A comparison of wordplay and the innovation of words in the context of house advertising

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Abstract

Humorous aspects in the field of house advertising and hyper advertising exhibit cumulative linguistic phenomena, though only minor scientific studies have been conducted in the area of business to consumer relationships. This paper sheds light on an unexplored subject by examining the frequency of wordplay and the creation of words published by French advertising agencies. It explains wordplay using the example of homophony and the creation of words through the innovation of words. The analysis of such linguistic phenomena allows for conclusions about how words contribute to strengthening brand value. A significant number of the examined advertisements exhibit humour. Hence, the study also takes into account the impact humour might have on the reader and viewer and how more effective advertising can be designed. The study found that wordplay strengthens the brand value to a greater extent than the creation of words and that humour is employed in a test-in-process manner that leads to more choices of linguistic phenomena.

Keywords: humour, hyper advertising, house advertising, wordplay, creation of words, innovation of words

1. Introduction

The creation of advertisements is the main task of specialized agencies. This is why they have profound knowledge of the use of words and images and their impact on the reader. Hence, they must be even more creative when it comes to their own advertising. They use house advertising, for example in magazines, to promote themselves and to encourage entrepreneurs to buy their product or service or, at best, a whole concept. Thus, the product or service they offer is the instrument of communication itself. As a consequence, various professional journals have appeared to achieve the specific objective of over viewing agencies and their services. These journals report either on innovations or changes within a particular segment. In order to be seen by entrepreneurs, advertising agencies try to develop creative, surprising and outstanding advertisements.

In order to produce convincing advertisements, agencies utilize certain language and/or images. Because they use language and images in a more intensive form, they are creating a kind of hyper advertising. This is a supercharged form of employing linguistic phenomena and a supercharged form of general advertising. Here, agency advertising goes one step further by trying to outperform average advertising. Advertising agencies use more linguistic phenomena within their house advertising to a greater extent than other advertising. The goal of this is to surprise the reader and to catch his or her attention. According to the AIDA formula (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action, Ostheeren, 2003), this is the first aspect of an interesting advertisement. After having caught the user's *attention*, the user should become *interested* and develop a *desire* to possess the product or service. This leads him or her to the *action* of purchasing the product or service. One important linguistic phenomenon is the innovation of words. Belonging to the word formation (which in linguistics means the creation of new words), the innovation of words does not always provoke a smile or laughter; it is not necessarily funny. In the best case, it provokes a positive surprise.

The reader/viewer may be convinced of the brilliance of the advertisement and consequently may become convinced of the product or of the agency's skills. A desire can be born which wants to have a similar ingenious idea for one's own advertisements. In comparison, while images are often utilized, there are also some advertisements that use words creatively without images. For example, a creative application of words would involve the integration of foreign words, colloquialisms, and wordplay. The latter is part of the linguistic phenomenon "humour". This is commonly included to support memorization. If an advertisement has caught the reader's attention, the user is likely to memorize the advertisement or, for example, the wordplay contained in it.

In literature, an analysis of these linguistic phenomena is not found very often. Janoschka (2004) has looked at linguistics in hyper advertising as used in web advertising. Her work contains an overview of linguistic phenomena, but does not focus on the innovation of words in general. However, her analysis does raise the subject of interactive hyper advertising as a topic for future analysis. The lack of further analysis suggests that existing literature gives an unsatisfactory overview of linguistic phenomena in advertising and hyper advertising. In addition, it explains the effects of humour in general advertising, but does not focus on the *innovation of words in hyper advertising* nor does it offer a comparison with other linguistic phenomena, such as wordplay. This is necessary in order to provide evidence why the innovation of words as linguistic phenomena is frequently employed.

French advertising agencies in general (the agency *megalos* for example) use linguistic phenomena like humour and / or the innovation of words more often in their advertisements than other companies. This is because hyper advertising has a direct impact on incoming projects and, thereby, the success of an advertising agency. Furthermore, agencies find themselves in an ongoing competition with their competitors. This generates significant pressure to demonstrate their ability to create outstanding advertising campaigns.

Finally, this study establishes a connection between linguistics and marketing. It focuses on the use of wordplay and the creation of words in agency advertisements on the one hand, and on these advertisements in the entrepreneur's everyday business on the other. Consequently, marketing research is combined with a detailed analysis from a linguistic point of view.

1. Theory: Definition and Hypothesis

Humour is defined in different ways. Lipps (2013) stated that humour is one's own way of thinking and consciousness. It is thus a way of thinking and a frame of mind of one's own. However, Lipps goes on to write that it depends on the situation and on individual as well. Lipps understands humour in the sense of humoristic behavior. This study looks at the individual case, especially the two advertisements with the slogan "Mâchez chewing cøm" and "affective, effective, a effective", in which humour is used.

New words used in order to make an advertisement more unique, new compositions of words, or the creation of an original and fresh atmosphere by playing with linguistic phenomena are all examples of techniques used to catch the observer's attention. This is done through creativity, or the ability to create something that has never existed before; something new and original; and constant (Mumford, 2003). Runco and Jaeger dealt with the different definitions of creativity and corrected the standard definition: "Creativity requires both originality and effectiveness" (Jaeger, 2012). According to Jaeger, one should use Stein's understanding of creativity as "that process which results in a novel work that is accepted as tenable or useful or satisfying by a group at some point in time." Stein explains that "novel "means "that the creative product did not exist previously in precisely the same form"(Stein, 1953). Here, a deeper analysis would exceed this paper. The analysis from here forward will understand creativity following Stein's definition.

Humour canbe expressed in different ways. In addition to parody, irony, sarcasm or cynicism, humouris also expressed in the form of jokes. Looking closer at jokes, a sub type that can be distinguished is word play. Word play can be understood as a combination of two linguistic systems (DeFoucault, 1988) or in other words as a combination of two senses. It exists as a consequence of two linguistic systems that can be understood as follows: Normally, there is wordplay when a second sense overlays the first sense (Herman and Hölz, 1996). Thus, wordplay consists of at least two senses: the first sens is overplayed by a second sens.

The second sens is not easy to understand at first glance: the comprehension of wordplay depends, among many things, on the cultural standard and the physical condition of the observer (the state he is in).Wordplay can be expressed through different forms, such as oral, written, pictorial, or ethnic forms. This study focuses on wordplay in pictorial form, which means it focuses on wordplay in the form of pictures. In most of the cases, humour provokes laughter and smiles. Additionally, wordplay in pictoral form generally results in amusement (Mireault, Crockenberg, Sparrow, Cousineau, Pettinato, and Woodard, 2015).Although several studies found that laughing and smiling "appear very early during the first year of life," there may be other metrics than laughter and smiles that allow researchers to measure humour.

Taking a look at the definition of wordplay, Tanaka (1994)stated that word play is"the general name indicating the various textual phenomena (i.e., on the level of performance or parole) in which certain features inherent in the structure of the language used (level of competence or language) are exploited in such a way as to establish a communicatively significant, (near-) simultaneous confrontation of at least two linguistic structures with more or less dissimilar meanings (signifies) and more or less similar forms (signifiers)." As a consequence, there are two components in wordplay: the "signified," which is the meaning or concept of the word, and the "signifier," which is the sound-image of the word.

In this respect, creativity is the creation of novel, new words. It is certainly the most important domain in an agency's work. The employment of creativity often proves how good the agency works. Consequently, there should be a great deal of creativity and created words in hyper advertisements. The hypothesis of this work is that there are more created words in the analyzed data than instances of wordplay. Hence, created words strengthen the brand value to a greater extent than wordplay.

2. Methods

Existing literature focuses on general procedures rather than individual cases. This is because the results should be suitable for a larger variety of potential clients. Eisend (2010) stated that humour in general advertising raises attention and increases positive values. Obviously, this quality of humour is the reason agencies tend to employ it in their work.

O'Barfound argues that a creative idea within advertising may be "tested, reedited, or otherwise adjusted to the point where both agency and client believe they have produced the best communication strategy for the brand" (O'Bar 2011). Having a creative idea and creating something new and surprising is thus what agencies do best. By employing the innovation of words into their own advertisements, they show their talent.

The data collected was obtained from offline magazines in an international agency in France called *megalos*. This agency is part of Makheia Group, one of the most famous agencies in France.[1] The analysis considers a corpus of 101 advertisements. The advertisements originate from five international, well-known French magazines: *Stratégies, Marketing – Communication – Médias* (2008), *Stratégies Marketing services le guide 2009* (2009), *Stratégies le guide Agences tome II* (2009), *Marketing Magazine. Le guide du Directeur Marketing 2009* (2009), *CB News Web, cahier de tendance* (2008).

In my study, the number of adjectives, verbs and substantives were counted and a comparison was made for each advertisement. This method is appropriate because the data (hyper advertisements) came directly from an agency. Within the advertisements, this study concentrates on wordplay (*jeux de mots*) and on the creation of words, more precisely on the innovation of words.

Looking closer at an advertisement that contains wordplay, more precisely homophony, one observes that the slogan does not work without the name of the agency: As explained previously with the definitions of signified and signifier, two components are necessary. In this case, a slogan and the name of the agency correlate with one another. The slogan corresponds to the sound-image, whereas the name of the agency corresponds to the meaning/concept.

The following advertisement from the agency Chewing Com provides an example of wordplay. It represents a typical advertisement that can be defined as a homophone.

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[1]See www.megalo.frandwww.makheia.com/en
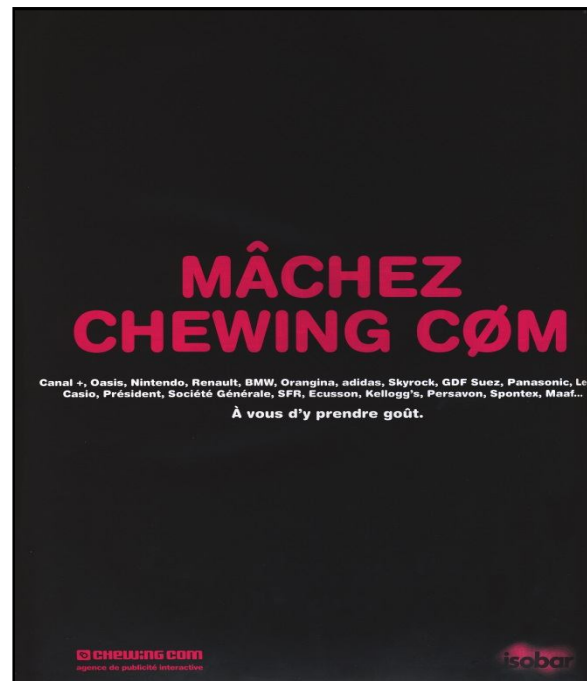
Annonce 58: Chewing Com

The slogan « Mâchez chewing cøm » indicates "to chew gum" and also instructs readers to do so (expressed in the last part of the word "Mâch**ez**"). However, the word « cøm » also reminds readers of the term « com », which represents the internet. These two ways of understanding can only be revealed if the user has the same repertoire as the sender. The user must know the English expression « chewing gum », but he or she must also know that « com » is a part of a web-address.

In case the user does not yet know the agency, the most obvious meaning of the slogan becomes clear at the end by reading the name of the agency, which is called "chewing cøm."

Thus, this double wordplay is a play with the sonorities of the words. Therefore, the name of the agency has two homophones in a broader sense. More precisely, it has two homoiophones, meaning the word is similar but not identical. However, they are not homographes: none of the two versions is written in the same way as the original word. Their sound is similar, but not the same.

In addition to the playful aspect of its meaning, the agency is playing with the typography of the word. The reason why a crossed-out *ø* is used instead of a normal *o* is not evident. The agency succeeds in attracting the user's attention, and it does not matter if this is a play in order to emphasize the sound of "chewing gum" (the gum is pronounced like a closed *o*), a visual form in order to remember the agency better, or simply a gimmick in order to appear different from other names. However, despite its potential effectiveness, wordplay with different meanings also risks not being understood or being misunderstood. Because this advertisement is one out of several advertisements, there is only a limited amount of time for readers to comprehend it. The hidden meanings may not be perceived because they seem too complicated at first glance. Yet, once the wordplay is understood, the user might remember this advertisement and the name of the agency for a longer period of time.

The name of the agency contains an enigma/a mystery that is used throughout the whole advertisement. Underneath the slogan, a number of references are written down. These lead to the expression: "À vousd'y prendregoût." This set of words means "It's your decision to develop a taste for it." Again, within the word "g*oû*t", the homophone "chewing g*u*m" is highlighted. This wordplay also includes part of the corporate identity of the agency.

Finally, this advertisement is an example of a homophone advertisement that works without an image and only with words that are highlighted using colour. This advertisement is considered to be funny because of its wordplay, more specifically because of its homophony. The appeal made in the advertisement causes the observer to imagine chewing gum or – as a costumer - to choose this agency "chewing com" for his or her further project.

With the above evidence in mind, it is clear that wordplay must be easy to understand in order to be effective. The observer is often not ready to invest a lot of time into comprehending an advertisement because he or she is overwhelmed with advertisements (Janich, 2003). Here, wordplay is an element that captures the reader's attention, but it also risks being too complex for fast comprehension.

Within the study of wordplay, there are other elements that promote humour in advertisements. In the following table, homophony is only one example. Other categories include homographie (defined above), image-word allusions, and context combinations. Image-word allusions allow wordplay to be achieved through an allusion between images and words. This means that there is an image within the advertisement and connecting words that correlates to the image to some extent. For the combination of context, there must be a play with the reference, such as an advertisement (Wischmeyer, 2015).

3.   Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the frequency of wordplay in hyper advertising. Table 2 shows the amount of created words in hyper advertising from the same source of magazines than table 1.

Frequency of word play					
Advertisement	Wordplay	Homophony	Homography	Image-word allusions	Context combinations
2	x	x	x		
3	x	x	x		
4	x	x	x		
11	x			x	
17	x				x
20	x			x	
28	x			x	
35	x	x	x		
44	x			x	
54	x			x	
56	x			x	
58	x	x			
77	x				x
93	x			x	
96	x			x	
97	x	x	x		
Total	18	6	5	8	2

Table 1: Wordplay in analyzed data (Wischmeyer, 2015)

Here, 18 out of 101 advertisements were found to contain wordplay. Six advertisements are homophones and five advertisements are homographs. In 8 out of 18 advertisements, the wordplay works with an allusion between images and words. Only in 2 out of 18 advertisements did the wordplay work with context combinations.

Appropriately, Simola et al. (2013) stated that "the same ad… can have different effects depending upon the context in which the ad appears."

One of the advertisements is classified as a homophone *and* a homograph. This is because there is a similar sonority, which makes it homophone. However, at the same time, the words share identical written forms, which define homography (Delabastita, 1993). There is also one exception found in Advertisement 58 (see example above, "Mâchez chewing cøm"). There, the wordplay in the advertisement only works with homophony and not with homography. Despite this, however, it is interesting that these two phenomena appear together very often. In comparison, the following table shows the frequency of the occurrence of created words.

Frequency of created words				
Advertisement	Created words	Composition	Derivation	Innovation of words
9	x		x	
12	x			x
17	x			x
22	x	x		
27	x	x		
50	x			x
58	x	x		
60	x	x		x
62	x	x		
70	x			x
Total	10	5	1	5

Table 2: Created words in analyzed data

Here, 10 out of 101 advertisements contain created words. Within these 10 advertisements, there are 5 showing compositions. Compositions are new words created by the mixture of two words. For example, in the slogan "When you bet, you win. To between," the last word "between" is a composition of two verbs:"bet" and "win." By putting them together, the agency has created a new word. This new word is the name of the agency. Hence, the observer was directly involved in the creation of a new word, which then leads directly to the agency.

Furthermore, there is only one advertisement that contains a created word by derivation. A derivation can be a word, for example a verb, from which one creates a noun. In the analyzed data, this is found in the word "écarquilleur de paupières." The word "écarquilleur" does not exist in the French language, but the verb "écarquiller" which means to open one's eyes widely in surprise, does exist. By derivation, the word "écarquiller" has been developed into the noun "écarquilleur".

While only one advertisement showed derivation, Table 2 reveals that innovations of words were more common (there were 5 innovations of words). An innovation of a word is a completely new word that did not previously exist. It is, for example, the word "a effective," as seen in the advertisement below.

Annonce 12: Marquetis

Within this advertisement, the slogan is "affective, effective, a effective." This seems to be a play with words. By enumerating these three words, a repetitive character is evoked. At first, the observer may think this is an enumeration of the same words. However, by taking a closer look, he or she finds that the first two words are different and have different meanings, whereas the third word is a mixture of the first two words. The word "a effective" does not exist in French or English. This innovation of the word was invented by the agency that created the advertisement. The agency is attempting to show its creativity and its know-how. To make the words "affective" and "effective" even stronger, a new word is created. Although this is not obvious to everyone: "A effective" shows that the agency is simultaneously effective and affective: the meanings of both words are united into one word in one agency.

4.   Conclusion and Outlook

This study found that created words are used less frequently in analyzed advertisements than wordplay. Created words have been found in 10 % of advertisements, whereas wordplay was found in 18 % of the advertisements. Looking at the hypothesis "Theory: Definition and Hypothesis," the statement ("there are more created words in the analyzed data than instances of wordplay.") could not be proven. One cannot say that the created words strengthen the brand value to a greater extent than wordplay. Instead, wordplay strengthens the brand value to a greater extent than created words. This is also evident in conclusions by Wischmeyer (2015), who states "humorous advertising strengthens brand value to a greater extent than no humorous advertising."

Consequently, wordplay more easily captures the observer's attention than the innovation of words. Since only limited research advances have been made in this field, linguistic phenomena are employed in a test-in-process manner. Taking into account the consequences of using linguistic phenomena like wordplay or the innovation of words, different choices might be made. The agency can tailor the advertisement according to a specific target group and based upon the results of this study. One could use wordplay more often and think deeper about when to employ particular linguistic phenomena. Humour is the main element used in hyper advertising because it creates contentedness and the services of an agency can have a positive reputation through its use. Wordplay can also have a positive effect on the brand of a company. Therefore, wordplay strengthens brand value to a greater extent than created words. With this in mind, advertising agencies can use language in a completely new way. Agencies can use wordplay and innovative words and more creative arrangements of the two. They engage intellectually with their clients, and in doing so, they seem to have found the secret for success in advertising.

The findings of this study can help to redefine humour and the innovation of words. In doing so, they can have an impact on the design of future advertising. Nevertheless, more research in this field is necessary because the use of humour and the innovation of words in hyper advertising is still not fully understood. However, agencies can use results to improve their advertisements, to gain competitive advantages, or to boost customer numbers. New markets and target groups could be identified. For example, by using certain types of word creations, such as the innovation of words, a special target group could be addressed or a market that might have seemed irrelevant in the past could be approached. Because the hyper advertisements analyzed for this study were collected in 2009, the next stepwill be to analyze present-day hyper advertisements (2016) in order to evaluate time-dependent changes. In addition to this, researchers should also study advertisements' from other parts of the world (non-French) in order to strengthen conclusions and broaden their reach.

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