

Meaning and Change in the Advertisements of Star Lager Beer: A Systemic Functional Approach

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Abstract

This paper focuses on linguistic meaning and change in the print advertisements of STAR Lager beer. STAR is a product of Nigerian Breweries (NB). In order to answer the question of how and with what tools advertisers are able to reach the consumers, language which is a communication tool exclusive to human beings comes to mind. Two objectives were set for this study. They are (i) to describe the structural features of linguistic signs used in explicating meaning in advertisements and (ii) to investigate how changes in linguistic signs used indicate changes in meaning in advertisements. Advertisements of STAR over the last seventy years are carefully selected for analysis through the process of media monitoring. They were print advertisements that were extracted from newspapers and newsmagazines, NB publications and the internet. In the bid to analyse linguistic messages of the advertisements, Halliday's Systemic Functional Theory (SFT) was employed. Halliday's functional grammar is predicated on ideational, interpersonal and textual 'metafunctions'. The apparatuses of this theory dwell on linguistic messages. The findings reveal that advertisers utilise diverse linguistic structures to signify meanings in advertisements. Besides, changes and variations in Processes, Participants and Circumstances signify changes in meanings.

Keywords: *Advertising and Advertisements, Nigerian Breweries, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Meaning, Change*

Introduction

The focus of this paper is to utilise Halliday's language functions referred to as 'metafunctions' (Halliday, 1985 & 1994), (Halliday and Mathiessen, 2004 & 2014) on semiotic resources employed in advertising communication. This is important because the words of an advertisement make tremendous meanings to the consumers. The convergence of linguistic apparatuses in an advertisement explicates the overall meaning of such an advertisement. The verbal mode of communication on a page of a newspaper or newsmagazine's advertisement is a

meaning – making process employed by an advertiser to realise the persuasive strategy to facilitate buying or making a product known. At different times, such semiotic devices are varied or changed to engender a change in meaning, consequently modifying the belief, the attitude and behaviour of the viewer / reader of the advertisement.

In modern society, advertisements have become an unavoidable component of human ways of life. Advertisements, in whichever way they come, influence people by changing their attitudes either positively or negatively towards a particular product or service. Consequently, advertisers devise means to persuade the consumers to buy the products and services that are advertised. Attractive means are used. Such means include images, photos, size, shape, colours and pictures of human beings. Most importantly, advertisers use language. In spite of the glossy format of a printed advertisement on a page of newspaper or newsmagazine, therefore, it is the language that makes a product known (Crystal, 2003). The language used, literally or literarily, but communicatively, suggests a lot of things in diverse ways to people who come across such advertisements.

Advertising is not only about the promotion of certain branded products or services but ‘can also encompass ideas of text whose intention is to enhance the image of an individual, group or organisation’ (Goddard, 2005: 8). The focus in this paper is to apply Systemic Functional Theory (SFT) to the advertisements of Nigerian Breweries’ product, Star, thereby unfolding changes in the selected advertisements over the years.

Nigerian Breweries was established seventy years ago. Although Nigerian Breweries’ has nineteen products introduced into the Nigerian market at different times, STAR larger beer is as old as the company. The changes are neither only in the lexical items nor in semiotics, generally, but most importantly in meaning potential (Halliday, 1985) at each stage of the communication transformations. Meaning points at the way the society employs and values particular signs. Both the use of language and other forms of communications change in advertisements as well as the other areas of life depending on the purpose, the audience, time and place. However, we focus on the linguistic meaning-making efforts of the advertisers.

There has not been sufficient research on changes and developments in advertising over time (Phillips and McQuarrie, 2002). Only a small number of scholars have studied changes in form and style in newspaper and magazine

advertisements over time (Bustam, 2011; Cordruta-Mariana, 2011; Oyeleye & Adeyinka, 2014). Apart from describing the structural features of linguistic signs used in explicating meaning in advertisements of Star lager beer, it is also the focus of this paper to investigate how changes in linguistic signs used indicate changes in meaning in advertisements of the product.

Numerous works have been done on advertising. However, not many works seem to have been done on meaning and change in this part of the world. Moreover the studies we came across were in the areas of marketing, consumption, youth involvements and effects, TV advertisements and promotions. From all the studies, none in particular focuses on meaning potentials of the linguistic apparatuses of the advertisements. Hence, the focus of this paper on meaning and change is crucial. Only one or two works that we came across in the literature focuses on the language of advertising in relation to alcoholic drinks. This paper is on the linguistic choices made by advert copy writers and it attempts to highlight the trends since it seems to us that changes are taking place in the Nigerian society, in ads and in all areas of English language-use in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework (Systemic Functional Theory (SFT))

Systemic Functional Theory (SFT) was first introduced by Michael Halliday. It is an approach to the study of grammar which radically departs from erstwhile traditional view in which language is a set of rules for specifying grammatical structures. SFT is also a departure from concerns that language is a mental process. Halliday, the proponent, explores how language is used in social contexts to achieve particular goals (O'Donnel, 2012:2). Halliday explains that language is a resource for making meanings and hence grammar is a resource for creating meaning by means of wording (Sadighi & Bavali, 2008:14).

In the first edition of his book, Halliday (1985) explicates the concept of Systemic Functional Grammar as follows:

The theory behind the present account is known as “Systemic” theory. Systemic theory is a theory of meaning as choice, by which a language, or any other semiotic system, is interpreted as networks of interlocking options.... Whatever is chosen in one system becomes the way into a set of choices in another, and go on as far as we need to, or as far as we can in the time available, as far as we know how.

By this explanation, the theory does not address itself to how language is processed or represented within the human brain (Chomsky, 1957). On the

contrary, it examines the spoken and written discourses that are produced and the contexts of the production of the texts. It is predicated on the use to which a language is put. It places emphasis on what functions are performed by the clauses and not on how the language is composed which is the structure of a language.

The Clause in SFT

The clause in an SFT analysis refers to the structural unit in which we express a particular part of that meaning potential. The clause is conceptualised in three component parts as clause. They are: (i) the process (ii) the participants in the process (iii) the attendant circumstances. Meaning resides in these component parts, using SFT.

The process refers to the verbal elements of the clause; the participants in the process whether before or after the process are nominal; while the attendant circumstances answer the questions when, where, why etc. They are the adverbials.

To determine the meaning potential of the clause, the **ideational** functions of the metafunctions are through the process of TRANSITIVITY system, the **interpersonal** functions are through the system of MOOD and MODALITY while the **textual** functions are realised through the system of THEME/RHEME and INFORMATION FOCUS. The textual function presupposes that language should be operationally relevant. It should have a texture. The clause as a whole expresses all functions through the total set of its structural and lexical resources (Kress 1981: 24). The clause realisation can be summed up in the following figure: // STAR is beer at its best//

Table 1: Example of structural analysis of a clause: Adapted from Kress (1981:24, 29)

Form/Clause	STAR	is	Beer	at its best
IDEATIONAL Transitivity	Participant Carrier	Process Relational	Participant Attribute	Circumstance Manner
INTERPERSONAL Mood	Subject	‘present’ Finite	Complement	Adjunct
	Mood		Residue	
TEXTUAL Theme	Theme	Rheme		

The table above illustrates how meaning may be realised in the clause through the systems of Transitivity, Mood and Theme simultaneously. To Halliday, the meaning of an expression is the function to which such is put.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Relevant to this study are concepts such as Meaning, Change, Communication, Advertising and Advertisement. These are reviewed within the limited space in order to ascertain the work and contributions of linguists in the past.

Advertising as Communication

Advertising is a form of communication and it is one of the oldest professions in the world (Akinbode, 2012). Advertising is as old as humanity. As a market instrument, advertisers use advertisements to influence the behaviours of consumers at the point of purchase (Sandage, Frouburger & Rolzol, 1997). Communication is ubiquitous in contemporary society (Cordruta - Mariana, 2011). Language, as we investigate in this paper, is only an aspect of communication and meaning-making in advertisements. As a social process, as the society changes, forms of communication change - linguistic and non-linguistic alike. Advertisements provide people with information on the availability of particular products, the place of purchase, the nature of the products etc. (Olateju, 2006:102; Akinbode, 2012). Advertising is a form of communication through the media about products, services or ideas paid for by an identified sponsor (Bel-Molokwu, 2000). It is directed at an audience, persuasive in nature and is an integral power of marketing (Oyeleye & Adeyinka, 2014:276).

Change and Advertisements

Williamson (1978), Gisbergen *et al.* (2004) and Leeuwen (2005) have written on changes in advertising. Leeuwen attempts social reasons for change in advertisements and identifies that as society changes, new semiotic resources may be needed. Some of the identified resources are typography, metaphor and connotation. 'Innovation, metaphor and connotation are always there in the background', he says. Gisbergen *et al.* identify, in particular, changes in openness. It suggests absence of the product in the ads. Their findings are that from 1900-1970, 85% of the ads depicted the products whereas between 1978 and 1988, portrayal of the products declined. Other observations are presence of rhetorical figures of 'suppressions' and 'substitution'. In the first, parts of products are left out but in the second, ads with metaphor and metonymy are on the increase. Phillips and McQuarrie (2002) observe a change in verbal anchoring, that is, a decrease in the number of words used between 1975 and 1999. In all none of the

works in particular applied the Systemic Functional Theory (Halliday, 1985 & 2004) to the language of advertising.

Inevitability of Change

Every living language is constantly changing. As a living language, English in Nigeria as elsewhere keeps adapting to an ever-changing world which requires new and varied means of communication (Millar, 2007:97). Millar explains that language change is ceaseless and remorseless. Every language that is spoken continues to change, not just century-by-century, but day-by-day right in our own eyes. Most importantly, language changes in use and according to the prevailing context. Change in a living language is unavoidable (Aitchson, 1981:20). Thorne (1997: 116) concludes to that the history of language shows it is very difficult to artificially control any language because language growth is organic, evolving to meet the demands users place upon it. Therefore, whatever linguists feel about the effects social, cultural and worldwide growth have on language, such changes will probably survive if they are useful (Millar, 2007:132).

This, at least, shows that irrespective of how individuals feel about changes taking place, a living language would always survive. This of course is because the users of a language would always adjust to whatever changes there are and they keep servicing the society and maintaining the social, economic and political relationship of the people (Aitchson, 1981:49).

Methodology

This paper relies heavily on fieldwork methodology. The appropriate field work for the study is media monitoring. We also used library search for useful materials. Media monitoring is a process of reading content of media sources on a continuing basis (Snjezana, 2003; CyberAlert, 2010). This is done in order to identify and analyse advertisements that contain particular area of research interest. It presupposes monitoring the output of the print, online and broadcast for the purpose of, especially, scientific and technological research. The method is essentially apt in order to track NB ads. Since the advent of the internet in Nigeria, most adverts that we could not track in print newspapers are found in the online version of the papers. Newspapers and newsmagazines selected for this study are searched from the inception of publication to 2016. Relevant online sites of the product, Star, was equally visited.

The newspaper advertisements were selected from *The Guardian*, *The PUNCH*, *Daily Times of Nigeria*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *Newswatch* and *Tell Magazine*. The

archives of the National library and University of Lagos were used. Some officials of the Lowe Lintas advertising agency equally provided some available Star adverts in the company.

We adopted a purposive sampling in order to extract advertisement copies in which linguistic messages are in clauses. This is important to SFT (our Theoretical Framework) which focuses on the clause, first and foremost, for analysis. Overall, there were 94 advertisements that fit the frame recommended in SFT. The distribution is as follows:

Table 2: Categorisation of advertisements across time posts

PRODUCT	1 ST BREWED	ADVERT TIME POSTS					TOTAL
		1949-1980	1981-1990	1991-2000	2001-2010	2011-2016	
STAR LAGER BEER	1949	SLA 29	SLB 23	SLC 9	SLD 29	SLE 4	94

Though many of these advertisement copies are of varying shapes and sizes, many of them share the same image and linguistic content.

The focus of the paper is on linguistic change. Signposts are necessary to determine at what period in the society or in the life of the product changes were effected. As a result of this, lines were drawn to demarcate period although such differentiations can only be approximations. After careful selection and collation of the available advertisements into the various posts, five stages of the product's lifetime were identified as we have in the table above. The differentiations are our own segmentations.

Findings

The analysis focuses on verbal copies of the advertisements with the application of Halliday's (1978, 1985) linguistic metafunctions to explicate how meanings are made through the systems of Transitivity, Mood and Theme as explained earlier in the paper.

The first objective of this paper was to describe the structural features of linguistic signs used in explicating meaning in advertisements. Structure is an arrangement of entities that embodies wholeness (internal coherence), transformation (non-static, not only structured but structuring) and self-regulation (does not have to appeal beyond itself) (Martin & Ringham, 2000).

a. `Meaning is construed in the clause. Thus, we have the clause as Representation, the clause as Exchange and the clause as Message. There is a three-layer view of grammar here. The structural features of the Experiential (Ideational) meaning through the system of transitivity are *Actor/Agent// Process// Goal/Recipient/Beneficiary// Circumstance; Senser/Cognizant// Process// Phenomenon; Sayer// Process// Target/Recipient/Receiver/Addressee// Verbiage; Carrier// Process// Attribute// Possessor// Process// Possession – Token// Process// Value; Behaver// Behaviour// Phenomenon; Existential// Existent*

However, owing to flexibility of language use, there are occasions for use of phrases (called groups) that have just one layer of analysis (Eggs, 1994; Halliday & Mathiessen, 2014). Examples are given in the tables below to illustrate the clause as Representation.

Table 3: STAR Experiential Analysis (sample)

Clause	STAR BEER	WINS	1 st PRIZE	IN LONDON!
Experiential meaning	Participant Senser	Process Mental	Participant Phenomenon	Circumstance / place

Clause	You	can't beat	STAR
Experiential meaning	Participant Actor	Process Material	Participant Goal

b. The structural features of the Interpersonal meaning through the system of MOOD are *Subject// Finite/Predicator// Complement// Adjunct*. The subject like the participants in the Experiential is realised through noun, noun phrase, pronoun or nominalisation. The finite/predicator constituency as realised in the Experiential processes is realised interpersonally in the verb elements which may be simple or complex. The complement answers the questions ‘who’ or ‘what’ after the predicator as realised, too, in the recipient/goal/beneficiary etc structure of the Experiential meaning. It is usually nominal. The adjunct in the interpersonal is realised as circumstance in the Experiential structure. Adjunct can be extent (distant/duration), location (place/time), manner (means/quality/comparison), cause (reason/purpose/behalf) etc. (Bustam, 2011). On the whole, the clause is structured into Mood block and Residue. While the former comprises subject and finite, Residue takes care of all other occurrences in the clause. The tables below illustrate the clause as Exchange in SFT.

Table 4: STAR Interpersonal Analysis

Clause	STAR BEER	WINS		1 st PRIZE	IN LONDON!
Interpersonal meaning	Subject	'present' Finite	win Predicator	Complement	Adjunct[place]
	Mood		Residue		

Clause	STAR	<u>IS</u>	beer	at its best!
Interpersonal meaning	Subject	Finite	Complement	Adjunct [Manner]
	Mood		Residue	

c. The structural features of the Textual meaning are realised through Theme and Rheme. SFT through metafunctions views language as a network of SYSTEMS rather than a set of structures (Halliday, 1994:15). However, the network of systems is realised in the structure. Theme and Rheme form the two major choices within the textual metafunction. It is the Textual metafunction that enables both Ideational and Interpersonal features of a text to be understood by the interlocutors in a discourse situation. Theme is the point of departure; it is that with which the clause is concerned (Halliday, 1985, 1994). Specifically, Theme, on the one hand, assigns special status to a part of the clause. By this, it is placed in the initial position in the clause structure. Rheme, on the other hand, relates to New information. It is the remainder of the message. Rheme is just anything that is not Theme. Rheme is the part of the message in which the Theme is developed (Krisnawati, 2013). The following tables illustrate the clause as Message in SFT.

i. **Table 5: Theme in Declarative Clauses (Unmarked)**

STAR BEER	WINS 1 st PRIZE IN LONDON!
STAR	<u>IS</u> beer at its best!
You	can't beat STAR
Life	takes on a bright, golden glow
Shadows	fade when clean bubbling Star comes on the scene
Warm, wonderful friendship	spreads around.
THEME	RHEME

ii. **Table 6: Theme in Declarative Clauses (Marked)**

and fifth, STAR	is beer at its best
When the day is done, few things	work like a STAR
No wonder, STAR	is everything you want in a great lager
In their homes, at parties, In hotels and bars they	enjoy Star and a pleasant life
THEME	RHEME

iii. **Table 7: Theme in Interrogative Clauses**

Polarity (yes/no) This was not realised in the study.

Ø	ø
THEME	RHEME

iv. **Table 8: Wh-questions (unmarked Theme) Wh-word**

'Who	switched on the light?'
'Who	let the balloon up!'
'Who	won the medal?'
THEME	RHEME

v. **Table 9: Theme in Imperative Clauses**

Be	<u>KOBO – WISE</u>
Enjoy	life this Christmas
BUY	YOUR STAR NOW
Turn on	the brightness
Share	this unique pleasure
THEME	RHEME

The composition of the Theme includes (i) the first experiential element in the clause namely, participant/process/circumstance. (ii) any other element that precede the experiential elements above. These could be vocatives, conjunctions, connective adjuncts etc.

Four clauses above are fronted thematically (Table 6). Thematic fronting is labelled 'marked' by Halliday. It means that such construction is significant for meaning in the context of appearance. In this wise, an advertiser purposively focuses on such words or group of words by placing it initially in the clause where, by the structure of modern English, it ought to belong elsewhere. Such MARKED Themes are shown in the declarative clauses above.

Objective 2 of this paper was to investigate how changes in linguistic signs are used to indicate changes in meaning in advertisements. The following are the findings.

(i) **Variations through brand naming (Labelling): STAR – Star**

Premium/Regular (1949), Rock Star (Limited Edition) November 1 – December 30, 2013 (60 days), Star Fruity (2013), Star Lite Lager (2014), Star Radler (2015), Star Triple X (2015).

(ii) **Change in slogan: STAR - beer at its best (40s-), Be STAR-BRIGHT for Life! (75-81-), Enjoy the Brighter Life (82-83), the ideal brew (85-), Ahead on**

taste (95), Live the Brighter Life in Style (90s); Shine of quality (01), Never a Dull Moment with Star (03) beer at its brightest and best, Share the Brighter Life (05-09), Shine On (09-).

(iii) **Use of Pidgin/ Non Standard English:** TIME 2 PUMP UP DA BEAT AS STAR MEGA – JAM CRANKS UP DA HEAT; Who is da bomb? However, the use of pidgin or non Standard English is not prevalent in Star advertisements.

(iv) **Endorsements: STAR** - Rap Mega Star artiste Ja Rule, the king of Caribbean Soccer-Kevin Lyttle and a galaxy of Nigerian musical super stars; STAR Shines at Osun Osogbo Festival; Nelly Enas Live Concert!; D'Banj, P Square, Olu Maintain, 9ice, Faze, Timaya, Ruggedman, KC Presh, Pheel, Diamondz and football legend Kanu Nwankwo. I AM NIGERIA and STAR is my Beer. They are all faces of variation and change which the advertisers have employed to sustain the interest of the consumers.

(v) **Change in Participants:** Participant is a component in the Transitivity System. It acts on the Process to explicate the experiential meaning. Most often, product names (Participants) enjoy permanence as they reach fixation. Such is found in Star (1949-date). However, for the purpose of persuasion, Participants are often varied as we can see in Star Lite (2014), Star Tripple X (2015) Star Radler (2015). From one advertisement to another, apart from the above, participants in the clause change. For instance, Star is, It is, It's favour is, The sensation is; There are, You are, Star people are

(vi) **Change in Processes:** Processes are embedded in the verbal elements. In Star advertisements, we have change in processes in You have, You are, You will, You can, You can't, You should, There are, There is.

(vii) **Change in Circumstance:** This involves locations (Temporal & Spatial). Examples are: When you feel like celebrating, after a hard day's work, in a special way, for all seasons, when clean bubbling Star comes on the scene, Once the crowns come off, Because STAR is brewed and matured to that distinctively brighter taste that's clean, smooth, and ever-fresh!, Wherever people gather, If your ticket is drawn, In their homes, at parties, In hotels and bars etc.

In all, the Subject (Participant) - Star - is relatively stable. It continues through time. The Participants exhibit 'Permanence'. However, Finite undergoes phenomenal change. Processes are unfolding through time exhibiting 'Transience'.

Conclusion

All language users are capable of changing and varying their words according to the context in order to bear new meanings. Languages have embedded in them various resources for effecting changes in vocabulary. Consequently, meanings of the existing words may change. Since it is possible that users of a language are capable of altering the vocabulary very easily, it means that the language user can without effort adopt new words, accept or invest new meanings for existing words. They may, again, cease to use some words or cease to use them in certain meanings. Finally, it is discovered that variation and change in adverts are consciously done for the purpose of effecting change of attitude towards the advertised products by the consumers. Layers of meanings are embedded simultaneously in the clause experientially, interpersonally and textually.

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