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THE PERSUASIVE FUNCTION OF RHETORIC IN ADVERTISING SLOGANS

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ABSTRACT

The current article discusses the use and purpose of rhetorical figures in advertising slogans. The choice of words and techniques used by copywriters may strengthen the conviction of prospective buyers that by buying an offered product they may get more than products or services i.e. they may get the features they are looking for, and they may fulfil their needs and achieve satisfaction. The body of 49 advertising slogans of cars and airplanes has been chosen for the analysis. The choice is not a random one since all the slogans concern very popular means of transportation, and focus on features which are very important, and therefore sought by both drivers and passengers. Finally, the features have been used to create a schema for the advertised products.

Key words: slogan, rhetorical figures, identity, schema, persuasion, competition

INTRODUCTION

The omnipresence of advertising messages causes that many people may not notice some of them, or even ignore them. Thus, copywriters have a very challenging and difficult task to perform since they not only have to attract and sustain people's attention to what they 'say' about a product, but they

also have to use methods and techniques that make people remember the message. They have to bear in mind that contemporary customers can choose from a large number of offers, and as a result they are becoming more and more sophisticated, demanding and fastidious. What is more, there is a cut-throat competition in most of the markets, and every company has to be very watchful if it does not want to lose the edge. One of the devices, which is a part of almost every advertisement is a slogan, whose persuasive power is considerable and as such it deserves to be investigated.

1. THE FUNCTION AND POWER OF RHETORIC AND PERSUASION.

Every effort companies make to sell something makes use of persuasion. Most of the definitions of persuasion include words such as **motivation, influence, values, beliefs** and **wants**. Even the simplest ones that are provided by dictionaries, for example, "Persuasion is the process of persuading someone to do or believe something" refer to its power to influence somebody's decisions and actions.¹ The definition of persuasion that seems to be very relevant for the purpose of the present article comes from Harvard Business School „Persuasion is a process that enables you to change or reinforce others' attitudes, opinions or behaviours [...]. What is more, persuasion is not only a matter of making a rational case but also of presenting information in a way that appeals to fundamental human emotions. It's about positioning an idea, approach, or solution in a way that appeals to the people who are affected by it"². In the light of the above features and characteristics persuasion is often linked to rhetoric, which also aims at attracting attention, influencing and gaining compliance of the recipient of the message. The rhetor, through using appropriate techniques can convince his/her audience to his/her point of view and influence their ways of thinking, and/or making a decision "The user of rhetoric peddles choices, even though most people naturally resist making choices unless forced to do so"³. Copywriters use rhetorical figures, which are modes of persuasion used to reach and win customers as well influence their purchasing decisions. They employ a variety of techniques and strategies, which are supported by the language they choose to convey messages to an audience. The power of language and its ability to penetrate entire communities and their cultures, its ability to shape a world view is enormous and can never be underestimated⁴. The rhetorical devices that have been employed

¹ MacMillan English Dictionary For Advanced Learners. Bloomsberry Publishing: Oxford 2002, p.1057.

² Persuading people. Expert Solutions to Everyday Challenges. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business Press 2008, p. 4.

³ Hart, R.P., Daughton, S.: Modern rhetorical criticism (third edition). New York: Allyn & Bacon 2005, p.86.

⁴ c.f. Čulenová, E.: Jazyk. Matricaaleboplášť? Banská Bystrica: Fakulta humanitných vied Univerzity Mateja Bela 2012, p. 136.

in the analysed slogans are as follows: **alliteration, hyperbole, rhyme, repetition, personification, rhetorical question, idiom, simile, oxymoron** as well as grammatical forms such as **pronouns, verbs, nouns and adjectives**.

2. SLOGAN AS A FUNDAMENTAL ASPECT OF ADVERTISEMENT

Given the large number of advertisements that bombard us on a daily basis it is obvious that we cannot remember most of what we see or hear. Thus, a slogan which is usually short, seems to be one of the easiest ways to attract and hold our attention. The word *slogan* comes from a Celtic word *slaugh*=*army* +*gharim*+*war*, which can be understood as a 'war cry'. Therefore, the language used in slogans is often perceived as a powerful weapon.⁵ Slogans are used to establish brand's identity, raise awareness of a product, stimulate interest, create a desired image and secure a position on the market that will enable the company not only to reach its sales targets, but also effectively compete with rival products. The definition of a slogan that comprises most of its features has been provided by Ranju and MukeshTrehan "It is a short, simple phrase or a catchy sentence which is easy to remember, sweet, easily pronounceable, pleasing to ear [...]. It should be related to product-features, product-quality, product superiority, etc. Sometimes a brand-name of a product is also mentioned in a slogan and helps increase the chance that it will be remembered (popular slogans can be used for number of years). Slogans can also act as headlines. Slogans are also called punch lines or jingles"⁶. To sum up the most important features of slogans they are: short (usually 3-5 words); should inform about the features of a product e.g. *Protection on all sides* (Audi); should be simple e.g. *Always Coca-Cola*; should differentiate the brand and refer to the needs of the customer, e.g. *Designed to save lives* (Volvo); should recall the brand name e.g. *Have you driven Ford lately?*; should include a key benefit e.g. *Hospitality at the highest level* and be memorable e.g. *Skoda Simply clever* (Skoda). Since slogans are one of the key methods to make a positive impression and encourage purchase they should be carefully invented. The reason is that they should be compatible with other marketing and advertising strategies employed by companies; should inform customers about conditions and situations in which a particular brand is a good choice and how potential buyers will benefit from a particular product. The knowledge they may gain from a slogan can be considerable and concern product attributes, functions, benefits and its purpose. This is what advertising actually aims to achieve i.e. inform about what people need and want to know before making a purchasing decision.

⁵ cf. Kwaciak, B.: Co trzeba wiedzieć reklamie. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Profesjonalnej Szkoły Biznesu 1997, p. 107.

⁶ Mukesh,T.: Advertising and Sales Management. New Delhi: V.K. (India) Enterprises 2006, p.121.

3. ANALYSIS OF CHOSEN SLOGANS

The analyzed slogans are part of advertising messages of the following car makes: Toyota, Mercedes, Jaguar, Dodge, Hyundai, KIA, Ford, Alfa Romeo, Skoda, Honda, Citroen, BMW, Volkswagen, Chevrolet, Volvo, Nissan, Subaru, Land Rover, Peugeot and airlines: Delta Airlines, Emirates, Virgin America, Qatar Airways and KLM. They have been grouped and analyzed according to the rhetorical figures they employ.

3.1. Alliteration- also known as 'head rhyme' or 'initial rhyme' is a stylistic device in which words that have the same first consonant sound occur close together in a series. Such arrangement of letters makes a slogan definitely easier to notice and remember, and also more interesting.

Today, Tomorrow, Toyota (Toyota)

Don't dream it. Drive it (Jaguar)

Building a better airline, not just a bigger one (Delta Airlines)

The use of alliteration in the above slogans draws attention to the following features and key benefits of offered products: **continuous availability** and **reliability** (Today, Tomorrow, Toyota); assurance of the realisation of **what customers dream about** (Don't dream it. Drive it), and declaration that the company's **policy of growth** is not realised at the expense of the **quality** it offers.

3.2. Hyperbole- a rhetorical device that purposefully uses exaggeration. The aim is to emphasize something, to stir imagination and to intensify emotions. The use of hyperbole in slogans allows copywriters to focus on product qualities.

Visit new worlds with our inflight entertainment (Emirates)

Loaded with adrenaline (Dodge Nitro)

Chevrolet. An American revolution (Chevrolet)

Designed to save lives (Volvo)

The above usage of hyperbole allowed copywriters to focus on such benefits and features of offered products as: promise to take customers to '**new worlds**' (clearly there is only one world, but the company offers some unique experience, which is enhanced by pleasurable moments (Visit new worlds with our inflight **entertainment**); promise to experience something that customers will find **exciting** (Loaded with adrenaline)⁷; assurance that the product is **revolutionary** (Chevrolet. An American revolution) and just like revolution, which

⁷ Adrenaline is a 'chemical produced by your adrenal glands that make your heart beat faster and gives you more energy' (Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners. 2002 p.19) and thus it is characteristic of human beings, and not inanimate objects such as cars. Thus, using the notion of adrenaline in a slogan is an example of hyperbole.

is 'a major change' offers something **new** that will improve product **quality** and **performance**; guarantee that a product will meet one of the most important and sought features i.e. **safety** (Designed to save lives).

3.3. Rhyme- a figure of speech where similar sounds (or the same sounds) are repeated. As a result the slogan is more interesting and easier to remember.

Never being bored on board (Delta airlines)

Guess where and we'll fly you there (Emirates)

Grace...space...pace (Jaguar)

Mean but green (Toyota)

Rhyme has been used in the above slogans to highlight the following features and benefits of advertised products: **entertainment** during flight (Never being bored on board), which will make the journey **pleasant**, and in some cases may help passengers who suffer from 'fear of flight' to divert their attention from what they find a scary experience; promise to take passengers to **any destination** they wish to reach (Guess where and we'll fly you there); assurance that the product is **attractive, pleasant** and **interesting**, provides a lot of room for passengers and thus it is **comfortable**, allows the user to achieve **speed**, which is no doubt one of the features customers look for most often when they decide to buy a car (Grace...space...pace); information that a product is **environmentally friendly** (today more and more people are becoming aware of the need to protect our endangered planet) and at the same time **excellent** (Mean but green).

3.4. Repetition – a rhetorical device where a word or phrase is repeated in order to emphasize its importance in the whole message.

Loyalty programmes should be loyal (Delta airlines)

New thinking. New possibilities (Hyundai)

Get in. Get happy (Volkswagen)

The above examples of the usage of repetition draw attention and emphasize the following features and benefits: the possibility to take advantage of loyalty programmes⁸, which are marketing strategies employed by companies aiming at encouraging customers to continue to buy products they offer, and in this way have the possibility to e.g. **save money** as they can buy something cheaper or get something for **free**. Moreover, the company ensures that the airline will be **loyal** to its customers, and as such it deserves to be **trusted** and **relied** upon (Loyalty programmes should be loyal). Another slogan contains information that the company has adopted new ways of thinking, which in case of businesses can mean implementing **new ideas** and **new solutions** both in

⁸ Sharp, Byron and Anne Sharp, "Loyalty Programs and Their Influence on Repeat-Purchase Loyalty Patterns". *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 14 (5), 1997, pp. 473-86.

terms of the technical side of products, as well as **good customer service** and **comfort** (such approach creates **new possibilities** for both the company and its customers (New thinking. New possibilities); assurance that the customer will not only be **satisfied** with the product performance, but even **happy**- the only thing he/she should do is to get in and start the car (Get in. Get happy).

3.5. Personification- a figure of speech in which a thing, an idea or an animal is given human attributes. The non-human objects are portrayed in such a way that we feel they have the ability to act or feel like human beings.

The car that cares (KIA)

Jaguar. Born to perform (Jaguar)

Skoda. Simply clever (Skoda)

The above slogans use personification as a way to stress the following features and benefits offered by products: the use of a verb 'to care' with reference to a product can have many meanings as it may be a signal that it is designed to make customers **comfortable** and **safe**, but also that the product is **economical** and e.g. **environmentally friendly** (The car that cares); the message included in the slogan Jaguar. Born to perform is unambiguous and it conveys information that a product has been designed to fulfil all the needs and requirements of a customer i.e. it will 'perform' and do what it is expected to do (as such it may be read as **reliable**, **safe** or ,for example, **economical**; the message in the slogan *Skoda. Simply clever* is 'simple' i.e. that the product is **good** and **effective**.

3.6. Rhetorical question- rhetorical questions, unlike other types of questions which need to be answered, do not require a response. Fahnestock calls them 'questions that are really statements'⁹. The rhetorical question itself implies an answer and/or makes it easy to understand. It draws attention, evokes emotions and causes that people are more focused on the content of such question, and think about their own opinions.

Why pay more for a car ? (Citroen C1)

Could you ever love life on the road (Honda Accord)

Isn't it lovely having room to play with (Skoda Roomster)

Who could ask for anything more? (Toyota)

Is it Love? - BMW.

The above rhetorical questions refer to the following features and benefits offered by products: **cheap price**, which is a feature that enhances the chance that a customer will purchase a product (Why pay more for a car ?); the **ample**

⁹ Fahnestock, J.: *Rhetorical Style. The Uses of Language of Persuasion*. Oxford University Press, Inc.: Oxford 2011, p.300.

physical space the product offers gives the customer an opportunity to use it for a purpose that he/she needs e.g. to transport things, or just ensures **comfort** for passengers (Isn't it lovely having room to play with); the message contained in the question Could you ever love life on the road can be read and understood in many ways and mean, for example, that the car is **comfortable** or **easy** and **fun to drive**; assurance that a product will **satisfy every need, meet every requirement** of every customer (Who could ask for anything more?); the question Is it Love? suggests that what a product is or what it offers may be just like love, which is one of the strongest emotions experienced by people (as the definition of 'love' explains, love is the feeling of liking and caring for someone) and thus, those who will buy the product may find it **reliable** and **attractive**.

3.7. Idiom- a rhetorical device whose aim is to make language richer and spicier, and thus it makes the message more attractive. It cannot be interpreted literally.

Love at first flight (Virgin America)

Do you only feel at home at home? (Emirates)

The use of an idiom in a slogan Love at first flight is a very clever linguistic trick since the copywriter changed one word in the original idiom Love at first sight (the message it contains may be an indication that passengers will be more than **satisfied** with the product, and will 'love' all it offers; another slogan that uses an idiom indicates that the product offers its customers something that will make them feel as if they were at home (the connotations with home for many people mean **comfort, safety** and **pleasant environment** (Do you only feel at home at home?)).

3.8. Oxymoron- an expression that uses words that have opposite meanings. The rhetorical purpose is often to highlight and juxtapose two opposite features in order to create not only an interesting effect, but draw attention to something that can have two different features.

The little big car (Renault)

The slogan The little big car purposefully refers to features that are sought by some customers i.e. there are customers who look for cars that are small (this may mean that they are **economical** and **easier to park**), and at the same time 'big' figuratively meaning that they are **reliable**.

3.9. Imperative mood- this mood is the most natural part of persuasion. However, in advertising it is rather used to propose or suggest something, and is rarely used as a command.

Enjoy 5-star luxury in the sky on Qatar Airways

Arrive beautifully (Virgin America)

Do something memorable (Toyota Aygo)

Ford. Feel the difference (Ford)
Drive future. Today (Renault)

The rhetorical purpose of using imperative mood in the above slogans is to highlight the following features and benefits: **luxury** that passengers can enjoy on board i.e. As an advertisement of Qatar Airways explains luxury can mean '**sophisticated** and **elegant** cabin. Our open and **spacious** design is complemented by award-winning service. **Generous storage** will keep your belongings within reach, sophisticated LED lighting will help you adjust to changing time zones and an attentive crew will look after all of your needs. Settle into **unparalleled comfort**, and adapt your personal space to **suit your needs**. Lounge on an ottoman, catch some sleep or make productive use of your time with a large work surface. Your seat also features **ample stowage options**, a vast selection of in-flight **entertainment** and a contemporary setting for **world-class cuisine**¹⁰(Enjoy 5-star luxury in the sky on Qatar Airways); the slogan Do something memorable allows many different readings such as e.g. indication that the conditions offered by airline guarantee that the passenger will reach his/her destination **safely**, and in **good physical condition**, promise that using a product will be an **enjoyable** and **valuable** experience that will be remembered by the customer; an imperative mood in the slogan Ford. Feel the difference is an invitation to experience something that will allow customers to enjoy features that are not offered by other products, in this way making it **unique**; the imperative Drive future. Today contains information that a product is a **cutting-edge** one i.e. it not only uses **sophisticated technology** and solutions that **are ahead of the times**, but it uses them already today.

Moreover, there are slogans that do not employ rhetorical figures, but achieve persuasive goals through using such grammatical forms as pronouns, nouns, verbs and adjectives.

3.10. Pronouns – the use of pronouns, especially the second person singular or plural pronoun *you*, or its possessive form *your*, as well as the first person plural pronoun *we* or its possessive form *our* are used by copywriters to emphasize that the message is addressed to the reader (*you*). Such approach may help establish a closer relationship with readers, make them feel important, and emphasize that what a company does or proposes is always focused on customers' wants and needs.

Your private cabin, your personal crew, your premium place (Qatar Airways)
You order it. We bring it (Virgin America)
With your miles you can now fly further (Qatar Airways)
Everything we do is driven by you (Ford)

¹⁰ <http://www.qatarairways.com/global/en/business-class.page> (retrieved 26th January 2016)

Drive your dreams (Toyota)

Without heart We would be mere machines (Alfa Romeo)

The use of the second person personal pronoun 'you' and its possessive form 'your' in the above slogans has been an opportunity for the companies not only to create an atmosphere of closeness and indicate that customers matter and are treated as equal 'partners', but also to highlight features and benefits offered by products such as **private space** on board, which ensures **comfort** and the chance to travel in a **relaxing atmosphere**, being served by crew that will **take care** and will be at a disposal of individual passengers only, **good and comfortable** place on board (Your private cabin, your personal crew, your premium place); assurance that the company is ready to **satisfy customer needs** (You order it. We bring it); the chance for frequent passengers¹¹ to get an extra bonus and get a **discount** or a **free** place on board (With your miles you can now fly further); assurance that **satisfying the customer needs** and requirements are of top priority on the list of company goals (Everything we do is driven by you); information that the product will **fulfil customers' dreams** (Drive your dreams) and that the company is not only interested in making good quality products, but also cares about customers in terms of good, personal service, friendly relations and atmosphere (Without heart We would be mere machines).

3.11. Verbs

There is no doubt that the choice of verbs may enhance the chances to invigorate the message, and increase the persuasive power of a slogan. The verb can not only attract attention, but also make the reader think about something it refers to and focus on a feature that copywriters wish to highlight.

You can with a Nissan (Nissan)

Just imagine what Citroen can do for you (Citroen)

Volkswagen Polo. Built to protect (Volkswagen)

The verb 'to protect' in Volkswagen Polo. Built to protect assures customers about one of the most important features they are looking for i.e. **safety** (the product has been designed to prevent danger); the use of modal verbs can also help convince customers that the product has the power to **fulfil their needs** and **meet their requirements** as in *You can with a Nissan, Just imagine what Citroen can do for you*. 'You can' means 'you will' be able to get, do, achieve what you want if you purchase our product.

¹¹ A frequent-flyer program (FFP) is a loyalty program offered by an airline. Many airlines have frequent-flyer programs designed to encourage airline customers enrolled in the program to accumulate points (also called miles, kilometers or segments) which may then be redeemed for air travel or other rewards (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frequent-flyer_program (retrieved 26th January 2016)).

3.12. Nouns

Some of the analysed slogans consist of only or mostly nouns, which explicitly state the features or benefits a company offers and wants to highlight.

Design. Innovation. Performance (Jaguar XF)

A joy to drive. A pleasure to own (Mercedes-Benz C-Class)

Sophistication and Ruggedness (Subaru Outback)

Hospitality at the highest level (Qatar Airways)

Quality is job one – Ford (Ford)

Chrysler. Drive = Love (Chrysler)

The true definition of luxury. Yours – Honda (Honda)

The above slogans all contain nouns that practically do not need any comment as they state features that are most sought, and often considered to be 'a must' by customers who wish to purchase a car, or use an airline service. Thus, **design**, **innovation** and **sophistication** indicate that a company uses new technology, always looks for new solutions and strives to cater to the needs of modern customers; **performance**, **speed** and **effectiveness** of a machine or vehicle refer to the strength and ability to deal with difficult conditions; **ruggedness** and **quality** which "in manufacturing, is a measure of **excellence** or a state of being **free from defects**, **deficiencies** and **significant variations**"¹²; **luxury**, which can not only mean very good and comfortable conditions and high quality, but can also be a status symbol, which is important for some people who choose a product, and **hospitality** assuring customers that they will receive good service and treatment. Nouns can also refer to emotions such as **joy**, **pleasure** or **love**, which apart from rational arguments, as stated by Kinneavy¹³ are indispensable and very strong elements of persuasion.

3.13. Adjectives (degree)

There are also slogans that realize their purpose and achieve persuasive power by using adjectives only.

The reliable airline (KLM)

The most agile. The most responsive. Land Rover ever (Land Rover)

More economical. Less pollutant (Peugeot)

The adjectives used in the above slogans point out features that are desired by customers i.e. **agile**, which refers to the ability to move quickly and easily; **responsive**, which refers to the ability to react in the way that is needed, suitable or right for a particular situation; **reliable** and **economical**, which allows to save money and **less pollutant** i.e. environmentally friendly.

¹² <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/quality.html> (retrieved 28th January 2016).

¹³ cf. Kinneavy, J.: *Theory of discourse*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall 1971, p. 45.

CONCLUSION

The above analysis of the chosen slogans looked at the purpose of rhetorical figures they employ in order to attract, interest and convince prospective customers about the features and benefits of advertised products. The analysis has been qualitative, investigated the use of rhetorical figures and also focused on a pragmatic meaning of particular words i.e. words which signify crucial or significant features of cars and airline services, or conjure up images e.g. an image of luxury. As stated by Cook, a pragmatic meaning is about 'what a word or utterance means and does in a particular context'¹⁴. In line with the above definition the advertised products **claim** to be **reliable, exciting, revolutionary, new, safe, economical, cheap, effective, attractive, innovative and sophisticated, pleasant and interesting, comfortable, environmentally friendly, fulfill customers wants, needs and desires, ensure high quality, growth** as one of the major priorities companies have, offer **new ideas** and **solutions**, assure **good customer service**, make customers **satisfied** and **happy** and are **fun** to use.

Taken the above considerations, it can be stated that conscious choice of words and the deliberate rhetorical efforts undertaken by copywriters to create interesting and eye-catching slogans aim at achieving particular emphasis and effect, and thus they enhance their appeal. If copywriters create a good slogan there is a chance that it will be remembered and used for a long period of time, and that it will increase the plausibility of arguments they advance or illustrate. Of course, words sometimes change their meanings "[...] it has been long known that the meanings of words change over time, and cultural historians have taken advantage of this knowledge in offering new interpretations of past texts"¹⁵. However, we hope that it will not be too presumptuous to claim that some words e.g. **safety, reliability** or **quality** always have positive connotations, and are very important in the description of features of many products, especially products where safety and reliability are of key importance. Such words are a kind of schema ' [...] an organized template of background knowledge that a single item fits into, as *window* fits into the schema for *house*'¹⁶. In this vein, the features in the analysed slogans fit into the schema of a car or a plane. Still, there is one thing that needs to be remembered by copywriters i.e. that the response of the target recipients depends on the personality, cultural, linguistic, economic, legal and regulatory conditions. Yet, this issue is a subject for another analysis that will take these factors into consideration.

¹⁴ Cook, G.: *The Discourse of advertising*. Second edition. London, New York. ROUTLEGE, Taylor& Francis Group: London, New York 2005, p.103.

¹⁵ Smith, J.J.: *The Power of Words*. In: Caie, G.D, Hough, C., Wotherspoon, I.(eds.): Amsterdam, New York, NY, 2006, p.160

¹⁶ Op.cit. Fahnestock, J., p. 353.

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RETORIČKA FUNKCIJA UVJERAVANJA U REKLAMNIM SLOGANIMA

SAŽETAK RADA:

Članak govori o korištenju i namjeni retoričkih figura u reklamnim sloganima . Izbor riječi i tehnike koje koriste autori reklamnih poruka mogu bolje uvjeriti potencijalne kupce kako se kupnjom ponuđenog proizvoda može dobiti više od proizvoda ili usluge, odnosno ti proizvodi mogu poprimiti upravo one značajke koje kupci traže te zadovoljiti njihove potrebe. Ovaj članak obuhvaća analizu 49 reklamnih slogana za automobile i zrakoplove Izbor nije slučajan jer su svi slogani vezani uz vrlo popularna prijevozna sredstva i usredotočeni na karakteristike koje su vrlo važne, i shodno tomu, tražene kako od vozača tako i putnika.

U konačnici, značajke su iskorištene za stvaranje sheme reklamiranih proizvoda tj automobila i aviona.

Ključne riječi: slogan, retorička figura , identitet, sheme, uvjeravanje , konkurencija

