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Linguistic choice in a corpus of brand slogans: repetition or variation

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Abstract

This article analyses the linguistic choices realized in a corpus of brand slogans. Our main hypothesis is that these choices are determined by the socio-semantics of two factors: repetition and variation. Repetition and variation are twin strategies to enhance memorability of the product in the potential consumer. The results of our research are a classification system of linguistic choices in brand slogans at four levels: phonological, lexico-grammatical, syntactic and semantic.

Keywords: Brand Slogans; Linguistic Variation; Metaphor; Repetition; Stylistic Devices

1. Introduction

In our current consumer society, the products we purchase are given brand names such as Kleenex or Kit-Kat, often accompanied by an advertising phrase ('Have a break, Have a Kit-Kat'®) that facilitates the product's dissemination in the media. Rarely do we encounter an advertisement without text. An advertising slogan has a place of prominence in this genre.

The stylistic features of this kind of language form the subject matter of our research. To maximize the impact that the advertising message may have in the consumer, advertisers employ specific linguistic resources. Thus, the construction of the ideal tagline to create a brand slogan by choosing the right figure of speech to convey the

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message is important for the advertising industry as it allows them to make the kind of impact they desire on the consumer. The creation of brand names and brand slogans are closely related and they construct a reflection of society as well as reflecting back to society those values we hold dear. This advertising genre as social activity is a linguistic and semiotic exchange between producers and consumers. The figure below represents our view of the genre of brand slogans as social activity.
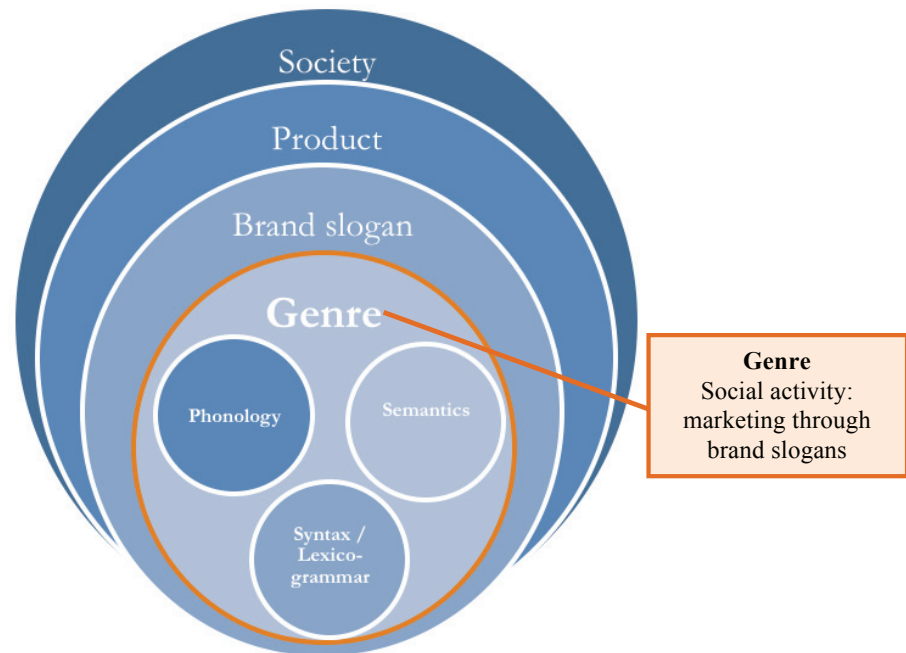

Fig. 1. Society-brand-genre

Language use in brand slogans often implies linguistic deviations which are realized as figures of speech, or variations in the spelling of lexical units. Similarly, brand slogans may involve alterations in the order of sentence elements; repetitions of phrases, lexical units, words or sounds. They give origin to newly formed words (neologisms) or incorporate loanwords. Because of the brevity of the advertising slogan, it frequently has to contain a heavily loaded use of metaphorical language to connect with latent associations and to create the brand slogan's emotional bonding power. This article assumes that all stylistic devices employed in advertising slogans revolve around two basic concepts: repetition and variation of meaning. In this research paper, we have classified the rhetorical figures found in our corpus from this perspective.

Brand slogans enclose within themselves a persuasive strategy that tries to sell the benefits of a product or service. Advertising makes use of language to publicize the product or service and strengthen its memorability. Memorability is the true test of exceptional brand slogans. Advertisers above all else want their target market to recall the product/service name and slogan. How easy is it to remember and pronounce after seeing it just once? The Kit-Kat slogan is memorable and pronounceable. How does sound symbolism affect the evaluation of a slogan's latent association (Break-Kit-Kat)?

Effective advertising slogans contain stylistic devices that awaken in their target audience a more responsive attitude and therefore lure them into consumption. Depending on the nature of the stylistic device, they can be classified into:

1. Linguistic resources involving the repetition of some element. Repetition is a basic strength factor and a primordial element of cognition. Repetition makes it easier to recall and record the brand slogan in the memory of the consumer.
2. Linguistic resources that create a metaphorical situation that provokes a reaction in the recipient (the target market). Metaphor allows the advertiser to relate an abstract concept to a specific item (product or service); and
3. Linguistic resources based on both the repetition of a linguistic unit and semantic variation.

Stylistic devices are inherent to the strategy of persuasion of this genre. If you choose the correct stylistic figure, the advertising slogan will provoke in the consumer the desire to purchase a particular product or service.

2. Literature Review

Very little research has been carried out into investigating the linguistic aspects of brand slogans. There is more research on brand naming mechanisms. Klink and Wu (2014) focused on the decisions that marketers face when embedding sound symbolism in brand names. Bao et al. (2008) investigated the effects of both connotation and pronunciation of brand names on the preferences of consumers. Lowrey and Shrum (2007) showed that participants prefer a fictitious brand name whose vowels are associated with attributes which are desirable for the category. Work on phonetic symbolism demonstrates the importance of the role played by phonology to construct meanings in brand names and we have found that, in our corpus, choices at the phonological level are rich and varied in the construction of meaningful brand slogans. At the lexical level, there have been studies of morphological processes (particularly, affixation in the forming of different words by adding morphemes at the beginning, middle or end of words concerning brand names in English). These morphological variations represent efforts by business enterprises to persuade consumers to accept a brand's unique vocabulary. Names ending in –*x*, like the soap *Lux*, apart from it denoting "light" through its Latin etymology and connoting "luxury", are considered good examples of brand names because they are short, distinctive and end in –*x* (other well-known examples are *Kleenex, Rolex, Moulinex*) (Room, 1991; Stvan, 2006). Other aspects at the lexical level that have been found are related to orthography where a word consists of unusual or incorrect spelling (view – *vue, vu* or clear – *klear, kleer, cleer*) and neologisms, the creation of new words (*belightful, jobfully*, *owlet*). At the syntactic level, recent research (Miller and Toman, 2015) has suggested that compared with syntactically simple slogans, moderately complex slogans stimulate deeper processing improving brand recall and interpretation. At the semantic level, quite a lot of research has been carried out into linguistic and visual metaphors in brand naming (Noble et al., 2013). However, as we have said, there is very little research on brand slogans. In what follows, we describe a brand slogan corpus consisting of real data, brand slogans which are legally traceable and have been analyzed using computer tools to provide scientific results of this understudied aspect of advertising genres. Because of their legal and public status, a corpus of brand slogans provides a great opportunity for traceability. One can carry out a systematic search of brand slogans and their current legal status in USPTO (US Patent and Trademark Office).

3. Methodology

The corpus of brand slogans we have compiled is called the Brand Corpus or BRC. It can be defined as a written, monolingual, closed and specialized language corpus. It is a largish corpus when you consider that it consists of 353,075 brand slogans (though not large in terms of potential corpora size that can be created nowadays, but it is in relation to the particular genre being represented). It is a simple corpus, that has not been annotated, employs ASCII (plain text) characters and it is a documented corpus. Moreover, it is a synchronous corpus, since the data set was collected from a series of search results during September and October, 2011. The data that makes up our corpus comes from the US Patent and Trademark Office's Electronic Search System database (TESS).

The BRC contains 1,278,986 words, representing approximately 1.3% of the total words to be found in the BNC (British National Corpus), our reference corpus. The total number of individual different words (types) in the corpus

is 125,327 with a type/token ratio of 9.91% which when compared to the BNC with 512, 588 types and a type/token ratio of 0.52% highlights a fundamental linguistic aspect of this genre that content words predominate over function words. We note that, among the top 50 words in the BNC, there are no nouns. While not surprisingly in the BRC there are 18 nouns. Likewise, in the BRC, there are seven adjectives while, in the BNC, there are none. Furthermore, in the top 50 words of the BRC, there is the noteworthy presence of the interpersonal pronouns YOU (eighth) and YOUR (sixth). In the BNC, they come in respectively at 18th and 75th place. The most common noun in our corpus is LIFE (seventh most frequent word). The most frequent noun (63rd word) in the BNC is TIME. *Life* is our most precious commodity.

With the help of Excel and a formula designed specifically to account for the length of brand slogans, we could calculate the number of lexical units in each brand slogan (giving us a Zipfian looking curve in the figure below). The slogans in the BRC range from 1 to 690 words. However, the great majority (73.48%) of the 353,075 slogans had between 1 to 4 words. If we take into account brand slogans with 5 to 8 words, we are talking about 95% of all brand slogans.
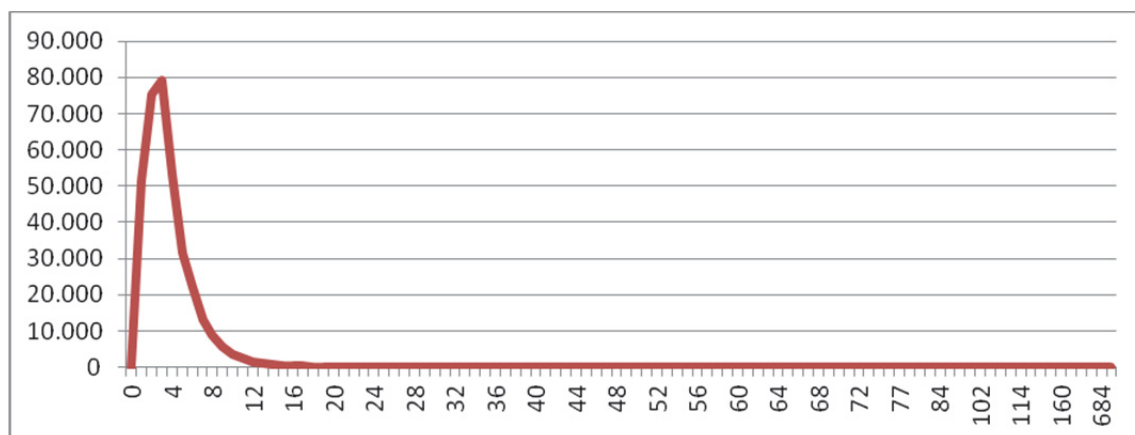

Fig. 2. Graph Countwords

Having corroborated in the data, the brevity and highly condensed nature of these texts, we now go on to describe the stylistic choices being made when creating brand slogans in our corpus.

4. Linguistic choice in advertising

4.1. Repetition

Not all stylistic devices are susceptible to quantification. Rhetorical figures that repeat the same linguistic element within the same phrase are easier to detect using computer programs for that purpose rather than when one has to detect the repetition of various linguistic elements or if there is some kind of semantic change or variation. In these cases of simple repetition, we are dealing with rhetorical figures that repeat the same or similar linguistic units such as phonemes, syllables, morphemes, phrases, clauses or even sentences within the brand slogan. First, we list the rhetorical figures belonging to the phonological level in the BRC and, then, we focus our attention on some examples of simple repetition devices in table 1 below.

- Repetition devices: alliteration, rhyme (masculine and feminine rhyme, visual rhyme, half-rhyme, assonance, consonance and pararhyme), sibilance
- Phonological devices that also belong to the semantic level: antanaclasis, homonymy, onomatopoeia, paronomasia, phonaesthesia

- Rhythm: anapaestic, dactylic, iambic, spondee, trochaic

Table 1. Examples of repetition devices (phonological level).

Phonological level	Example
Alliteration	FAJITAS, FRIENDS, & FUN
Assonance	GIVE LIFE A SLICE
Pararhyme	LIVE TO LOVE - LOVE TO LIVE
Rhyme	LET THE WALK DO THE TALK

We should note that rhetorical figures at the syntactic level can be distributed into four basic groups:

1. Repetition of identical elements: anaphora, anadiplosis, antimetabole, climax, diacope, epanalepsis, epiphora, epizeuxis, mesodiplosis, ploce, polyptoton, polysyndeton, symploce and tautology
2. Repetition of diverse elements: paralellism
3. Rhetorical figures that alter logical syntactic order: chiasmus and hyperbaton
4. Rhetorical figures that involve omission or suppression of an element: asyndeton, ellipsis and zeugma

Table 2. Examples of repetition devices (syntactic level)

Syntactic level	Example
Anaphora	**FEED YOUR** BODY, **FEED YOUR** BEAUTY
Diacope	**PEOPLE LIKE YOU** HELPING **PEOPLE LIKE YOU**
Epiphora	MAKING THE REST **OF YOUR YEARS** - THE BEST **OF YOUR YEARS**!
Epizeuxis	**SAME, SAME**, BUT DIFFERENT

ANAPHORA: repetition of elements at the beginning of consecutive sentences
DIACOPE: repetition of a word or phrase broken up by one or more intervening words
EPIPHORA: repetition of elements at the end of consecutive sentences
EPIZEUXIS: repetition of a word or phrase in immediate succession, for vehemence or emphasis

4.2. Variation

Metaphors link two concepts originating in a new one that requires the involvement of an active recipient for interpretation; it requires understanding and experiencing one kind of thing or notion in terms of another. It is based on a relationship of analogy or similarity between two elements ranging from the abstract to the concrete. The more time spent understanding the message, the more its meaning is internalized. Metaphor is used in advertising because of its enormous ability to represent concepts while facilitating learning about the product's or service's brand slogan. For example, the metaphorical use of language in the brand slogan 'Your Daily Ray of Sunshine'® (Tropicana orange juice) projects an image of health and vitality that is associated with the fact that oranges are natural products raised in sunny climates.

Metaphor is the most creative semantic figure but there are many other semantic stylistic devices to be found in the BRC. At the semantic level, all resources are based on the modification of meaning; they are a metaphor in themselves. As above with the phonological level, first, we list the rhetorical figures belonging to the semantic level in the BRC and, then, we focus our attention on some examples in table 3 below.

- Semantic devices: Antipophora, Antithesis, Epithet, Hyperbole, Irony, Litotes, Metaphor, Metonymy, Oxymoron, Paradox, Personification, Simile, Syncrisis, Synecdoche

Table 3. Semantic devices

Semantic level	Example
Antithesis	TAKE CONTROL OF TOMORROW . . . TODAY
Hyperbole	DOGS CAN FLY
Irony	GUNS SAVE LIVES
Litotes	BECAUSE SIMPLE ISN'T EASY
Metaphor	GIVE YOUR TONGUE A TWIST
Metonymy	DRINK YOUR APPLE A DAY
Oxymoron	CLASSICALLY MODERN; GLOBALLY LOCAL
Paradox	MAKE THE ORDINARY, EXTRAORDINARY
Simile	WE WORK LIKE THE DEVIL TO TREAT YOU LIKE A SAINT
Syncrisis	LESS PAIN, MORE LIFE
Synedoche	KEEPING THE WORLD ON 2 WHEELS

4.3. Repetition and variation

In the two previous groups, we have presented linguistic resources based on repetition or semantic variation; in this group, we include rhetorical figures that combine both repetition and semantic variation. We believe that when the stylistic resources used in an advertising slogan are based on these two linguistic resources, the brand increases its probability of being internalized and remembered.

Table 4. Examples of stylistic devices involving both semantic variation and repetition

Phonological level	Example
antanaclasis	GET YOUR **BACK BACK**
paronomasia	A WORLD IN **PEACE**, NOT IN **PIECES**

Lexico-grammatical level	Example
intertextuality	PLAY IT AGAIN SLAM; MAKE WINE NOT WAR
neologism	JOBFULLY; JOBVERTISE; MATRIMONEY; VIEWABILITY

Syntactic level	Example
polyptoton	MAKE A GREAT LIVING & LIVE A GREAT LIFE
tautology	PEOPLE DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY DON'T KNOW

Among the figures of repetition in Table 4, there is a group of literary figures called adnominatio; it is a type of lexical repetition which causes a change in the meaning of a word. In other words, it is a figure in which, by means of a modification of sound, or change of letters, a close resemblance to a given verb or noun is produced, so that similar words express dissimilar things. If adnominatio is phonetically-based, the figures are called paronomasia and antanaclasis; if there are grammatical variations, it is called polyptoton.

Basically, polyptoton is a rhetorical figure where a word is repeated in different case forms (Wales, 2001: 365). So, for example, in Shakespeare's Sonnet 28: …make grief's strength seem stronger. In fact, in the corpus we have the slogan: MAKE THE STRONG STRONGER. Polyptoton is used as a means of emphasis. Paronomasia is the collective name for different kinds of word-play involving puns. A special kind of pun is antanaclasis which involves the repetition of the same word or form or sounds but in different senses in the near co-text (Wales, 2001:

385). These rhetorical figures which involve both repetition and semantic variation play an important role in advertising as they allow for a high level of memorability.

A neologism is formed by a number of means; rarely by totally original linguistic invention or coinage; typically by the application of formation rules, primarily by compounding (BOOKUNITY; COMMUNIVERSITY), derivation (DOOROLOGIST; OWLET) or blending (INFOTAIN; LIFEOGRAPHY). The vast majority of neologisms are constructed of existing language elements: words and affixes. In addition, neologisms can be foreign borrowings, or loans from technical domains. Neologisms in brand slogans challenge the target audience with their novelty and may even amuse.

Intertextuality occurs when previous texts are reproduced in whole or in part in the wording of the advertising message. Intertextuality serves as a framework so that the target audience has to unpack the deployment of encoded meaning in the brand slogan and the consumer feels clever and flattered by being able to unpack this meaning because of their cultural understanding of the message. Full understanding of the brand's slogan depends on the target audience's knowledge of the world.

5. Conclusion

As we have already stated, brand slogans are a marketing strategy of persuasion that tries to sell the benefits of the product or service. What is really happening is that advertising appropriates and even subverts and destabilizes language to publicize a product or service and consequently strengthen its memorability. Effective advertising phraseology exploits stylistic devices that awaken their audience, the general public, into a more receptive attitude and thus lure consumption.

Depending on their nature, these stylistic resources can be classified into three overarching types:

1. resources consisting of the repetition of any of its elements. Repetition is a key cognitive element as repeating the name of the brand slogan increases the probability of it being registered in the memory of the consumer.
2. resources that create a metaphorical use of language that provokes a reaction in the recipient. Metaphor allows us to relate an abstract concept to a specific item.
3. resources based on the repetition of a component and some form of semantic modification.

Stylistic figures are inherent in the genre whose single social strategy is an act of persuasion. If you choose the correct rhetorical figure, hopefully the advertising slogan will attract consumers to purchase a particular product or service. In this regard, we believe that, for a brand slogan to be successful, it should include at least one of the linguistic resources described here in this paper. And don't forget to use the present simple, future simple or imperative, no past tenses. At least, that's what the corpus says.

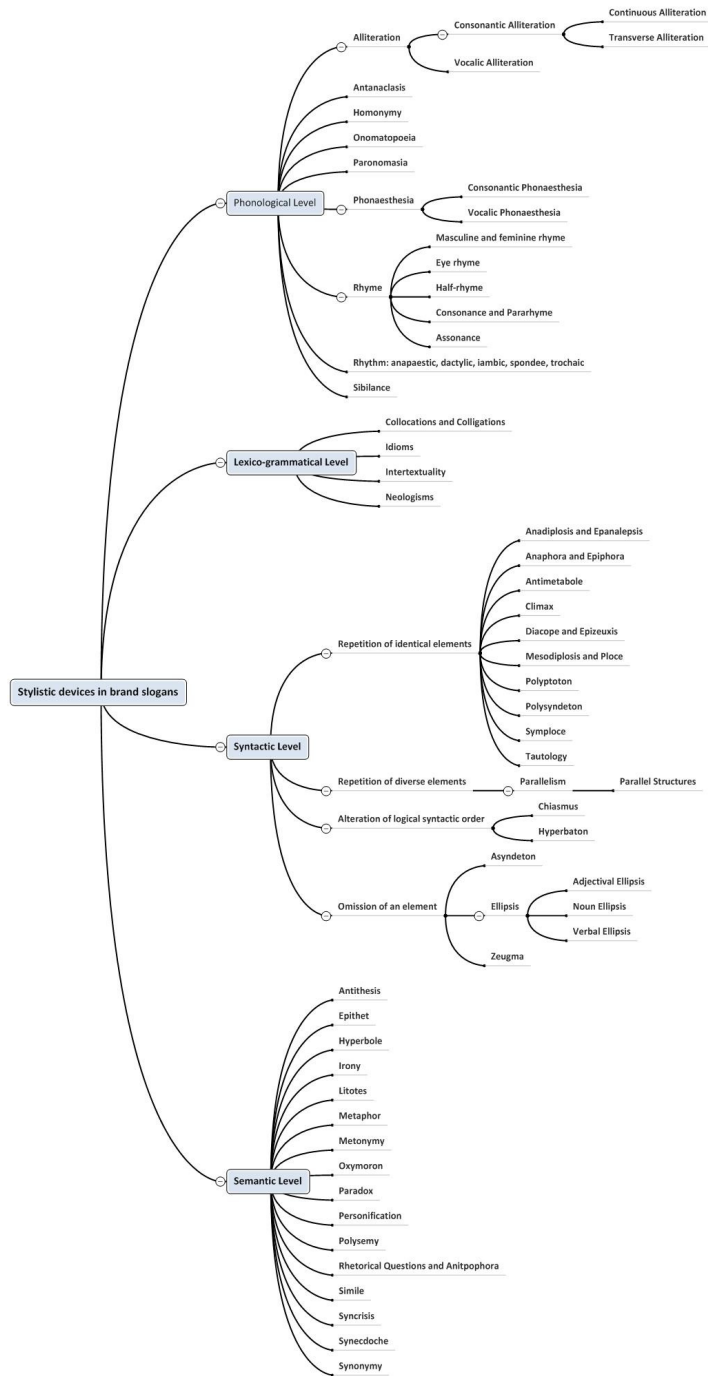**Appendix A. A network of choices of stylistic devices in the BRC**

Fig 3. A network of choices of stylistic devices in the BRC

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