AMBIGUITY OF MEANING IN ENGLISH ADVERTISEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study of 'Ambiguity of Meanings in English Advertisements' aims to find the causes of ambiguity of meanings in English advertisement. The effect of the ambiguity of meanings provides the description about how the ambiguity of meanings affects the readers. The data were collected through various electronic advertisements in websites. There are five advertisements chosen with priority on their verbal elements, which are the headlines and also the complete element of advertisements which support the ambiguity of meanings that lies behind the headline. Data was analysed qualitatively based on the main theory by Myers and Ullmann. In his Ullmann's theory proposes three forms of ambiguity relating to lexical factors as the most important type. The analysis of the cause of ambiguity of meanings is based on the definition given by Myers, while the analysis of the effect of the ambiguity of meanings based on the research was done by Myers and Dyer. The results of the analysis indicate that each advertisement has its own reason about the cause of ambiguity of meanings in the headlines and signature. From four advertisements, one is caused by homonymy (plate 4); two of the others are caused by puns and homonymy (plate 1& 2); and the last is caused by metaphor (plate 3). The effects of ambiguity of meanings are dealing with the aims of the advertisements themselves, such as to bring emotive associations of a product, to create product or company image through the advertisement.

Keywords: linguistic, ambiguity, advertisement

ABSTRAK

Penelitian tentang ' Makna Ganda dalam Iklan Bahasa Inggris' bertujuan untuk menemukan penyebab adanya makna ganda tersebut. Akibat yang terjadi dari makna ganda ini memberikan gambaran tentang bagaimana iklan tersebut mempengaruhi pembacanya. Semua data dikumpulkan dari iklan elektronik yang ada di website. Ada empat iklan yang dipilih dengan prioritas pada bagian utamanya yaitu headline dan bagian iklan lainnya yang mendukung headline dari iklan tersebut. Teori utama yang digunakan menganalisa iklan –iklan ini adalah dari Myers dan Ullman yang dianalisis secara qualitatif. Teori Ullman merumuskan ada tiga bentuk makna ganda yang disebabkan oleh faktor leksikal merupakan paling penting. Analisis penyebab dari makna ganda pada iklan didasarkan pada definisi yang diberikan oleh Myers, sedangkan untuk menganalisa efeknya terhadap para pembaca didasarkan pada penelitian yang dilakukan oleh Myers dan Dyer. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa setiap iklan memiliki alasan tersendiri tentang penyebab makna gandanya pada bagian headline *dan* signature *(ciri khas). Dari keempat iklan yang dianalisis, satu iklan makna gandanya disebabkan oleh homonim, (gambar 4); dua iklan berikutnya disebabkan oleh permainan kata-kata (*puns*) dan homonim (gambar 1& 2); dan yang terakhir penyebabnya adalah metafora (gambar 3). Efek dari makna ganda berkaitan dengan tujuan dari iklan tersebut, misalnya ingin menarik emosi pembaca ke produk yang diiklankan, membuat imej atau kesan tentang produk atau perusahaan melalui iklan.*

Kata kunci : bahasa, makna ganda, iklan

1. INTRODUCTION

Human necessities are increasing along with the progression in every aspect of life in the world. Many manufactures produce in accordance with the increase in demand of goods and services. Moreover, there are several cases that different manufacturers produce the same products. Certainly, many claim that their products are the best ones.

There are many ways to promote products, one of which is through advertising. A wide range of manufacturers, from small to large scale one, promote their products through advertisements. Generally, advertisements can be found in magazines, newspapers, radio, television, and online media. In addition, advertisements can also be found in the form of pamphlets, on the wall along the street or in the public places that can attract people's attention.

Generally, the language of advertisement is informal and colloquial. In addition, it is sometimes quite standard and unobtrusive. The sentences in advertisements are simply constructed and short. Its primary aim is to attract the audience's interest and for entertainment reasons. In advertising, the advertisers often use the language that contains ambiguous meaning.

Ullman in Semantics an Introduction to the Science of Meaning (1977: 156) stated that ambiguity is a linguistic condition, which can rise in a variety of ways. In advertisement, the homonymy, puns, and metaphor are commonly use to rise ambiguity of meaning or double meaning.

Ambiguous meanings in advertising can use on the same word or a word with spelling and pronunciation that is almost similar but still contain different meanings. This is called a homonymy. Dyer (1982:153) gives an example of the famous cigarette slogan such as ' Players Please'. It can be read as either 'Please give me some Players' or 'Players are pleasing'. In this case, Players is a brand of cigarette. The example above also can call as a pun, i.e. play on brand names of a product. Myers (1994:65) stated that many of the puns in advertisements used two unrelated existing meanings of a word.

1.1 Statement of Research Question

Based on the above-mentioned background, the research questions addressed in this study are as follows: what are the causes and how are the effects of ambiguity of meanings in English advertisements?

1.2 Concept of Ambiguity

Ambiguity is a linguistic condition, which arises in a variety of ways. According Empson in The Science of Meaning by Stephen Ullman (1977), from a purely linguistic point of view there are three main forms of ambiguity: phonetic ambiguity, grammatical ambiguity, and lexical ambiguity. By far, the most important type of ambiguity, is that due to the lexical factors. The sentences may become ambiguous because they contain one or more ambiguous words. This condition is called lexical ambiguity (Fromkin and Rodman, 1974:212).

A word can be given one or more figurative senses without losing its original meaning: old and new will live on side by side as long as there is no possibility of confusion between them. In this way a number of metaphors may, as a pioneer of modern semantics put it, 'radiate' from the central sense. For example, the word 'eye' can be describe the term of the organ. The Shorter Oxford Dictionary lists the following metaphorical used of this term: the opening through which the water of a fountain wells up; a central mass; the brightest spot (of light) ; the center of revolution; etc.

Homonymy differs from polysemy. It has no advantages except for the punster and rhymester. Since the work was done on homonymic by Gilleron, J. Orr and other linguistic geographers, it is no longer possible to dismiss this form of ambiguity as a mere episode in the life of language (Ullman,1977:181). However, in most cases, homonymy does not cause embarrassment in ordinary speech. The influence of context is by far the most important type of safeguards.

In Professor Palmer's formula, *'homonymy causes linguistic disturbances only when it exists between words that in given contexts would cause misunderstandings'* (Ullman,1977:181).

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 The Understanding, Structure, and Language of Advertisement.

Advertising makes sense in a system in which we work for money and define ourselves by the things we buy. Myers (1994; 10) stated that advertising offers a relationship between the advertiser and its audience based on the associations of meanings with the products.

Regarding to Dyer's idea, Leech also divided advertising in quite similar and much simpler way, which are commercial consumer advertising, retail advertising, and prestige advertising. In order to understand the language in press advertisements, we have to appreciate some essential arts in its design and structure.

Leech in English Advertising (1972:59) explained that the standard components of press advertisements, as distinguished by functional and layout, are headline, illustration body copy and signature line. The headline and signature line can be regarded as the most indispensable parts of a press advertisement, although even these are sometimes collapsed into a single display line. The other parts are optional and omitted with varying degrees of frequency.

Advertising language is generally informal and colloquial (Dyer, 1982:144). The sentences are simply construction and short. Some figurative expressions have passed into daily life. The expression like *'I'll eat my words'* or *' chewing over an idea'*, are not to be taken literally. We commonly interpret them in a figurative sense. They are the example of metaphor, where a word acceptable in one context (e.g. 'eat' in the context of food) is transferred to another context (Dyer, 1982:152). Beside metaphors, puns are also useful to provoke interest through the advertising. A puns can be made explicit in two ways by repeating the same word in a different meaning, and by commenting on the ambiguity.

The discussion about homonymy is already mention in the previous part. This part discusses the connection homonymy with the advertisement. A statement could be ambiguous if different meanings can be expressed by using the words alike in spelling and pronunciation (Dyers, 1982:153).

Therefore, the linguists called this as homonymy.

2.2 Research Design

The data was taken from several websites, including www.behance.net, www.facebok.com, and www.pinterest.com. All of the advertisements used in this study won the best marketing and advertising images in 2020. The headline and signature of the advertisements were the most important features to be analysed. Furthermore, the body copy, image (picture), and the sub-headline are supporting elements for the analysis of ambiguity of meaning.

The data collected was then analysed using the qualitative method. Moreover, the analysis on the ambiguity of meaning was based on the abovementioned theory, and then the analysis involved correlating between exploration of ambiguity of meaning by the advertisers and the effects on the readers.

3.RESULT
Plate 1: Advertisement of BIG COLA
Plate 2: Advertisement of McDonalds
Plate 3: Advertisement of Toyota PRIUS
Plate 4: Advertisement of Facebook

The analysis indicates that each advertisement has their own reason for the cause of ambiguity of meanings in their headline and then one of them is signature. Based on four advertisements analysed, one of them is caused by homonymy (Plate 4: Advertisement of Facebook); two of the others are caused by puns and homonymy (Plate 1&2: Advertisements of BIG COLA and McDonalds); and one is caused by metaphor (Plate 3: Advertisement of Toyota PRIUS).

Metaphor is a cause of ambiguity of meanings in advertisement because headlines and signatures contain words that can arise expressions setting the similarity of two referents as if they were the same things. Whereas, the puns and homonymy can be the cause of ambiguity of meanings at the same time in an advertisement. The effects of ambiguity of meanings that arise deal with the aims of the advertisements themselves which are the creating the right kind of emotive associations to be linked to a product through

metaphor, and making the reader create their image through the product or services offered through metaphor.

Metaphors are powerful, but they can easily get out of the advertisers' control. The meanings of metaphors cannot be pinned down. They can carry over several meanings at once without untangling them. On the other hands, the ambiguity of meanings that arise from puns and homonymy also have similar effects. Both of them are useful to make the audience create their own image through the product or service offered. In addition, puns also make the bored readers interested to look at the advertisement. However, the puns have a negative effect to make people groan because it may seem unreasonable and it can violate the logical relationship of language.

4. CONCLUSION

Companies use advertisement to promote their products or services either verbally or visually. Advertisers use the nature of ambiguous language in advertisements to attracting the audience's attention and direct them toward the products or services offered. The use of language ambiguity affects the readers as an active interpreter of advertisements.

The results of analysis show that each advertisement has their reason about the cause of ambiguity of meanings in their headline and signature. Based on the four advertisements analysed, one of them is caused by homonymy (Plate 4; Advertisement of Facebook); two of the others are caused by puns and homonymy (Plate 1&2: Advertisements of Big Cola and Mc Donald); and the last is caused by metaphor (Plate 3 ; Advertisement of Toyota PRIUS).

The metaphor is a cause of ambiguity of meanings in the advertisement because the headline and the signature contain the words that can arise expressions that set up the similarity of two referents as if they were the same things. Whereas, the puns and homonymy can be as the cause of ambiguity of meanings at the same time in an advertisement.

The effects of ambiguity of meanings relate with the aim of the advertisements themselves. The effects of ambiguity of meanings that arise from metaphor is creating the right kind of emotive

associations to be linked to a product. On the other hands, the ambiguity of meanings that arise from puns and homonymy also have similar effects. Both of them are useful to make the reader create their own image through the product or service on offer. Additionally, puns can also make the bored audience interested to look at the advertisement. However, the puns have a negative effect to make people groan because it seems unreasonable and it can violate the logical relationship of language.

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