

“BABEȘ-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY OF CLUJ-NAPOCA

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**BRITISH AND ROMANIAN NEWSPAPER
ADVERTISEMENTS. A CROSS-CULTURAL
DISCOURSE-ANALYTIC PERSPECTIVE**

PhD Dissertation-Summary

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Key words: advertising, discourse analysis, communication, language, culture, low-context culture, high-context culture, speech acts, information content, individualism, collectivism, presuppositions, conversational implicatures, maxims, inferences, cohesion.

SUMMARY

An adequate consideration of the language of advertising should not be done without considering the culture of that particular country. There is an inseparable link between communication and culture and as advertising is a form of communication, it reveals cultural meanings that are relevant to the society in which the advertisements are produced. The communication patterns differ from one culture to another and people give different meanings to the same experiences. In order to get the audience's attention, the advertisers have to use patterns, structures and symbols that are recognized and meaningful to a particular culture. The message has to be created so that it is first of all understood by the audience and then it persuades the audience.

However, the question that arises when dealing with advertisements from two or more different countries is whether the cultural differences are reflected to a greater or lesser extent in the advertising messages. Are the differences evident only in the surface structures or also in the deep structures and meanings of the language? Our assumption is that advertising reflects the structure of the culture in which it is created, therefore, when analysing the language of advertising of two different societies, the distinctions in pattern, style and language are expected to be revealed in the advertising message. The purpose of this thesis is specifically to examine if the cultural differences between Britain and Romania are reflected in the advertising message. We are interested in observing whether culture influences the language of advertising only in the surface structure or in the deep structure related to the principles and rules of the language. We consider that such cross-cultural studies are important for understanding how culture influences communication and for the success of the communication process at global level. Our research is conducted based on the differences in cultural context between England and Romania which have been classified by Hall and Hall (1990) as low-context culture and high-context culture, respectively. In low-context cultures the communication is direct, exact, with a precise use of

words so that the message is understood exactly as it is sent. Therefore, in low-context cultures, the advertising message is likely to use forceful and direct appeals to the consumers. On the contrary, in high-context cultures the vague language is preferred, the connotations and the context playing an important role in the process of communication. As there is no direct reference to the message, the audience has to get the meaning from the context. Thus, in high-context cultures, the advertising message is likely to use implied and indirect appeals to the customers. Based on these principles and on the dimensions of individualism (associated with low-context cultures) and collectivism (associated with high-context cultures), we expect to find differences in the values emphasised by each culture and even in the style and principles of the advertising messages. Still, we also expect to find similarities in the language of the advertisements because some strategies have to be similar considering the purpose of ads, namely to persuade the addressees and to make them buy the products. With the help of this cross-cultural study we will be able to identify the differences and the similarities in the cultural values and the language principles between the two countries.

Moreover, the results of such a comparative study will answer yet another question related to a possible standardization and globalization of advertising. As the globalization process becomes more popular it affects the socio-cultural resources and it increases the role of media, advertising and consumerism. The cultures change due to globalization and people's identities are affected. Some theories related to the implications of globalization on individual cultures have already been created: homogenization (a standardized global culture around a Western or American pattern), polarization (two dominant but contrasting cultures, the Western and the non-Western) and hybridization (incorporation of elements from all cultures) (Holton, 2000). Whether these theories will be supported or not it remains to be seen. However, a global culture implies similar values and understanding and the possibility of having similar advertising campaigns all over the world. This would be ideal for marketers and advertisers because it would imply huge savings, a larger market for selling the products and a simplification of the process. The results of such comparative studies are the answer to whether international advertising may use the same strategies in promoting the products or it should continue to adapt everything to the ideas and patterns of each country. Different cross-cultural studies have been conducted so far on the content or the visual content of advertisements, on the advertising expressions, on the cultural themes or the use of humour. Few studies, if any, have been conducted between a developed country, such as England and a developing one, such as Romania. Our study will offer comprehensive insights into the similarities, differences, attributes and patterns used in British

and Romanian advertising in order to understand the characteristics that prevail in each culture and the necessity for adaptation or standardization in advertising. Our research will give the answers to the existence of differences and similarities in the cultural values and ideas and/or to their existence in the language patterns and principles as well.

The thesis is organised into seven chapters and a bibliography. In the first part we consider the analytical framework and the theoretical background on which the research is conducted while in the second part we analyse the advertisements that represent the corpus of the thesis and we offer the results and conclusions for our analysis.

The introductory **Chapter I** deals with preliminary issues, a presentation of previous research and a synoptic view of the thesis, the implications of globalization on advertising and the importance of cross-cultural studies for the language and for the process of advertising. A short history of advertising in Britain and Romania is also presented.

Chapter II gives an overview of the notions of communication, language and advertising. It outlines the most important characteristics, classifications, models and components of the notions and it also deals with the Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Grice 1975) and the speech acts proposed by Yule (1996). The goal of the first part is to define the concept of communication and to present the elements that are essential for the success of communication. The second part deals with the process of advertising and the factors that are important for this form of communication. It also presents the importance of speech acts in advertising and our expectations regarding the types of speech acts that prevail in the advertisements that represent the analytical corpus of the thesis. We formulate our first hypothesis related to the types of speech acts that prevail in the British and the Romanian advertisements that represent the corpus of the thesis. The third part defines the concept of culture and it underlines the relationship between culture and communication and the relevance of cross-cultural communication at global level.

Chapter III deals with the theoretical concepts relevant for the analysis of the British and the Romanian advertisements that represent the corpus of the thesis. First, we define the concept of cross-cultural advertising and present the Resnik and Stern (1977) classification system according to which we compare the information content of the advertisements from the corpus. A distinction is made between high-context and low-context cultures, the differences between these cultural contexts representing the main features on which we conduct our analysis and formulate our second hypothesis. This hypothesis is formulated based on the information content of advertisements. We expect a difference as to the number of information cues used in the

advertisements from the corpus. Then, we propose a classification of the consumers based on the information content of the advertisements. We describe Hofstede's (1980) dimensions of individualism and collectivism and their relationship with the cultural contexts and underline their significance for advertising. We also present the importance of the cultural context for a correct interpretation of cross-cultural similarities/differences. The third hypothesis is also formulated.

Next, we consider the notions of presuppositions, inferences and maxims of communication. Each concept is described and classified and their impact and importance for the language of advertising are also presented. We focus on Grice's (1975) notions of conventional and conversational implicatures. We deal specifically with presuppositions and their use in advertisements and also with Grice's conversational maxims and their flouting in advertising messages. Starting from Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory, we elaborate on the process of inference making in advertising and present the constructions according to which we are going to analyse the corpus. A hypothesis is formulated for each concept. Finally, the cohesive devices and the concept of cohesion and its role in the language of advertising are outlined and the last hypothesis is formulated as well.

In **Chapter IV** the research methodology is presented. This chapter explains the procedures taken in the selection of the materials that represent the corpus of the thesis, it presents the hypotheses that we have formulated for our research and it describes the test used for the statistical comparisons. The first criterion for selecting the newspapers was the presence of the publications in the top 10 newspapers in both countries according to recent circulation figures in order to ensure a high degree of relevance. The circulation figures were taken from the following websites: *www.mediauk.com* and *www.wikipedia.org* for the British newspapers and *www.wall-street.ro* and *www.reportervitruial.ro* for the Romanian newspapers. The circulation figures presented on these websites originate from the Audit Bureau of Circulations in Britain and the National Audience Study and the Audit Bureau of Circulations in Romania, respectively, for the period 2009-2012. The newspapers from which we selected the corpus for this study were: *The Sun*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mirror*, *The Times*, *London Evening Standard*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent* (Britain) and *Click*, *Adevărul*, *Evenimentul Zilei*, *Ziarul Financiar*, *România Liberă*, *Capital*, *Libertatea*, *Academia Cașavencu* (Romania). The issues of the selected newspapers covered the period from 2009 to 2012.

Only advertisements with headline, body copy, slogan and signature were considered in order to ensure a high degree of relevance for our analysis. As for the visual elements, only

advertisements with photographs, cartoons and true-life drawings were considered in order to have relevant results for the individualism and collectivism analysis of the ads. First, the advertisements were classified into three categories based on the type of product being advertised: fast moving consumer goods (non-durables), durables and services (White, 2000:98). Then, due to insufficient occurrence of advertisements for non-durables in the selected Romanian newspapers, this category of products was excluded. In order to have relevant results for the comparative analysis we decided to choose advertisements for similar categories of products, namely durables and services. Durables are goods that usually survive to a long period of use and are not purchased frequently. Examples include automobiles, electronic devices and systems, furniture, etc. Services denote activities and benefits that are intangible and are offered for sale. Examples include travel agencies, health care, legal services, insurance, banking services, real estate agencies, tax preparers, car rentals and hotels.

When marking the ads, duplication was avoided when there were more ads for the same brand by randomly marking one of the advertisements. Finally, after identifying and marking all the advertisements for durables and services in the selected issues of each newspaper, a random sample of advertisements was selected, resulting in a total of 25 advertisements from the issues in the British newspapers and 25 advertisements from the issues in the Romanian newspapers, respectively. An English translation for each Romanian advertisement was also provided.

Chapter V deals with the analysis of the 25 British and the 25 Romanian advertisements that represent the analytical corpus of the thesis. All the theoretical concepts are considered in the analysis of each advertisement.

In **Chapter VI** we present the statistical results of the analysis, the main findings and the confirmation or refutation of the hypotheses. The results are presented in terms of each variable by country, the descriptive statistics providing frequencies and proportions of the concepts and sub-concepts for the British and the Romanian advertisements that represent the corpus of the thesis. The statistical comparisons are done with the help of the *Mann-Whitney U test* for non-parametric data. They reveal whether there are statistically significant differences between the use/presence of the concepts that have been analysed in the corpus.

The final part of the thesis includes **Chapter VII** – Conclusions and the **Bibliography**.

The following hypotheses have been formulated for our study:

H1: There will be more directives, representatives and commissives than expressives and declarations in both British and Romanian ads. Because of the cultural differences, we expect a greater number of directives and commissives in the British ads and more representatives in the Romanian ads, respectively.

H2: The number of information cues will be greater in the British advertisements than in the Romanian ones, the British ads directly presenting information about the advantages of the product and the purchase reasons, giving the customers the possibility to rely on more exact information for decision making.

H3 We expect that the British advertisements that represent the corpus of the thesis reflect the individualism cultural dimension and the appeals which belong to it while the Romanian advertisements emphasise the collectivism dimension and the appeals which characterise it.

H4 We expect a frequent use of presuppositions in the headlines of the British and the Romanian advertisements that represent the corpus of this thesis. At this point we are not able to hypothesise which presupposition types are favoured in the headlines but we expect to be able to classify them after analysing the corpus.

H5 We expect a greater number of implicatures through flouting the maxims in the body copy of the Romanian advertisements than in the British ads. We also expect to make a classification of the maxims that are flouted in the body copy of the British and the Romanian advertisements that represent the corpus of the thesis.

H6 The number of inferences/claims will be greater in the headlines, slogans (if present) and the body copy of the Romanian advertisements than in the British ads. We expect to make a classification of the most used inferences/claims in the British and the Romanian advertisements that represent the corpus of the thesis.

H7 The number of cohesive devices will be greater in the British advertisements than in the Romanian ads. We expect to make a classification of the most used cohesive devices in the British and the Romanian advertisements that represent the corpus of the thesis.

The results of this cross-cultural study revealed that there were a couple of significant differences between the two cultures in the production of the advertising messages and that the different cultural principles were rendered in the advertising messages. Our research illustrates that even if there is some common ground between the theories, there are many aspects on which the two countries differ. The distinction between the cultures is reflected in the patterns, style and language of the advertisements. Cultural values definitely influence the deep structure of the

language of advertising, having an effect on the principles and rules of the language. Our cross-cultural study emphasises the idea that the values are definitely different and it is not possible to think of standard advertising appeals and strategies yet. Although marketers and advertisers prefer standardised ad campaigns, the barriers have not been broken yet. The values, the concepts and the understanding still differ. However, there are also similarities in the language of advertising between the two countries. These similarities may be the result of the globalization process which has started to affect the socio-cultural norms, but also of the role and purpose of advertisements, namely to persuade the addressees and to make them buy/choose the products/services. Our cross-cultural study illustrates that even if the similarities exist, the differences are still reflected in the advertising messages, thus advertisers should be careful when considering the standardization and globalization of advertising. It is too soon to think of similar strategies at international level because the differences and similarities exist not only in the cultural values and ideas but also in the language patterns and principles. Therefore, advertising should be adapted to the ideas and patterns of each country. Our study offers comprehensive insights into the similarities, differences, attributes and patterns used in British and Romanian advertising with important implications for understanding the language of advertising from the two countries and for creating effective advertising messages.