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A critical analysis of the representation of gender in Spanish advertising discourse during the 70's and 80's

INTRODUCTION

The growth of advertising became prominent at the beginning of the twentieth century as a means of mass communication. Apologists of advertising have highlighted the fact that advertising ensures the consumer's freedom of choice to acquire products by widening consumer choice and that advertising is senseless unless it is addressed to people with freedom to decide for themselves the pattern of their work and lives.

However, there is a common criticism that advertising largely concentrates on consumption. Critics of advertising claim that the advertising industry creates false needs in the mind of the consumer, promising fulfilment through consumption. Advertising is regarded as a tool whereby consumers are controlled and manipulated by the producers of goods and advertising agencies to desire things for which they have no need. Nevertheless, the power of advertising resides in the fact that commodities are no longer important for their primary use but what they stand for. Advertising is not confined to the pure utility of a product but involves a number of interconnected symbolic relationships between the person and object. As Williamson (1979:13) points out: "Advertisements are selling us something else besides goods: in providing us with a structure which we, and those goods, are interchangeable, they are selling ourselves."

This paper endeavours to show through both the verbal and non-verbal analysis of printed advertisements, how the discourse of advertising embodies ideological assumptions that legitimised existing relations of power of men over women. The analysed corpus consists of printed advertisements, which advertise alcoholic drinks included in the magazine: *Ipmark Información de Publicidad y Marketing*, which from 1972 to 1992 published a yearly issue, *La Feria de la Creatividad Española* that offers a wide sample of the printed advertisements and T.V. commercials of the year.

The analysis of the advertisements is based on the following framework:

Analysis of verbal communication:

- 1) Textual aspects:
Cohesion patterns: reference, conjunction, lexical cohesion
- 2) Interpersonal aspects:
2.1 Modality patterns
2.2. Power/solidarity axis: pronoun systems, **tu – ud** patterns of formality
- 3) Inferred Language Cues:
3.1. Speech acts
3.2. Presupposition
- 4) Lexical patterns: Lexical items that refer to ideological conventions
- 5) Motivational features¹: a) attract attention b) arouse interest c) stimulate desire d) create conviction e) provoke action

Analysis of non-verbal communication:

- 1) Reinforcement/contradiction of the verbal message
- 2) Anchorage: the text provides a link between the picture and the situation in space and time, which cannot be established by visual means alone
- 3) Denotation/connotations
- 4) Currency of signs²:
4.1 The signifier (the material vehicle)
4.2 The signified (the mental construct, the idea)
4.3 Objective correlatives: objects, persons or a chain of events that attach particular feelings or ideas to a product

ADVERTISEMENT ANALYSIS

Advertisement one consists of a photograph and a verbal message which is printed on the illustration. The verbal message which starts with the product's brand name **VAT 69 Scotch Whisky (Image 1, p. 5)** is followed

¹ As pointed out by (Verstergaard and Schoder, 1985:50) "it is quite rare to find and advert where it is possible to demonstrate one-to-one relationships between these five motivational factors."

² Semiotic analysis adapted from Williamson J. (1988): *Decoding Advertisements. Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*. London: Malion Boyers.

by an existential presupposition: *La cita de los fuertes* (The meeting for strong men). The presupposition is ideological because it makes a general appeal to background knowledge.

In Western societies, men rank each other according to physical strength and athletic ability in the early years, but later in life stratification is focused on the ability to make money. (Pleck,1995:5). The lexeme **Los fuertes** is ideologically based because it refers to the masculinity myth of authority and power. Moreover, the adjective **fuertes** does not refer to physical strength but to the ability to make money and to succeed in the hierarchical and competitive world of business.

The non-verbal message reinforces the verbal message. The success image is illustrated by depicting a well-groomed man stylishly dressed in formal wear, sitting on an expensive sofa in his study. He is looking at us with a serious expression, his head is high which according to Goffman (1979:40) is "stereotypically a mark of superiority." The correlation between the man in the picture and the product is made on the basis of connotation. The man is a signifier for confidence, authority, elegance and success. Both the photograph and the verbal message show the consumers that the man in the photograph is what people would stereotypically expect a successful business man to be. The reflection of his handcuffs on the silver tray reinforces that he is a successful career man.

The subject position set up for the reader is an elegant middle-aged successful business man whose objectives are wealth and power. Modern advertising offers potential consumers membership of consumption communities that is, buy this and you will become this kind of person, buy this and be one of us. (Talbot, 1991:175). Thus, **VAT 69 Scotch Whisky** drinkers belong to a special group: **Los Fuertes**, whose values, tastes and lifestyles are embedded in this advertisement.

Advertisement two advertises **Paternina Banda Azul**. (Image 2, p. 5) The headline: **Los provocadores**, which is situated on top of the visual message, catches the reader's attention and at the same time arouses the reader's interest to find out what the men depicted in the photograph are trying to provoke. The verbal message, which is situated below the photograph, is divided into two sections. The first section refers to the men in the photograph and the second section refers to the product that is advertised.

SECTION ONE OF THE VERBAL MESSAGE

Line 1- *Son cuatro y seguros de sí mismos* (There are four of them and they are confident in what they do).

Line 2- *Conocen a la perfección los secretos de la buena mesa* (They Know the secret of keeping a good table).

Line 3- *Su buen gusto no admitirá fallos y ellos le desafían a que los encuentre* (Their good taste will not accept mistakes and they challenge you to find them).

Line 1: The first information unit contains the quantitative numerative element **four** as focus referring to the four men in the photograph, thereby anchoring the text to the photograph. The verb **son (are)** is in the present tense form, which is according to Fairclough (1989:129): "One terminal point of expressive modality, a categorical commitment of the producer to the truth of proposition. The additive **and** extends the meaning of the clause by adding new information to it.

Line 2: Which begins with the verb **conocer (to know)** is a factive presupposition that is taken to presuppose the truth of the information stated after it i.e. the information is created as a fact. The men in the photograph are thus considered by the producer or addresser as professionals in the field of food and beverage.

Line 3: Begins with the pronoun **su (their)** which also refers anaphorically to the men depicted in the photograph. The clause: **y ellos le desafían a que los encuentre** is a directive speech act, which implies an exhortation to action.

SECTION TWO OF THE VERBAL MESSAGE

Line 4- *Pero hay un detalle que no deja lugar a dudas* (But there is a detail which is beyond any doubt).

Line 5- *Paternina Banda Azul*

Line 6- *El vino que llevará grabado en su memoria* (The wine which you will remember to be an irreplaceable part of your table).

Line 4: Begins with **But** which is the theme of the clause. It conveys contrary to the expectation built up in the previous clause. The comment adjunct **beyond any doubt** expresses the producer's comment on what he is saying, i.e. **Paternina Banda Azul** wine (Line 5) is beyond any doubt. If you offer **Paternina Banda Azul** wine, you will never make a mistake. This wine will always be up to the required standard.

Line 6: As in line 2, the clause (**el vino que llevará grabado en su memoria**) also denotes expressive modality. This section concludes with the rhetorical device of alliteration: **placer, prestigio y personalidad**. The word wine is repeated in line 7 indicating lexical cohesion.

The visual message consists of two photographs. The photograph in the foreground depicts a chef, a wine taster, a maitre and a headwaiter, standing at the table, which is impeccably set. The cutlery and napkins have been perfectly distributed on the table. The four men belong to the world of food and beverage and they are experts in this field. The bottle of wine, **Paternina Banda Azul**, is thus highly recommended by those experts. At the level of connotation, these men convey confidence and pride in what they do. Their age symbolizes experience, responsibility and efficiency and therefore, they become signifiers for prestige and expertise. The advertisement stimulates the reader's desire to buy the wine and creates conviction in the quality of the product by appealing to the method of expertise.

What is paradoxical of this advertisement is that while cooking is traditionally considered a women's task, the elaboration of a dish and preparation of a restaurant menu, which involves expertise, is represented by a man. Women are not depicted in the illustration because it seems that only men are qualified to engage in the public field of work and professionalism.

The subject position set up for the potential consumer is a businessman who wants to give a good impression to his colleagues or friends or flatter his clients at a restaurant by ordering **Paternina Banda Azul** wine which has been highly recommended by experts in the field of food and beverage.

Advertisement three (Image 3, p.5) also advertises **Paternina Banda Azul** wine. The verbal message refers almost exclusively to the women depicted in the smallest photograph of the two that are included in the advertisement.

The verbal message is as follows:

- Line 1- *Ellas saben preparar los platos más deliciosos ante los que el buen gusto se rinde* (They know how to prepare the most delicious dishes which are really tasty).
- Line 2- *Saben que el ritmo actual de vida hace difícil que sus maridos puedan compartirlos a su lado* (They know that the current pace of life makes it difficult for their husbands to enjoy them (those delicious dishes) together with them).
- Line 3- *Ellas y nosotros conocemos el secreto* (They and we know the secret).
- Line 4- *Es un juego convenido. Sin palabras* (It is an agreement that does not need to be explained).
- Line 5- *La clave es un vino que prolonga el placer de la buena mesa y que ellas se cuidan mucho de divulgarlo* (The key to it all is wine which prolongs the pleasure of a good meal and they take good care to recommend it).

The first information unit of the text contains the personal pronoun **Ellas**, which refers to the housewives in the photograph.

Line 1 contains the verb **saben (Know how to)** which is a lexicogrammatical metaphor for "can" in the sense of ability. The superlative (most delicious) denotes the producer's subjective attitude towards the statement. Line 2 is a factive presupposition, which presupposes that their husbands hardly have time to have lunch or dinner at home because they lead a hectic life due to their jobs. Line 3 and 4 arouses the potential consumer's attention to find out about the producer's and housewives secret. Line 5 gives away the secret. The key to it all, i.e., the way to have your husband spend a little more time with you is to serve him a good bottle of wine which prolongs the pleasure of a good meal. The verbal message, which concludes with the clause: **and they take good care to recommend it**, exploits the alternative face of gossip, which stands for an exclusive female relationship in a male world, a relationship that enables women to exchange experiences, complaints, secrets and mutual help without male interference. (Vestergaard and Schroder, 1985:94).

Many of the adverts that address women appropriate this female form of solidarity, exploiting it with the objective to comply with patriarchal definitions of masculinity. (Ibid). With regard to the visual message, what is most striking, if we compare this advertisement to the previous one, which also advertises the same product, **Paternina Banda Azul** wine, is that the photograph in the foreground does not depict the women to whom the verbal message refers but it shows a bottle of wine and half bottle of wine with two glasses. The photograph of the women seems to be less relevant due to its size and position within the advertisement. It seems that the housewives are less important than the chef, the wine waiter, maitre and headwaiter shown in the previous advertisement, which entails that domestic activities are less valued.

The ideal occupier of the subject position set up for the potential consumer is a housewife whose functions are relegated to activities within the limits of her home. The domestic sphere of the housewife is clearly opposed to

the public, social world of industry, finance and prestige of her husband who as the advertisement states leads a very hectic life.

The noun **prestige**, which was included in the previous advertisement as an inherent quality of the wine, is not mentioned here due to the fact that the women shown in this advert are not signifiers for prestige and expertise, but are signifiers for patient and supportive wives whose primary role is to look after their husbands.

Advertisement four advertises **Vodka Eristoff (Image 4, p. 5)**. The headline: **Atrévete... a una nueva experiencia** catches the readers attention and arouses their interest by using the verb **dare** (atrévete) which challenges them to engage in a unknown experience. The headline is a directive speech act, which implies a **direct** exhortation to action.

The verbal message is as follows:

Line 1- *Quítale la inocencia a un zumo de tomate* (Take away the innocence from a tomato juice).

Line 2- *Un tomate es muy inocente* (A tomato is very innocent).

Line 3- *Seguro que ella espera que seas más atrevido* (Surely she expects you to be more daring).

Line 4- *Invítala a un zumo de tomate con Eristoff* (Invite her to a drink of tomato juice with Eristoff).

Line 5- *Verás cómo todo cambia* (You will see how everything changes).

The present tense of the verb **to be** in line two conveys the categorical commitment of the producer to the truth of the proposition. The statement in line 3: **seguro que ella espera que seas más atrevido** is an indirect speech act which implies an exhortation to action. The advertisement makes use of the witty technique of using two double metaphors, which differentiate the vodka from the tomato juice, which are at the same time the ingredients of a well-known cocktail. Therefore, the tomato juice = innocence = women and the vodka = boldness = men. The use of these metaphors is particularly interesting due to their ideological attachments.

The representation of women being innocent and men being bold embodies the dominant ideologies of a patriarchal society. The verbal message in line 5: **Verá como todo cambia**, promises the potential consumer that his girlfriend or the women who is with him, will become "less innocent" i.e., more complaisant if he invites her to a vodka and tomato juice cocktail. The body copy ends with the slogan: **Vodka Eristoff, el sabor más atrevido** (The boldest flavour). A predominant cohesion pattern in the text is lexical cohesion, which is established by the repetition of the lexical item **atrevido** and by the repetition of the word **tomate** (tomato). The producer uses the pronoun **tu**, which is present in the inflection of the verbs: **atrévete**, **seas**, and **verás**, as a solidarity marker in order to minimise the social distance between himself and the addressee.

The visual image consists of a bottle of vodka Eristoff, placed next to a glass of tomato juice, which is juxtaposed to a photograph of two couples and a woman on her own, at a bar. The image portrayed of the women has got little to do with coyness and innocence. The woman who is on her own, is looking at somebody, who is absent from the photograph. At the level of connotation, she is in fact looking at "you", the potential consumer, inviting you to enter in the advert by filling in this absence. "You" are drawn in the advert to participate in a "discovery" of meaning i.e., the discovery of a new experience in which the headline challenges you to participate. The product, which becomes the signifier for sex not only represents a sexual experience, but becomes this experience and produces it.

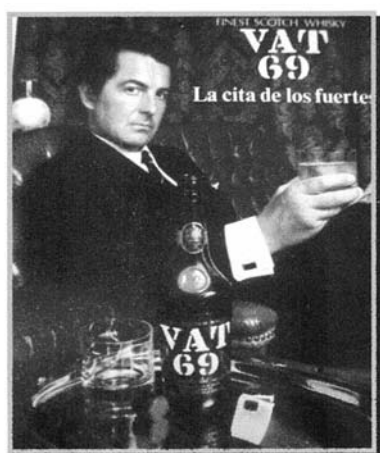
CONCLUSIONS

The discourse of advertising is determined by social structures, which are fixed but change according to the political and the sociological modifications that take place in a certain period of time. Conservative values such as the traditional family unit, which implied that the father is the breadwinner of the family and that women are housewives, are portrayed in the advertisements in the beginning of the 70s analysed in this paper. However, with the end of censorship in Spain, advertisements took advantage of the latter to portray women in a provocative way which is sexist and demeaning. As Fairclough (1989) argues, advertisements create the desire to buy lifestyles, emotions and dreams. Therefore, they can be expected to have long-term effects on the behaviour, social relationships and social identities of a society.

The discourse of advertising reflects behavioural patterns of how women and men should act and behave in order to be considered feminine or manly. Therefore, the power that this type of discourse has in shaping and reinforcing existing asymmetries should not be overlooked.

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ADVERTISEMENT 1: 1973, nº 112 / 113
 ADVERTISEMENTS 2 & 3 : 1974, nº 130 / 131
 ADVERTISEMENT 4: 1980, nº 196