

# Deixis and Personalization in Ad Slogans

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**Abstract**—This study examines the use of the persuasive strategy of *deixis* and *personalization* in advertising slogans. This rhetorical/stylistic and linguistic strategy has been found to be widely used in advertising slogans for over a century. A total of five hundred advertising slogans of multinational companies in both product and service sectors were obtained. The analysis reveals the 3 main components of this strategy as being *deictic words*, *absolute uniqueness* and *personal pronouns*. The percentage and mean of the use of the 3 components are tabulated. The findings show that advertisers have used this persuasive strategy in creative ways to persuade consumers to buy their products and services.

**Keywords**—Advertising slogans, deixis, personalization, persuasive strategy.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THIS study aims to investigate the persuasive technique of *deixis* and *personalization* used in advertising slogans that span over a century. It analyzes the use of this rhetorical strategy in advertising slogans of multinational companies selected from the late 1800s, through the 1900s and into the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

*Deixis* in discourse possesses the feature of pointing or showing, directing a particular speech towards the notion of time and space. Deictic words, however, rely on the *situation* or *context of utterance* [1, 2, 3]. Used widely in drama, poetry and literature, the reader has some prior knowledge of what the deictic words refer to [1, 3] and view them from their own point of view [15].

In advertising, visual materials, whenever present, play the role of providing continuity of the message of the advertisement. Deictic words such as *this*, *those*, *it* and *there* can be used as *cross-reference* in referring to the linguistic context in advertisements which are accompanied by visuals. The latter use is predominant in television advertisements [2].

Particularity of reference is a feature of *proper names* and *grammatical items*. In advertising, the brand name is considered a proper name and this is used to refer to a product or service. The grammatical items mentioned refer to personal pronouns, articles, demonstratives and adverbs of place and time which point to an entity, place or time in relation to a particular context.

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Reference [3], however, also mentions the present versus past tense as included in this category. This can be applied to the converting of direct speech into indirect speech where *here* and *now* become *there* and *then*.

### A. Personal Address

#### 1. Personal Pronouns

These deictic words or *indicative elements* also include the first and second person pronouns, *I*, *we* and *you* [3]. In advertising, the second person pronoun, *you*, refers to the consumer. Therefore both the brand name and the second person pronoun are used hand in hand to make advertising copy distinct from other types of discourse [2].

Advertising does make use of the fact that in Standard English, the singular and plural are not formally distinguished. Reference [4] shows that it employs the second person pronoun *you* in a *direct if simulated personal address* where the reader is considered both as an individual and as a group, lending empathy to the message [74]. This can be seen in the following *Premium Bonds* advertisement:

It's September and Christmas is coming. But are *you* feeling the pinch? [74]

Reference [4], however, also states that many advertisements do refer to a single reader as can be seen in this *Friends of the Earth* advertisement:

You may feel that, as an *individual*, there is not much *you* can do to help [74].

A third instance shown in reference [4] is combining both these ways of representing the reader:

Save just £10 a month and watch *your child's* security grow with *them* [131].

Consumer-friendly corporate bodies use personal pronouns such as *we* in their advertising to lend a friendly and personal image of themselves to the consumer. In the slogan of *The Cooperative Bank* which appeared on the London Underground Train, the implied subject is *we* as the bank who are posing this question [4]:

What's the difference between *ourselves* and other major banks? [164]

The emphatic pronoun, *ourselves*, has to be stressed when read, and only a stressed *us* can substitute it [4]. The third-person pronoun, *it*, on the other hand, has an impersonal effect,

and is used by very large corporate organizations. However, the pronoun *it* also appears in small press or circular advertising such as in the advertisement found in a Covent Garden restaurant voucher [4]:

Sample the delights of Cajun and creole cooking at *its* best! [177]

In fact, the *it* is found to be used widely in major newspapers such as *The Guardian*. Strip cartoons, and film or play advertisements also use this impersonal pronoun [4]. Therefore, although personalizing seems to be a popular strategy used in advertising, the impersonal *it* cannot be totally dispensed with.

One construction used widely in advertising slogans involves using the personal pronoun and an adjective to indicate *upgrading* and *downgrading*. This is where positive and negative attributes are employed in the same slogan as shown by these advertising slogans that appeared in *The Guardian* [4]:

The Volkswagen Boulevard. More stylish than *your* old cul-de-sac [181].

New Cushioncare from the makers of Elastoplast. For *your* larger than average wound [181].

This use of this type of personal address goes a long way back as described [4]:

...this generalizing-deictic use of *your* appears to have originated in the colloquial non-standard speech of the working classes, appearing in the prose dialogue of many Elizabethan plays composed in London in the aphoristic speeches or stereotypical jokes of clowns or rustics etc. Because of its second person-hood, and its focussing effect arising from its deicticness, it occurs in the kind of late-sixteenth-century educational prose-work that is reader or audience friendly, rhetorically giving *point* to generalizing propositions [181].

Over the years, personalization has grown not only in advertising but also in science [17]:

...even the positivists...are beginning to abandon their insistence on total impersonality, allowing, for example, the use of the first person pronoun – which used to be called the *intrusive 'I'* ...This is to me an acknowledgement of human intervention in the scientific process. By being more open, perhaps science becomes more credible [1097].

Looking at the functions of the various pronouns, the *I* and *we* are 'metadiscourse elements' used to link a product or service with a company. The *you* is used to express a one-to-one relationship and the *he/she*, *it/they* indicate shared knowledge between the persuader and audience or consumer. Although advertisements reach a huge number of people at

any one time, these pronouns or *person markers* lend a personal touch to the consumer [18].

## 2. Personification

The use of personification in the media has seen an increase, especially in film and advertising. Personification is present when there is potentiality for the referent to be addressed by *you* (or *thou*), in the assignment of the faculty of speech (and hence the potential occurrence of *I*), in the assignment of a personal name, in the co-occurrence of personified NP with *he/she* and in the reference to human/animal attributes: what TG (transformational grammar) would thus term the violation of selection restrictions (e.g. *the sun slept*) [4] [146].

Personification and parody have also been used hand in hand. For instance, in the conventional signs on ice-cream vans, 'Stop *me* and buy one', personification and metonymy are present with the use of the first person pronoun, *me*. However, this has been parodied in other advertisements, for instance, 'Buy *me* and stop one' for anti-car theft devices, advertised on the back of a bus (where a vehicle is used as the medium) [4] [147]. This is also a case of intertextuality in advertising.

Products advertised are also personified by labelling them with personal names or brand names, for example, *Mr. Muscle* for a bottle of oven-cleaner and *Mister Print* for a print and design company respectively [4].

### B. Expressing Uniqueness

The definite article is used to demonstrate uniqueness of a referent. Appositional constructions in advertising most often employ the definite article together with the brand name as the first element. Therefore, in *Wisdom. The 'correct-shaped' toothbrush*, the brand name, *Wisdom*, is followed by the definite article, *the*. The effect of this is explained [2]:

These constructions have the character of particular definitions; they equate one kind of name, a brand-name, with another – an expression describing some unique entity [157].

However, the construction, *Wisdom. The 'correct-shaped' toothbrush*, although not overtly stated, in effect conceals a supposition that all other toothbrushes are wrongly shaped [2] [157].

The definite article is also used in the generic sense in reference to the consumer, for example, *Be the girl with the Bush transistor portable*. The generic *the* in this case attributes uniqueness to a whole class of entities, not to any particular member of it. Secondly, *the* can be interpreted as providing subjectively assumed uniqueness to the particular *girl with the Bush* who is assumed to possess the qualities of attractiveness and prestige [2] [157].

The demonstrative, *that*, is also sometimes used to convey the function of *absolute uniqueness* as shown:

A Green Shield Worthington gives every man *that* great feeling [2] [158].

As we can see, *that* modifies an abstract noun of sensation, *that great feeling*, in conveying the message:

the X which cannot fail to strike every user of the product as different from other Xs [2] [158].

The sub-modifiers *such* and *so* play a similar role in, 'Such a good natural cheddar' and 'Fresh dairy cream tastes so good.' The deictic force of *so* is also present in clauses showing extent, 'so good that...' [2] [158]. However, it is not always the case that *so* and the *that* clause appear together.

When *so* is not followed by the *that* clause, it might be claimed that the deictic function is still present in an absolute sense, and that the full denotative value of *so good* could be expressed as *good to a unique extent*. However, in ordinary conversation, as in advertising, this force of *so* is somewhat weakened by its hyperbolic use to express an emotional attitude [2] [158].

In advertising, there are also words that express uniqueness more explicitly such as the adjective, *unique* itself and *only*, in for instance, 'the unique prescription for colds and flu' and 'the only chocolate flavoured cereal' respectively. Superlative adjectives also belong in this category. These words that express uniqueness directly are deictic in nature as they always follow the definite article *the* in the noun group although there are exceptions like, *a best man* or *an only child*. There are also phrases that use the negative such as *no other* and *nothing else* that demonstrate absolute uniqueness of a product or service. Although they are in the negative, their value in expressing exclusiveness outweighs their disadvantage in being negative [2] [158].

In summing up this section, we have seen the application of *deixis* and *personalization* as a stylistic strategy in advertising. *Deixis* also plays a principal part in the *embodiment of perception* and a *cognitive* approach will shed some light in this area [13] [41].

### III. METHODOLOGY

A total of five hundred advertising slogans were selected from multinational companies belonging to both product and service sectors. Overall, there are eight categories the slogans fall into. They are *food and drink*, *tobacco*, *automobile*, *airline*, *photography*, *electronics*, *computing* and *fashion*. Various categories were selected to ensure that the rhetorical patterns, if any, that emerged from the study would be consistent. The varied selection would also eliminate the possibility of some product or service categories using more persuasive strategies in their advertising than others because of some *intrinsic characteristic of the product or service* [11] [10].

Another important criterion for the selection of these slogans was that the products and services concerned or the companies involved were internationally popular or well-known. This was determined from the profiles of the particular companies found in business and advertising encyclopedias as well as from the company websites. The products and services were also considered if the researcher, being from Asia where these products and services did not originate, was familiar with them in her own country or had, at the very least, heard of the brand name or company. It is

important that ...a rhetorical figure draws on a specific body of preexisting sociocultural knowledge [9] [433].

TABLE I  
LIST OF COMPANIES

British American Tobacco plc.  
The Coca-Cola Company  
Continental Airlines  
Daimler Chrysler  
Dr Pepper Snapple Group  
Eastman Kodak Company  
Ford Motor Company  
The General Electric Company  
Guinness & Co.  
H.J. Heinz Company  
IBM Corporation  
Maidenform Inc.  
PepsiCo Inc.

Table I shows the list of companies used in the study. The companies were selected based mainly on the availability of both the advertising slogans, and the corresponding years in which the slogans were created or were first used. Knowing the year a slogan was created or was first used is important as it gives an overview of why a particular linguistic or stylistic feature appears in the slogan.

The occurrences of *deixis* and *personalization* were coded and classified under their various components based on information gained from the review of related literature and a content analysis carried out on a sample of 24 advertising slogans in a pilot study.

### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

*Deixis* and *personalization* is a stylistic strategy found to be employed in the advertising slogans analyzed. The findings confirmed the presence of 3 components of this persuasive strategy in the slogans. They are *deictic words*, *absolute uniqueness* and *personal pronouns*.

TABLE II  
PERCENTAGE AND MEAN OF DEIXIS AND PERSONALIZATION

	Percentage (%)	Mean
Deictic Words	46.6	0.5
Absolute Uniqueness	31.8	0.3
Personal Pronouns	21.5	0.2

Table II shows the percentage and mean of the use of *deixis* and *personalization* in the advertising slogans analyzed. The use of *deictic words* was the most popular with the highest percentage of about 46 and a mean of nearly 0.5. This was followed by *absolute uniqueness* at nearly 32% and a mean of about 0.3. The use of *personal pronouns* had a percentage of about 21 and a mean of about 0.2.

Hence, the use of *deictic words* was a prominent strategy used in the slogans. This was followed by *absolute uniqueness* which was the second most popular strategy under this

category. Thirdly, *personal pronouns* were also used in the slogans analysed.

#### A. Deictic Words

*Deictic words* were popularly used in the slogans to point the consumer in the direction intended by the advertiser. *Deictic words* such as *this*, *that*, *there*, *today*, *tomorrow* and *now* play an important part in persuading the consumer as they help the consumer focus on aspects of the intended message of the slogan. Reference [16] states that *deictic words* related to time are always present 'as tense is an obligatory category' whereas those related to places and people are not [34]. This is justified by the data of this study, in that there are more *deictic words* of time than those of places and things. Examples are the Coca-Cola slogans, *The pause that refreshes* (1929) and *Always Coca-Cola* (1993) and the Dr Pepper slogan, *The most original soft drink ever* (1970s) where the *deictic words* are *that*, *always* and *ever* respectively. There are, however, slogans which contain both *deictic words* of time and place, for instance, the Dr Pepper slogan, *Now is the time. This is the place. Dr Pepper, this is the taste* (1998) where *now* points to time and *this* points to place.

In visual images, *deictic words* are always absent unlike in verbal messages. This explains why a visual image is almost always accompanied by a verbal message in an advertisement, that is, to provide a *deictic* anchorage for the correct interpretation of the message [16].

In the 1905 Coca-Cola slogan, *Good all the way down*, the preposition *down* acts as a *deictic word* of place in this slogan as it points to the drink going down the drinker's throat. Reference [5] discusses the use of the preposition *down* as being connected with disadvantage and depression. However, as a *deictic word* in this slogan, *down* is given positive connotations that serve to emphasize the good qualities of the drink.

The data show that among the popular *deictic words* used are *now*, *that*, *so*, the third person pronoun, *it*, and the indefinite article, *a*. In the 1940s British American Tobacco slogan, *So round, so firm, so fully packed*, the sub-modifier, *so*, is used as a *deictic word* with the scheme *anaphora*. The combination of this *deictic word* and the repetition contributes to the persuasiveness of this slogan.

In the 1926 Coca-Cola slogan, *It had to be good to get where it is*, the third person pronoun, *it*, is used at the beginning and towards the end. The effect of the *deictic* use of this pronoun seems to be greater towards the end as it points to the position of Coca-Cola being somewhere at the top. However, imagine the slogan being rephrased without this *deictic word* used at the end: *It had to be good to get to the top*. Somehow the persuasive impact is not the same as the original slogan with the *deictic word* towards the end. To say directly that it is one of the top drinks, reduces the persuasive effect of the slogan. This is where the *deictic word* plays its role.

#### B. Absolute Uniqueness

*Absolute uniqueness* is another component of *deixis* where, in advertising, the *uniqueness* of a product or service is brought out by such words as the definite article, *the*, such as

in the 1955 Coca-Cola slogan, *Almost everyone appreciates the best*. Here, it is used with the superlative, *best*, but this is not always the case. Copywriters do show their creativity in coming up with other ways of expressing *uniqueness*. Even the indefinite article, *a*, can be used for this purpose if used cleverly. An example is the 1943 Coca-Cola slogan, *A taste all its own*. In this case, the indefinite article works together with the phrase, *all its own* to emphasise the *uniqueness* of the drink. The demonstrative, *that*, is also used to show *uniqueness* such as in the 1943 Coca-Cola slogan, *That extra something*.

As mentioned in the review of literature, the *negative* is also utilised in demonstrating *uniqueness* such as in the 1985 Guinness slogan, *No beer comes near*. Another variation is as used in the 1995 Pepsi slogan, *Nothing else is a Pepsi*. In a more current Coca-Cola slogan, *One and only* (2003), the show of *uniqueness* is more explicit. Another instance of the word *only* expressing *uniqueness* is in the 2004 Guinness slogan, *A taste that can only be Guinness*.

Consider this Guinness slogan, *Absolutely is Guinness* (2000). Although it expresses *uniqueness* in an indirect way, it totally violates the rules of grammar. It would be interesting to wait and see if copywriters come up with other interesting and novel ways of expressing *uniqueness*.

#### C. Personal Pronouns

*Personalization* goes hand-in-hand with *deixis*. The second-person pronoun, *you*, plays a prominent role in this strategy with the aim of establishing a bond between the persuader and the consumer where the *you* is the consumer. There are variations in the use of this pronoun. For instance, in the British American Tobacco slogan, *Do you inhale? Of course you do!* (1932), the persuader uses a leading rhetorical question to create rapport with the consumer. The *personalization* here is further enhanced by the conversational nature of this slogan. The reflexive form of the pronoun is also present in slogans such as in the 1923 Coca-Cola slogan, *Refresh yourself*. Companies such as IBM which are very consumer-focused use the second person pronouns *you* and *your* to go a step further to help consumers achieve their goals. Examples are the slogans, *Are you ready for e-business?* (1998) and *Your business on demand* (2004). The first-person pronouns, *I*, *we* and *me* also help in the act of *personalizing* although they represent the persuader or advertiser. Companies like Ford Motor Company and The General Electric Company show no particular preference for the types of personal pronouns they use.

The British American Tobacco slogan created in the 1960s used the first-person pronoun in their slogan, *Show me a filter cigarette that delivers the taste, and I'll eat my hat!* This slogan seems to smack of pride and snobbery and therefore such a slogan will probably not be successful today. Reference [8] shares this sentiment in that a message using the first-person pronoun is viewed as *insulting* or *offensive* and consumers may decide to *tune it out* [37]. Most of the slogans in this study, however, have used the second person pronoun, *you*, to create *personalization*.

This does not mean that first-person pronouns are not effective. On the contrary, these person markers produce a

sense of solidarity with the potential customer, since the advertisers themselves are also portrayed as members of the target group. The person markers mentioned are pronouns which, in this case, refer to first-person pronouns. Even third-person pronouns such as *she*, *he*, *they* and *it* imply shared knowledge between the addresser and the addressee and they are now used for suggesting a personal bond between the two or the presence of a referent which is not mentioned [18] [1298].

#### V. CONCLUSION

From the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the rhetorical strategy of *deixis* and *personalization* has been widely and creatively used in advertising slogans to persuade consumers for over a hundred years. Their use was, in fact, the main rhetorical or stylistic and linguistic strategy found in the advertising slogans studied. Advertisers have been adept at using *deictic words*, *absolute uniqueness* and *personal pronouns* in their slogans to promote their products and services. *Personal pronouns* were used to lend a personal touch to the message conveyed in the slogans. It is hoped that this study would encourage more researchers and scholars to carry out further research on this persuasive strategy in relation to new technology.

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