



Institut for Economic  
Promotion,  
Austrian Economic  
Chamber,  
Vienna, Austria



T.E.I. Thessaloniki  
Greece



Department of Tourism  
Management

*UDC 378:81*  
*Review*  
*Received: 04.03.2008*

## THE ROLE OF ADVERTISEMENTS IN ESP TEACHING

**Irina Petrovska**

University of St. Kliment, Ohrid, Macedonia<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Advertisements are used in foreign language teaching, but this genre is appealing as in the ESP classroom as it is in everyday life. This article examines the main arguments for using ads in EFL, as a specific trend in education for tourism and hospitality industry. With reference to recent research, the article focuses on some of the appealing uses of language, culture in advertising, some visual aspects and how language teachers could exploit them in the classroom.

*Key words:* foreign language teaching, special genre, advertisement.

### INTRODUCTION

In today's consumer's society and constant process of globalization advertising becomes an integrated fact of life. One can read advertisements almost everywhere - on the Internet, TV and radio, in newspapers and magazines, on busses, trains and planes. Advertisements in tourism industry are a particular cultural artifact with associated generic conventions and in many cultures an important part of the tourist experience. The paper investigates the genre using a corpus of holiday advertisements. Such texts may seem ephemeral and unimportant in terms of content

---

<sup>1</sup> **Irina Petrovska**, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality, University of St. Kliment, Ohrid, Macedonia.

but they can reveal interesting aspects of both the society from which the composer originates and the culture about which the particular advertisement is about. As such advertisements can be used in the ESP classroom as a tool to practice grammar, or to introduce specific vocabulary, such as special terminology for types of holidays ('escorted tour', 'all-inclusive tour', etc), or for skill practice.

Even though advertisements could be considered 'attractive' additional teaching material the impression is that advertisements are underused by language teachers, since they are certainly less common in the ESP texts than in the every day life. According to Cook (Cook 1992, Myers 1994) there is little exploitation of the fascinating uses of language and visual elements in advertising.

### **GENERAL LEARNING VS. ESP LEARNING**

English for specific purposes (ESP) teaching and learning situations can be considered to be part of post-initial education, since in most cases they presuppose some basic linguistic competence in the target language (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998) and sometimes an engagement with the subject to be taught that can range from theoretical to experiential (Robinson, 1991:3-4) and concomitant motivation to learn. Despite the great diversity of many ESP situations, a ESP '*approach*' to the teaching of language can be seen as a predominantly 'adulthood-oriented' approach.

While *general learning of English language* means acquiring knowledge or skills that are unrelated to language, *learning a language* means acquiring knowledge or skills that are related to using a language for general communicative purposes, and *learning in ESP situations* means acquiring knowledge or skills that are related to using a language under certain circumstances and for SP.

ESP domain can be characterized as an organized and sustained teaching/learning situation that is carried out in a formal or non-formal vocational or non-vocational environment. Adults are claimed to be primarily workers and secondarily learners, acquiring knowledge mainly from experience, rather than from books and media. Adult learners are usually self- or sponsor-directed and this implies that their learning performance is proportional to the levels of motivation and sense of self-fulfillment that they get from the learning situation. This is contrasted with pre-adults' primary role as learners, who are usually supervised by parents and teachers and whose daily environment is constrained within the formal education system (school, university, etc.)

### **ADVERTS AS AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN ESP CLASSROOM**

One of the many questions that an ESP practitioner asks from time to time is whether he or she uses appropriate materials in the English classroom and whether it is relevant for the students in their content area. Students in higher education are learning not only the particular concepts and vocabulary but also they are introduced with what is being professional in their own field of study. Many authors have agreed that

authentic materials have a positive effect on learner's motivation in the foreign language classroom. Advertisements, being regarded as authentic materials are intrinsically more interesting or stimulating than artificial non-authentic materials. Little, Devitt, and Singleton (1989: 26) add that authentic texts bring learners closely to the target language culture, making learning more enjoyable and therefore more motivating.

The main arguments for using ads in ESP teaching have been categorized by Picken (Picken 1999) under the headings of language, content, language learning, technical and motivational qualities, and broader educational uses. The reason of implementing ads in ESP language teaching is that the language of ads is authentic and up-to-date (Lutcavage 1992:34).

The linguistic conventions attached to this genre reveal a valuable introduction about the language and culture of an advertised destination. The ESP students can be encountered with interesting uses of language, culture, and visual elements in ads; even more, they can suggest ways of exploiting them in the classroom. This, on the other hand, helps future hospitality students to evaluate, reveal holiday experience and representation of the culture presented.

The language of advertisements is authentic and up to date (Lutcavage 1992:34). According to some authors, ads, like literature tend to focus on the code, upon the language itself; they can provide a valuable introduction to literature and its language. (Cook,1990:129). Ads are very valuable resource materials – as they offer information about a culture, both for what they show, that is, paralanguage, slices of everyday life and for the cultural values that they reflect. The subject matter of ads also ties in well with many common topics in language teaching, such as transport, sport, food, travel, and environmental issues.(Davis, 1997:13). By providing a visual context, ads make it easier for learners to understand the language (Davis, 1997:14).

On the internet, TV commercials, or on the billboards ads are repeatedly presented through audio and visual channels, thus providing further justification for their implementation in the learning process. As from the technical point of view, ads are short, attractive, colorful and tempting,. They are appropriate for the relatively short time – span of one language class – and easy to find. (Davis 1997:13). Motivation is present as well when ads are introduced in the classroom. Learners enjoy ads and are motivated by them (Kelen 1991:9). Ads are creative and they stimulate the learners to be creative, too. Ads have a broader educational goals such as getting students to reflect on their consumer behavior.

Advertisements should attract people's attention and at the same time they should be memorized. The composers use a special language code in combination with poetic devices, such as substitution, repetition, word-play. Patterns of alliteration, assonance and rhyme can often be read in headlines and slogans as in *Islands pop-in - Hawaii hope-in*. Metaphor is often used in the ads, such as the promotion of Florida oranges with a smile *Breakfast without orange juice is like a day without sunshine*. Playing with words, their meaning, sound and spelling is another means to compose an attractive advertisement.

Exploiting the paralanguage is inevitable way of composing an attractive advert. The material form of language covers playing with the shape, words, sentences, fonts and layout of letters. (Cook 1992). Rhetorical patterns can also be found in the illustrations of ads. The visual rhetoric is presented through repeating an image or picture to or using similar pictures to stress shared or different features.

Advertisements are often used in the ESP classroom to explore the culture presented through a particular advert. Advertisers assume that people can make connections between advertisements and other texts that are well known in their culture. For example Kramsch (Kramsch 1993) discusses how she used an American 'Coca Cola' TV commercial to bring out some of the values of the students' own culture and the target culture.

### CLASS INTERVIEW

Interview was carried out among 55 members of the group of students in the age between 18 and 22 during the ESP semester course. The uses of language, culture and visual elements in ads is warmly accepted by the students, since they can be highly creative and unconventional. The ads were introduced in the classroom through three conventional activities - completion, description and creating parallel texts.

Completing headlines and slogans was done by the students after being introduced to the use of assonance and alliteration. Students had to complete one by themselves and at the same time to be both catchy and positive. Creating parallel slogans was used as a follow-up to the previous activity. For example, the use of alliteration with the /t/ to create Top Tourists Take To Tokyo, or by following this sentence pattern, Clever Characters Come to Copacabana. One challenging activity was describing paralanguage, such as conveying the shape of the text.

The students were asked on the opinion of the use of ads in the class. Responses varied a great deal, and comprise a useful body of learner comments on and impressions on the materials used. The following is a selection of representative interview quotes from students talking about the role of advertisements in ESP teaching:

*(ads)develop speaking power  
very effective ...funny  
I wanted more vocabulary  
useful for description  
it caused a lot of conversation  
interesting ...but a bit too difficult for me  
expands our view of society  
the best this term  
I want more like this  
I got useful information  
amusing and fun in class  
I like this holiday destination*

*very impressive*  
*not so useful*  
*more difficult*  
*very exciting*  
*very worthwhile...but vocabulary was difficult*  
*more difficult but useful*

The interview performed showed that the students are tolerant and open towards introduction of authentic material, that is advertisements into classroom. They show higher level of learning motivation, as a result of the greater authenticity of the materials introduced.

### CONCLUSION

Advertising is an unavoidable fact of life in today's consumer societies, as they can be found almost everywhere. Advertising often explores linguistic and visual codes in a variety of ways, thus being of value to ESP teachers. Advertisements use consistent patterns of linguistic, textual and visual representation, as well as persistent themes to project an image of a global reach. In particular it was suggested that conventional language activities can work well with ads. The activities connected with ads can be used as a starting point for inspiring teachers to experiment with other conventional and unconventional ways of exploiting this genre. This could be a starting point for the major ESP publishers to be inspired to start producing more advertising-related materials.

### REFERENCES

- Bosnar-Valkovic, B., "Acceptance of English Language Advertising slogans in Croatian journals for the hotel and tourism industry", *New Trends in Tourism and Hospitality Management 17<sup>th</sup> Biennial International Congress*, Opatija, Croatia, 2004.
- Cook, G., *The Discourse of Advertising*, London: Routledge, 1992.
- Davis, J., "TV Commercial Messages: An Untapped Video Resource for Content-based Classes", *Language Teacher*, 21/3:13-5, 1987.
- Dudley-Evans, T. & St. John, M.J., *Development in ESP-an interdisciplinary approach*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998.
- Frandsen, F., "The Trip Goes To ... Verbal and Visual Communicative Strategies in a Danish Tourist Guide". In Claire Haven et al. (ed) *Tourism Research 2002*, Cardiff, 72-90, 2002.
- Kelen, C. "Television Commercials: Short texts with big Potential for Language Learning", *Language teacher*, 15/10:9-12, 1991.
- Kramsch, C., *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*, Oxford: OUP, 1993.
- Little, D., S. Devitt, and D. Singleton, *Learning Foreign Languages from Authentic Texts: Theory and Practice*, Dublin, 1989.
- Lutcavage, C., "Authentic Video In Intermediate German", *Die Unterrichtspraxis*, 25/1:33-40, 1992.
- Myers, G., *Words in Ads*, London: Edward Arnold, 1994.
- Petrovska, I., "Communicative Strategies in the Tourism and Hospitality Industry in English and Macedonian". In Perić, J. et al. (eds) *Tourism & Hospitality Industry 2004: New Trends in Tourism and Hospitality Management*. April 14-16, 2004, Opatija: 545-555, 2004.
- Picken, J., "State of the ad: the role of advertisements in EFL teaching", *ELT Journal Volume*, 53/4. OUP, 1999.
- Robinson, P., *ESP today: a practitioner's guide*, Prentice Hall International, New York, 1991.
- Yu, L., *The International Hospitality Business*, New York, London, Oxford, The Haworth Hospitality, 1999.