A REFLECTION ON THE USE OF ADVERTISEMENTS IN ENABLING LANGUAGE LEARNING IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

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1. Introduction

Evans and Green (2006: 222, cited in Johnstone, 2011: 188) state that words and grammatical structures are related within a frame which relates 'the elements and entities associated with a particular culturally embedded scene from human experience'. Also, Thornbury (2005: 6-7) argues that language is not realized as isolated sounds, or words or sentences, but as whole text, spoken and written, and L2 language learners have to cope with texts because they live in a world of texts. On the other hand, Bax (2011: 9) shows the kind of knowledge people draw on when they comprehend language. All this indisputably means, for example, that grammar and words can only be interpreted in the context of the frame they evoke.

The overall aim of this article is to show why and how teaching language at discourse level using whole written advertisements contributes to language learning focusing on commercial print advertising, for the practical reason that, as Picken (1994: 249) points out, it is more available than broadcast advertising. I define commercial advertisements as the written texts with which advertisers (producers and/or copywriters) want to capture readers' attention aiming to get them to register their communication either for the purposes of immediate action or to make them more favorably disposed to the advertised product, service or idea. Goddard (2006: 9) sums this up saying '…copywriters have to find ways to shout at us from the page'. My preference for advertising texts emerges from the results of a small scale mixed research study I carried out, for my MA dissertation in 2012, in five current EFL coursebooks of international type used in EFL classrooms; from intermediate to advanced level. The research data illustrated that the advertising texts are under-exploited qualitatively and quantitatively Picken (1994: 2) had concluded the same; out of 64 units only 8 contained advertisement extract, while the micro-level and macro-level discourse features which carried out the function of these advertising texts (discussed in section 4) were neither highlighted nor interrelated.

2. Teaching language using whole advertisement texts

The study of commercial advertising texts is important for EFL learners in the western societies, among others, for the following reasons. Learners cannot walk down the street, shop, watch television, read a newspaper and so on without encountering commercial advertising texts written either in English or in their L1 as Prodromou (1987: 73-88) supports. In both cases, they usually advertise products or services found all over the world, such as journeys and cars, the majority of which attract learners. The frequency of advertising texts is supported by Thornbury and Cook. The former (Thornbury, 2005: 6) argues that among other texts, from phone calls to electronic messages, on average people in western societies, are exposed to 'anything from 600 to 1600' advertising messages a day, while Cook (2001: 1) says that the prominence and quantity of advertisements would strike a stranger to our society, let us say a Martian, and s/he might reasonably pay more attention to them than to texts that people value more highly such as literature and law.

Also, the fact that advertisement texts are creative, due to their using, as Goddard (2006: 4) argues, people's commonly shared language resources in ways that affect them and mean something to them (discussed in sections 4, 5), may stimulate learners' creativity. Consequently, learners may enjoy advertisements and be motivated by them.

Moreover, according to McCarthy and Carter (1994:150), advertisements are a valuable source of habits, customs and social behavior the knowledge of which takes place through learning about language; namely, through discourse analysis. On the other hand, the dynamic process of language learning is supported to emerge from language awareness, while language awareness emerges from learning about language. Therefore, the highlighting of the macro-level and micro-level discourse features of advertisement texts at discourse level contributes to develop learners' language awareness, which leads to language learning. Also, through this kind of highlighting

learning becomes a process of devolving self-awareness of the world outside the classroom. This might, also, contribute to language learning, because devolving self-awareness, namely reflecting their consumer attitudes, and meeting frequently the same or similar advertisements around them either in their L1 or L2, learners become motivated, because learning English stops being limited to the classroom but 'escorts' learners in their daily life (discussed in sections 5.1 and 5.2).

Language awareness, learning about language and the contribution of teaching language at discourse level using whole commercial advertising texts for language learning will be discussed in the next sections. This discussion will enable me to support certain teaching implications; more specifically, how advertisement texts could be included in the design of EFL coursebooks and/or exploited in the EFL classroom.

3. Learning about language and language awareness

In this section, I devote attention to what learning about language and language awareness are. Learning about language is, according to McCarthy and Carter (1994: 22, 89, 134), a process of analysis, explicit attention to language, conscious reflection on the forms and functions of the language and on the means by which meanings are made by language. Thornbury (2002: x) argues that learning about language enables learners to promote their language awareness, which is humans' sensitivity to and conscious awareness of the nature of language and its role in their lives. Thus, the focus of language awareness encompasses not only the linguistic domain, that is, for example, the grammar of language but also the cultural and sociolinguistic domain. For example, considering the following sentences:

> 'I suppose he's quite a nice little boy, isn't he? (Tentative, polite)
>
> Nice kid. (Informal, spoken)' (Hedge, 2008: 157)

it is clear that in English the available different grammatical structures for a particular purpose are not equivalent, since they belong to different styles. Style is a matter of lexis and grammar or, what Johnstone (2011:138) argues, the repeated sets of stancetaking moves associated with situations or social identities.

However, in second language education language awareness has a narrower scope as it refers traditionally to linguistic knowledge only. McCarthy and Carter (1994: vii-viii) argue that one of the routes to achieve language awareness is through language analysis, that is, analysis carried out by learners in whole texts; '…language teaching has to begin with texts and to recognize through them the forms of lexicogrammar…and how these wordings function in their particular patternings…'. In other words, language analysis contributes to learners' linguistic and sociolinguistic competence (language knowledge of what language is correct in a given situation for a given purpose). To conclude, grammar choices are related to larger issues than that of the sentence and the lexico-grammatical system and the discourse patterns of a language are strongly interrelated, and all language should be thought of as discourse. In the following section and its sub-sections, I discuss how advertising carries out its functions exploiting the kind of knowledge people draw on when they comprehend language.

4. Advertising texts

Advertising language is 'one of society's most pervasive forms of discourse' (Delin, 2000: 123), and is used to carry out the functions of the advertisement text, namely to sell. I adopt Fairclough's framework (1989: 197-208) that argues that advertising implements its functions using language to build images, consumers and relations, and although the three elements of this framework overlap, I discuss them separately, focusing on illustrative discourse features of whole written advertisements. This will enable me to illuminate and support, in section 5, the contribution of discourse analysis of whole commercial advertisement texts to language learning in the EFL classroom. Also, I could suggest, in section 6, indicative parameters of how whole written advertisements could be either included in the design of EFL coursebooks as prefabricated material to be exploited in the EFL classroom, or how teachers themselves could develop teaching materials using these texts.

4.1 Building images

Advertisers use language to establish an 'image' of a product or a service by using concepts readily available to the target audience. Advertisers use simple statements to assert facts about the world which are verifiable facts about the product to 'create' a reality for the advertisement' (Delin, 2000: 131) as in:

> 'Toyota Paseo has a driver side air bag, standard'.

Also, Geis (1982: 71) argues that advertisements use modal verbs and the verb 'help' to considerably weaken the claims they occur in as in:

'Lipcoat will help keep your lips looking luscious all day long'.

'Help' means that *'Lipcoat'* is just one of the products that could contribute to the desired result. Indeed, '*help'* implies cooperation or a combination of effort for the accomplishment of work, or the attainment of an end, and *'Lipcoat'* ,here, provides some contribution to what is needed to '*keep your lips looking luscious all day long'*.

Commercial advertisements also use positive vocabulary familiar to the consumption community they address so as to become memorable. For example: *active, vital*, *fresh, delicious, full, safe, give, keep, go, get*. Although, for example, the words *frenzied, lively, hyper, energetic, frenetic, vital* (taken from Delin, 2000: 133) are all candidate synonyms of *active,* as they have similar conceptual meaning, they cannot be exchanged for one another as they have other differences in meaning. Adapting Leech (1990: 9) and adopting Chomsky's (1995, 2000) minimalistic programme of lexicon, I argue that the meaning of lexical categories of lexicon (words, such as, nouns and verbs) have at least three dimensions, namely affective, connotative and collocative meaning. Consequently, we can have an *active* life, or an *energetic* and vital life style, rather than a *frenetic* or *frenzied* one. Carter (1987, cited in Delin, 2000: 132) terms this vocabulary 'core vocabulary', and is neutral. The core vocabulary can appear in a wide variety of different contexts and evokes ordinariness and familiarity.

4.2 Building relations

Advertising language also 'builds relations' which facilitate the establishment of trust, good will, or another relevant basis that could support acceptance of the product and consumer image. That is, advertisements build an interpersonal relationship between producer/advertiser and consumer. Fairclough terms this process 'the ideological work' (cited in Delin, 2000: 131) of advertisements. To achieve this, advertisements adopt a conversational style and use, for example, 'you' to remedy increasing impersonality, and simulate personal address and equal power relation; "you' assumes knowledge of the individual addressee' Cook (2009: 26). They also use 'us, we', the formulaic hesitation 'Er', and 'turn packaging' (Myers, 1994: 112) such as 'yeah well' to simulate the turn-taking of real conversation (turn packaging refers to elements such as *yeah, well, right, so, OK,* and *but* that act as indicators of the relationship between the speaker's turn and the preceding discourse' (Delin, 2000: 193-4)); the function of these elements and others discussed in this article are rarely considered in EFL coursebooks and classrooms. Moreover, advertising discourse uses disjunctive syntax (incomplete sentences), imperatives and interrogatives. Following Carter and McCarthy (2006: 9, 256-58, 561, 901), disjunctive syntax highlights key information in advertisements and reflects the kind of text and its functions, while following Delin (2000: 129), the disjunctive syntax of the following advertisement phrases:

- A new kind of car. (Noun phrase)
- *In three flavours*. (Prepositional phrase)

firstly, suggests a conversational style, perhaps, mimicking the short turns typical of face-to-face interaction between equals, and secondly, the information presented in this way does not consist of statements as it cannot be said to be true or false. On the other hand, imperatives and interrogatives, according to Toolan (1988: 54, cited in Delin, 2000: 140), describe an intimate interactive addressing of the reader. For example, the imperatives of the phrase:

'<u>define</u> and <u>conquer</u> (Max Factor mascara)' (ibid.)

show, Delin argues, that the advertiser makes 'a conscious effort to engage the reader rather than simply convey information'.

4.3 Building consumers

Advertising language also 'builds' consumers, because it 'builds' positions for consumers, which will give them a good fit with the advertised product. Specifically, advertising provides 'models for consumer needs, values, tastes and behaviour' (Fairclough, 1989: 207). Positions for consumers are 'built' by presupposing that consumers need to be or aspire to be certain types of persons who, for example, have certain beliefs, aspirations and financial standards. Delin (2000: 142) argues that 'the most pervasive positioning devices' are conventional implicature and presupposition. Conventional implicature is 'associated with specific words' (Yule, 2008: 45), and language is used to generate the effect that the implicated proposition(s) by the advertisement are not controversial and should be accepted as true by the reader as in the following example analyzed by Delin (2000: 144):

'Now we're well aware that your first experiments with tampons may have been equally disappointing. (TAMPAX tampons)'.

The above sentence through the use of 'we're well aware that' conveys the implications [a], [b]:

[a]: your first experiments with tampons may have been disappointing. However, the use of

modal 'may' allows the implication: 'your first experiments with tampons may not have been disappointing' (ibid.). (In section: 4.1, it was discussed that modal verbs considerably weaken the claims they occur in).

[b]: your first use with tampons was an experiment.

Another assumption from the above example is not an implicature but the use of a presupposition device which '…requires the presupposed proposition to be accepted as non-controversial and unarguable.' (ibid.: 140), and consequently, it is stronger than an implicature and even an assertion; '… ideas taken for granted' (Goddard, 2006: 38). The presupposition in this example is: 'your first use with tampons' which presupposes that the reader had a first use with tampons. This gives rise to presupposition:

'you had used tampons' (ibid.).

Even if the sentence was contradicted as in the following example the presupposition remains true:

'A: your first use with tampons was disappointing.

B: No, it wasn't!' (Delin, 2002: 144).

Although B disagrees with A, the presupposition exists.

To conclude, the illustrative discourse features discussed show that the advertisers' discourse choices are deliberate, and aim to implement the functions of the advertisement texts, namely to sell. More advertising features will be discussed in the next section in relation to their contribution to language learning.

5. Why using advertisements to teach discourse

In this section, adopting Goddard's (2006: 3) argument that advertisements leave messages behind them about the culture that produced them, I discuss that the teaching- learning process of highlighting the macro-level and micro-level discourse features at discourse level using whole written advertisements contributes to raising learners' language awareness (discussed in sections 2 and 3) enabling them to achieve native speaker proficiency in the target language (language competence), as it may pay great dividends in terms of memory and understanding.

5.1 Language learning concerns

The contribution of written advertisements to language learning, after their being used to teach macro-level and micro-level discourse features at discourse level, seems to be significant, because, in an era of globalization and information technology revolution, advertising is an unavoidable fact in today's consumer society as it is omnipresent trying to sell the same or similar products (discussed in section 3). That means that learners may meet the same or similar advertisements to those they have analyzed at discourse level in their classroom in their native language (L1) and in English (target language) all over the world through various channels such as print, audio. Also, learners may meet the same taught discourse features in various other genres with the same or different function. This last is due, as Goddard (2006: 51-2) points out, to the fact that because advertising needs to attract people's attention, and to be memorable, advertisers make connections between advertisements and other texts well known in their culture. One way of doing this is to play with the language code and use poetic devices or linguistic features of everyday language, for example, the elliptical utterances of 'casual conversation' (Cook, 2009: 115), which are discussed in the next sub-section. For further discussion concerning connections between advertisements and other texts see, for example, Picken (1999: 251-2), Goddard (2006: 51-9) and Delin (2000: 135). Cook (2009: 33, 39) calls this advertising 'behaviour' 'parasitic upon…other genres' elucidating that it is neither a negative quality, nor unique to advertising. For example, James Joyce's novel 'Ulysses' is 'an assembly of a range of styles -newspaper, romance, … ".

Therefore, learners who have already been taught discourse features at discourse level using whole written advertisements may compare their L1 and L2; comparison of L1 and L2, leads to intake 'the processing of assimilating linguistic material' (Gass, 1997: 3-5). Also, in meeting the same discourse features, in the same or other genre, learners may compare their function in these genres with reference to prior knowledge. Comparison to prior knowledge and frequency in input leads to 'apperceived input' (Block, 2003: 27) which is the first stage during which learners notice incoming data, relate them to past experience and then parse them into meaningful units for further analysis. To conclude, considering the frequency of advertisements and their 'parasite' discourse, their exploitation to teach discourse in the EFL classrooms may contribute to language learning.

5.2 Cultural concerns

In sections 2-3, it is discussed that language awareness, which leads to language learning, encompasses the linguistic, cultural and

sociolinguistic domain. In this sub-section, I define culture and I discuss how culture is related to the other two domains in advertising discourse. McCarthy and Carter (1994: 159) define culture as the set of prevalent values and beliefs within a given society or section of a society, arguing (150) that adopting a cultural view of language means exploring the ways in which forms of language, from individual words to complete discourse structures, encode something of the beliefs and values held by the language users. Fairclough (1992: 6) backs this view saying that language use reflects culture and it is impossible to disassociate the two in any real sense while Hyde argues '…the way a culture sees the world is reflected in its language' (1994: 300).

Concerning language teaching McCarthy and Carter (1994: 151) give culture three more specific definitions. Firstly, culture with a 'capital C' which includes the most prominent artistic achievements of a society such as art, music and literature. Secondly, culture with a 'small c' which includes advertisements, jokes etc. and refers to the vast area of a specific society's habits, customs, social behaviour and world assumptions. An interesting example of 'c' culture is given by Goddard (2006: 66-69) who uses a set of four advertisements that reveal cultural changes in the way a product (tampons) related with menstruation (an area of cultural taboo, at least some decades ago) is advertised from 1930 to 1996. These advertisements show how people construct their ideas about the world around them as well as how advertising discourse reflects a community's values. Goddard (2006: 120-1) argues that the older texts preserve the idea of taboo in using euphemisms ('a polite term used to cover something unpleasant or taboo' (Delin, 2000: 134)) such as the problem of 'tiresome days' instead of menstruation. In 1996's advertisement, the notion of a 'problem' is still present, but it has to do with acquiring a new skill (how to use tampons) rather than the problem being menstruation itself. Goddard (2006: 121) argues that the 1996 text revolts against the unspoken cultural ideas.

The third definition is 'culture as social discourse' which concerns the simultaneous knowledge of the language system with the social knowledge and interactive skills (sections: 2 and 3). For example, knowing rules about the cohesive device of 'ellipsis' (defined in the following sub-section) has no value if learners do not know how to use 'ellipsis'. The former is 'conscious knowledge' which is not 'equivalent to language use' (McCarthy & Carter 1994: 161). To support my claim I will illustrate in the following sub-section how ellipsis is used in different genres. Ellipsis is not the only discourse feature that reflects the 'parasitic behaviour' of advertising genre. However, constraints in the number of words in this article dictate the need to make a choice. Choosing 'ellipsis' is due to the fact that in the bibliography I have studied, I have found 'ellipsis' more frequently analyzed in relation to advertisements than, for example, presupposition.

5.2.1 Ellipsis

'Ellipsis' is a surface cohesive marking, and is defined by Carter and McCarthy (2006: 902) and Fairclough (2009: 176) as the omission of material that is recoverable from another part of the immediate text or context making a cohesive link between the two parts of the text. Fairclough (2009: 176) gives as an example the exchange: "Why didn't you lead a spade?'- 'I hadn't got any". In the second part there is ellipsis of 'spades'. Thornbury (2006: 83-85) argues that ellipsis in spoken language (conversation) is the deliberate omission of the subject pronoun and verb compliments, that are redundant because they are coverable from the immediate linguistic or situational context. He adds that ellipses frequently occur at the beginning of utterances rather than in their middle or at their end, giving the following example; the omitted elements are re-instated in brackets:

> 'Chris: is your wife working? [is]she going back to work?
>
> Gary: [she's going back to work] when she gets motivated I suppose
>
> Chris: Good on her, [she] stands her ground.' Thornbury (2006:84).

Thornbury explains that this happens because it is at the beginning of utterances that given information (the theme) is frequently integrated; this information 'is more readily recoverable from the context, and hence redundant' (ibid.).

On the other hand, Cook (2009: 171, 180) demonstrates that in advertising discourse 'ellipsis' helps advertisers to simulate the turn-taking of spoken language in a shared emotional or attitudinal context building relations (discussed in section: 5.2); '… people who know each other well don't need to be all that explicit about their meanings, … as a result of shared knowledge and shared history.' (Goddard, 2006: 107). The following advertisement extract taken from Cook (2009: 172) for Cascade dishwasher detergent exemplifies this view.

'When Lisa made a surprising visit, you didn't have time to worry about spotted glasses. Fortunately, you didn't have to. Cascade. Because you don't have time for spots.'

The second sentence contains ellipsis (in italics):

'Fortunately, you didn't have to *worry about spotted glasses.'*

Cook explains that the ellipted elements are recoverable from the preceding sentence, and their repetition 'would be quite superfluous' as omission would not lead to misunderstanding. Cook (173) adds that if the missing elements are not recoverable, they '… can be remedied by a request' giving the following friendly conversation extract to support this view:

'A: I think you ought to

B: ought to what?

A: Apply for the job.'

By analogy, in my opinion, Cook means that the advertisement reader could ask: 'I didn't have to what?' Moreover, ellipsis is associated with interaction in a situation which is equally clear to addresser and addressee, as when '… a surgeon utters a single word command, such as 'Scalpel!" (Cook, 2009: 173). I think this example could also be supported by Carter and McCarthy's (1997: 14, cited in Thornbury, 2006: 84) argument that ellipsis is omnipresent in spoken discourse, particularly in talk that accompanies the performance of some activity, where situational factors plus the need for brevity and concision render relatively elaborated language superfluous. To conclude, ellipsis suggests immediacy which is important in written advertisements (section 5.2). Also, the analyzed examples of the illustrative cohesive device 'ellipsis' show that advertisements are valuable sources of linguistic, cultural and sociolinguistic information because they show bits of daily life.

The above discussion exemplifies that teaching discourse in EFL classrooms using whole written advertisement texts, contributes to raise learners' language awareness and develop their language learning, because it involves the highlighting of linguistic, cultural and sociocultural domains. The issue of involving and exploiting the advertising discourse in EFL coursebooks/classroom will be discussed in the following section.

6. Teaching implications

This section has implications regarding how coursebook designers and/or teachers could look at advertisement texts and the kinds of activities it generates in the EFL classroom to raise learners' language awareness and promote the dynamic process of language learning. A discourse–based view of the language of written advertisements involves teachers and learners, in the EFL classroom, looking not just at isolated decontextualized bits of language, but examining how bits of language contribute to the making of complete advertisement texts. It involves exploring the relationship between the linguistic patterns of complete advertising texts and the social contexts in which they function. It also involves considering the higher-order operations of advertising language at the interface of cultural and ideological meanings and returning to the lower order forms of advertising language which are crucial to the patterning of such meanings. A discourse-based view of advertising language also prioritizes an interactive approach to the analysis of advertising texts, which considers the dynamism inherent in the advertising linguistic context.

Moreover, if language awareness can be and should be more extensively introduced into the language classroom using whole written advertisement texts, so that EFL learners should benefit, as is discussed in sections 2 and 3, then how is this best achieved? I strongly believe that it is unlikely to be successful if it is seen as a separate classroom activity not integrated into the ongoing process of language learning. However, the question is how this integration could be achieved so as to be beneficial for learners, and more specifically, what is the relevance for language awareness and language teaching. McCarthy and Carter (1994: 164) propose three parameters of language awareness for all kinds of texts, that of form, function and socio-cultural meaning, which are neither exclusive nor discrete. I adapt these parameters to the demands of advertising text considering that the latter uses language to implement the functions of the advertising text, namely to sell.

6.1 The form parameter

Activities within the parameter form involve a focus on formal aspects of advertising language as well as looking at advertising language as a system. However, there is 'always arbitrariness … in the relations between form and meaning' (McCarthy & Carter, 1994: 163). The examples of the core vocabulary (discussed in 4.1) of advertisement texts and the following additional example that in English you can have '*a strong/powerful argument', 'a powerful car'* but you cannot have * *'a strong car'* '(ibid.) is a good example of this. These lexical gaps could be exploited using activities which could, firstly, highlight the contrasts and gaps

internal to the target language, that is, to draw learners' attention to 'what is there and what is not there' (ibid.), and secondly, bring into conscious awareness contrasts or related patterns within the learners' L1 and L2.

6.2 The function parameter

Activities within the function parameter may raise learners' awareness of what language does in advertisements, because they involve the relationship between language and contexts in use. The fact that advertisements are parasitic upon their surroundings and other genres, discussed in section 5.1, gives several classroom possibilities for comparison. For example, if learners compare and discover how ellipsis (discussed in section 5.2.1) is used in real speech and advertisements, that is, how the same phenomenon is used for different purposes and functions, then language learning might benefit.

6.3 Socio-cultural meaning parameter

McCarthy and Carter (1994: 164) argue that socio-cultural meaning is best achieved by invoking the contrastive principle. Examples may include activities which contribute to language awareness cross-culturally. The advertising example of 'tampons' illustrates how this could be achieved. In the era of globalization a large percentage of similar goods are sold universally and their advertisements are in learners L1 or/and in English (the latter is the language of commerce universally). That means that comparison could take place between L1 versus L2 or L2 versus L2. Discussion in sections 5.1 and 5.2 argued that both kinds of cultural exploitation are beneficial for language learning.

Conclusion

The above parameters could integrate a discourse based view of the language of commercial written whole advertisements into the ongoing process of language learning in the EFL classroom, because they exploit the quality and frequency of advertising language. The latter is reflected in the quantity of advertising texts and its parasitic behavior upon other genres to carry out the functions of advertising text, namely to sell (discussed in depth in sections 2; 5.1, 5.2.1 respectively).

It is clear in relation to the above discussion that the exploitation of advertising texts to develop activities which encompass the linguistic, the cultural and sociolinguistic domain, that is, based on discourse analysis, is a crucial factor that enables and encourages language learning. This happens, on the one hand, because this type of activity enables learners to develop language awareness through learning about language; indispensable successive steps leading to language learning; that is, learning about language →develops language awareness → enables and encourages language learning. On the other hand, this type of activity is based on frequency, repetition and comparison between L2 vs L2 and L2 vs L1; discussion in sub-sections 5.1, 5.2 supports their contribution to language learning. A significant number of activities could emerge from studying, for example, Delin (2000: 132-149), Goddard (2006, for example, 34-43) Cook (2001), Geis (1982) and many others.

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