling white
20. And free from all germs
21. I... I can't believe it
22. Now I will only use new power plus harpic for my toilet
23. New Harpic power plus
24. Five times better than detergents

**Appendix 2: Royco**

25. My soup bring my man to my door
26. And it's like, he smells it from far
27. That's right, he hurries from far
28. I could teach you, I won't even charge
29. My husband gets home earlier than yours
30. Earlier than yours, earlier than yours
31. Every meal he's asking me for some more
32. I can tell you why, it's not that hard
33. La la la la
34. Stir it up
35. La la la la
36. Royco
37. La la la la
38. It's really tasty
39. La la la la
40. Royco

**Appendix 3: Always**

41. Where are you going
42. I check, I check
43. Check, check
44. On the bus I check
45. Check, check
46. In the class I check
47. Check, check
48. Every hour I check
49. Check, check
50. I check, I check
51. When I walk, I check
52. I twist I check
53. Check , check
54. I cover, I check
55. Check, check
56. I hide, I check
57. Check, check
58. I check every hour
59. I check, check
60. Check that Always
61. Check
62. Check days are gone
63. No check
64. Check days are gone
65. I study, I sit, I stand, no check
66. Eight, eight
67. No check
68. Eight, eight
69. No check, no check
70. Up to
71. Eight hours long
72. On the bus, in the class
73. I study, I walk, play
74. I dance, no stains , no check
75. Eight, eight
76. No check
77. Eight, eight

**Appendix 4: Ariel**

78. All Nigerian Artist are discovering Ariel
79. My name is Biola Oluwa
80. And I'm a fabric artist
81. I love wearing my own product
82. Looking good is good business
83. We were serving a food
84. And somebody pour a plate of soup on me
85. And I'm like ha!
86. I just said: ha!
87. I said: ha!
88. I hate washing with other detergents
89. When you just keep scrubbing and scrubbing
90. When I heard about Ariel
91. Hmm! Let me just buy the detergent
92. Ariel goes in deep to remove difficult stain better in just one wash
93. With Ariel, it's very simple, it washes it and the stain was totally off
94. And I lined it outside
95. And it's just a form of displaying
96. They just fall in love with it

97. Ariel
98. Ariel, brilliant, cleaning in one wash

**Appendix 5: Canon Extra**

99. Let's go
100. Just go
101. Hello, where's my husband
102. Oooops!
103. What!
104. Haaaa!
105. Never underestimate the power of Canon Extra
106. Canon Extra, gives quick relief from headache and body pains
107. If symptom persists after three day, consult your doctor

**Appendix 6: Eagle Aromatic Schnapps (CODE MIXING)**

108. My people know that success starts with blessing
109. I want to be successful
110. I want to roar like an Eagle
111. I need blessings with Eagle Schnapps
112. My son, as you go to the big city, may you soar like an Eagle
113. Asee
114. May your journey to success be as swift as the Eagle
115. Asee
116. May you achieve success and the might of an Eagle
117. Asee
118. So I embarked on my journey well assured of my success
119. And soon, I came back with a success story
120. And of course with Eagle Schnapps and success story
121. Eagle Aromatic Schnapps is blessing and success story
122. Eagle Aromatic Schnapps, a success of our cultural heritage

**Appendix 7: UNTL WAX**

123. UNTL wax has been long known for its durability
124. The colours don't fade
125. The fabrics last and last
126. UNTL wax is a wax that will never let you down, now and always.
127. UNTL wax, superior wax made in Nigeria
128. UNTL wax is here to stay

**Appendix 8: MTN**

129. Yellow damn mate you say you don travel abi?
130. How many roads sabi You like We
131. Oh boy I don take Yellow Paint cover all the Road finish
132. From Kano road go Zaria go Kaduna go Abuja Zambariwa!
133. Ha, ah what's up?
134. Yellow, my guy no be you Darling
135. Na people wey don feel my MTN Yellow power dey hail me
136. Oh leave matter my guy
137. Ehehen see how MTN Yellow magic don catch People with den car
138. MTN man
139. Yellow
140. MTN offers you unbeatable coverage on all ways.