



Кодирование рекламного дискурса с лингвистического ракурса

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Аннотация. На материале англоязычной коммерческой рекламы обсуждаются вопросы кодирования рекламного сообщения с учетом горизонтального и вертикального срезов культурного контекста. Применение семиотического метода с подключением лингвокультурологических процедур анализа позволяет представить рекламный дискурс как схему развертывания рекламных смыслов, зашифрованных в кодах и знаках культуры, внутридискурсивное взаимодействие которых обеспечивает косвенную передачу авторского замысла и внедрение заданной картины мира в массовое сознание.

Ключевые слова: кодирование, смысл, рекламный дискурс, культурный код, знак лингвокультуры, интерпретация

Для цитирования: Миндияхметова Р. М. Кодирование рекламного дискурса с лингвистического ракурса // Вестник Московского государственного лингвистического университета. Гуманитарные науки. 2023. Вып. 1 (869). С. 91–99. DOI 10.52070/2542-2197_2023_1_869_91

Original article

Encoding Advertising Discourse from Linguistic Positions

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Abstract. The issues of encoding advertising message with reference to horizontal and vertical dimensions of cultural context based on English commercials are discussed. The use of semiotic method with application of linguacultural procedures of analysis allows to regard advertising discourse as a scheme of sense development of advertising information deciphered in cultural codes and signs, interaction of which within the discourse space indirectly conveys the author's intention and embeds a certain worldview in collective consciousness.

Keywords: encoding, sense, advertising discourse, cultural code, linguacultural sign, interpretation

For citation: Mindiakmetova, R. M. (2023). Encoding advertising discourse from linguistic positions. Vestnik of Moscow State Linguistic University. Humanities, 1(869), 91–99. 10.52070/2542-2197_2023_1_869_91

INTRODUCTION

The problematics of media communication, analysis of texts used to enlighten different community strata and popularize a certain lifestyle are becoming of great interest in Humanities, especially in Language Studies. Various features of media discourse have been discussed within the framework of Communicative Linguistics aimed at establishing the most effective means of speech impact on mass consciousness. In this regard advertisement due to its complex structure, based on combination of two and more semiotic systems, interaction and interinfluence of which produce integrated communicative effect on addressees [Ворошилова, 2013, p. 22], deserves special attention. *Topicality of the work* concerns the fact that semiotic texts seem more attractive to a target audience than homogeneous texts. These heterogeneous advertising texts considerably affect motivational sphere of the reader, drawn in the process of deciphering its playing polycode nature [Гридина, 2009]. Since motives strongly determine consumer behavior, linguists concentrate their efforts on versatile analysis of semiotic aspects of the advertising text. The present paper seeks to throw light on the process of encoding of advertising information, i. e. to reveal how advertising message passes from the ad creator to the consumer from the point of view of Semiotic Linguoculturology. Hence, the research is held at the nexus of semiotic and cultural approaches to discourse-analysis. Admittedly, different aspects of verbal as well as non-verbal levels of advertising discourse have been thoroughly explored in Linguistics. But very few studies have analyzed the interaction of these systems from the integrative approach. The major tenet of the investigation lies on traditional view that advertising is a massive ideological instrument that sways public opinions, shapes and modifies the way we look at things. This implies the idea of using symbolic messages to represent the reality and reflect human values [Ritson, Elliot, 1997] via signs and codes of a linguaculture. A wide range of signs and codes in advertising are meant to revive a variety of social and ideological experiences. The view of advertising discourse as a structure of signs and codes outlines the scope of *implemented methodology*, which is largely predetermined by semiotic prospects. Structural-semiotic method may help to explain how this or that cultural system is organized, and how sense is transmitted through this structure. This is of paramount importance when analyzing art texts [Осипова, 2011], including texts of advertising. Indeed, advertising and art have much in common. Imagination and emotions are the pillars of both of them. Contemporary

advertisements may be touching and aesthetically the same way as any other piece of art. This affords ground to consider contemporary advertising texts a form of art, which combines creativity and beauty to attain marketing goals. In order to analyze interplay of code systems in advertising discourse we employ linguoculturological procedures and methods needed to identify interconnection of culture and language: 1) method of sense interpretation as the basic linguistic strategy, 2) contextual analysis that interprets the meaning of a sign with reference to other signs, 3) linguoculturological commentary, which discloses national specificity of this or that cultural code [Миндияхметова, 2022, p. 53].

BASIC CONCEPTS OF LINGUACULTURAL ENCODING THEORY

Before proceeding to the analysis of the empirical base of our survey it is essential to give definitions of some basic terms that language scholars can operate when dealing with text encoding/decoding. The key concept of our investigation is advertising as a discourse practice. It is impossible to gain an insight into the way discourse is molded in advertising without a clear picture of what is meant by discourse, and by advertising discourse as well, with regard to the tasks of the current study. By referring to the notion of discourse we will make an attempt to investigate advertising as a communicative event that takes place in the semiotic reality around us. An overwhelming object of research uniting the humanities in their search for semiotically expressed [Fairclough, 2004, p. 225–226] discourse has a wide range of topics to be tackled within this or that scientific domain. Judging by numerous definitions proposed by linguists, it is still considered to be a rather tangible and elusive concept interpretation of which depends on a researcher's views and academic interests. Seemingly, this intricate and complicated phenomenon, which «puts language, action, interaction, values, beliefs, symbols, objects, tools, and places together» [Gee, 1999, 27], will never lose its attraction to scholars. We look upon discourse as a total of thematically united texts that one way or another relate to one common subject. Discourse theme unfolds not in a single text, but intertextually, through complex interplay of a variety of texts [Tchernyavskaya, 2001, p. 16]. Hence, we hold that *advertising discourse* is a set of verbal and nonverbal texts interaction of which renders the advertising message of a certain company. Presumably, not only texts written for promoting goods circulate within the space of advertising discourse, but also texts

that may indirectly help to boost sales. For instance, generally regarded as a text of PR discourse company logo shapes corporate image of a unique company that sells the best ever goods. Needless to say, brand values such as quality, reliability, respect, etc. eventually project onto the image of the advertised product as a result of positive effect of brand associations. Thus, providing that a text contributes to distributing products it has relevance to advertising discourse. In other words, a multitude of signs of advertising semiotic space form plenty of intertextual links with various discursive practices of human life. So, interpretation of an advertising text is carried out with engagement of the background knowledge of an addressee and creation intertextual links between this particular text and other texts. For instance, movie stars in advertising realize many cultural meanings. These senses migrate into advertising discourse from other discourses (cinematic discourse, actor's discourse, publicistic discourse, etc.) involved in the process of sense deciphering. Such broad interpretation of advertising discourse makes it possible to get a sophisticated understanding of peculiarities of sense decoding of the advertising discourse: the reader perceives and interprets advertising message on the basis of experience gained in manifold human activities.

Detailed consideration should be given to the notion of *cultural code*. Cultural code is understood as a system of multiple languages of culture (verbal and nonverbal), sense interpretation of which discloses cultural information about values, beliefs, norms of a given linguaculture. The cultural code of a linguaculture appears as a kind of matrix that contains all the elements of the cultural paradigm of representatives of the nation, their behavioral patterns from semiotic point of view. As the means of transferring cultural sense cultural codes maintain integrity of cultural language area. Consequently, while accumulating cultural memory the code of culture plays the role of ideological and social mechanism of reproducing cultural meanings. This manifests communicative function of the cultural code in advertising. It regulates social relations, sets priorities and ideals, determines tastes and moods of mass audience. Moreover, as a specific marker of *us vs. them* polarization, signs and codes become a powerful instrument of manipulation. They are passwords that may be of benefit for the advertiser to properly communicate his audience. They give the author of advertising texts wide opportunities to insert implicit statements by means of shared cultural presuppositions.

Taking into account the fact that discourse is a complex sense structure of two layers, it is reasonable

to differentiate two levels of codification. The upper level contains the so-called explicit information, which the author wants to present to the audience. Whilst the deep level, or structure, comprises a vast amount of hidden senses, or implicit information. Due to language conventions, stereotypes and unspoken communicative postulates that exist in this or that linguaculture the reader comes across this information unconsciously. The general sense of the discourse therefore manifests itself in the explicitly expressed thought and relevant to the advertising context knowledge about the world. Codes of the upper level lie on the surface of the advertising discourse and name cultural objects (artifacts). These coded signs intersect with the codes of the deep level of a culture and take on additional more active ideological sense [Hall, 1973, p. 12]. Thus, comprehension of the message of advertising depends on the reader's ability to interpret the meaning of artifacts by means of the codes of the deep sense level, which encode information about diverse spheres of human life. Put it otherwise, cultural code affects the content of the advertising discourse and the way it is interpreted by mass audience. As an essential constituent of media communication cultural code becomes the meeting point of conceptual and cultural information in the media text. Subsequently, the cultural code of advertising should be understood as an unfolding scheme of cultural senses [Миндияхметова, 2018, p. 45]. Accordingly, encoding is looked upon as a creative process of writing advertising messages with consideration to the model of decoding by the target audience. The author goes largely on the premise that interaction of cultural codes in human mind underpins cognitive operations of sense interpretation and further reconstruction of the given idea. Communicative purpose may be achieved only if the encoded information (meaning) matches the intended meaning. This calls for careful selection of the upper level signs.

Another key term that we are going to apply in our study of encoding advertising is a *sign*. A sign may be anything that takes meaning, which is not the sign itself. All audio-visual elements of advertising message are viewed as signs. The notion of a sign is a core one in Linguoculturology. And, importantly, it is not to be confused with the concept of code. Obviously, the demarcation line between the sign and the code is quite vague. Their correlation still brings thought for debate among linguists. In this research the terms are not interchangeable, considering that a code is viewed as a structure of many senses and meanings, whereas a sign usually has one particular meaning, which may be interpreted differently in every new context. Stated otherwise,

an interpreted sign runs against the boundaries of its meaning, usually iconic or indexical, and takes on a symbolic (as a rule, attached to some cultural tradition) sense, becoming a code. A code is a cluster of signs such as the above-mentioned component of advertising discourse *company logotype*. It comprises the following signs: typeface, wording, color, font and configuration. Linguoculturology pays special attention to the signs of a particular ethnolinguaculture. A *linguacultural sign* is a sign the denotational meaning of which is accompanied by the connotational one within the context of this or that linguaculture. To understand 'what is meant by what is said,' we need to know the context, as it helps to assign the meaning to words [Larina, Leontovich, 2015, p. 9–10]. *Cultural context* is a decisive factor in communicating advertising information through cultural codes, inasmuch the latter as a system of secret words or symbols convey messages that are contextually bound [Hyatt, Simons, 1999, p. 28] to the national world picture. In this research carried out from the perspective of Linguoculturology we define cultural context as a set of cultural models (behavior patterns, beliefs, values, attitudes, abilities) accepted and approved within the scope of national culture. The cultural context of a given linguaculture is sustained by a series of cultural codes passed down from generation to generation.

A CASE STUDY OF ADVERTISEMENTS ADDRESSED TO AMERICAN TARGET AUDIENCE

The survey of sense interpretation of advertising text is based on the assumption that cultural context has two dimensions: horizontal and vertical. This enables to elaborate on the very essence of the encoding theory.

I. Encoding advertising of a particular historical period (horizontal cultural context)

As was stated above, emerging in the context of this or that culture cultural codes greatly influence tastes and needs of mass audience. For advertising to be more effective ad creators use codes that are dominant in a certain cultural context. This may be illustrated by Thanksgiving Day holiday commercial of the largest American bank, financial services holding company JP Morgan [JP Morgan Chase Holiday Commercial]. The advert abounds in cultural codes, interaction of which helps to deliver the advertiser's ideas to the audience. The surface

level consists of a variety of signs that represent two cultural spheres of life: community life and corporate culture. The scenes of a family celebrating Thanksgiving Day, taking photos, sharing precious moments together convey the sense of mutual support and warm atmosphere among employees, on the one hand, and concern for clients – on the other. At the same time, since a human being perceives the surrounding world through the prism of his native culture and mother-tongue, sense interpretation of the upper level codes depends on the axiological system of a recipient as a representative of this or that ethnoculture, norms and customs of which governs the routing of sense decoding. Ethnocultural senses are highlighted in the verbal register:

Let's give thanks for an idea. The grand idea called America. The idea that if you work hard, you are entitled to throwing away forty percent of food food per year, while the rest of the world starves.

A nation of hard workers, striving for a better life through pesistent labour, Americans are highly aware of their superiority over other nations. Attaching this national sense to the advertising text, the copywriter hints that JP Morgan's employees undertake their duties thoroughly. Following this interpretation an addressee concludes that one of the basic principles of corporate daily routine is equality. The sense line continues further, when the author brings up one of the big problems of the community:

This has led to other ideas, like racism and wars, to Justin Bieber, and to the free market for the rich and free coffee for the rest. Our country has gone through a lot, but this idea isn't fragile. When times get tough, we bond them out of another country. Everyday more people believe in the American idea. And when those pathetic morons fall for it, we just get a little bit richer.

Metaphorically comparing the company with the country, the advertiser points out that the company seeks for leadership and excellence on a competitive market just like America struggles for superiority on the international arena. Since competition is the driving force of healthy American society, the idea of competition encoded in the text implies that owing to employees' rivalry spirit the company survive, prospers and makes profit. Doubtless, the commercial appeals to American patriotism, evoking strong feelings and emotions. Patriotic, or the one that arouse the basic instinct, advertisement is always emotional. By the way, emotional advertising is believed to be a product of American culture, and as such makes the audience feel proud of the country.

American patriotism, or Americanism, often becomes a core message of an advertising text, permeating every sign of national advertising space. The subject of ideals of independence, equality before the law, freedom of speech [Kazin, McCartin, 2006] ensures the success of advertising campaign. Undoubtedly, the strategy raises brand's standing in the eyes of mass audience with every new commercial. For example, *Pepsi's Generation next* ad campaign commercials vividly demonstrate the case. Interestingly, from the very beginning PepsiCo has not been widely perceived as a national brand. The milestone in company's timeline was the year of World War II, when men and women were in uniform serving their country overseas. Capturing the patriotic feelings of the nation, the corporation adopted a new red, white and blue color scheme for its bottles and packaging [Sarosh, 2005]. It was the starting point of selling in Pepsi's advertising discourse American idea and American Dream worldwide. We can observe how the company imposes the concept of American patriotism throughout the country and beyond its borders.

Probably the most extreme patriotism is observed in one of the latest commercials. The ad narrates the history of the famous carbonated soft drink beverages manufacturer that goes hand in hand with the history of the US:

This is the Pepsi that your father drank, and his father drank before he met your grandmother [Pepsi Super Bowl commercial ...].

Again, we see a lot of linguacultural signs. The look of Cindy Crawford reminds of a great era of revolution in American fashion industry. Ray Charles touches those who keep in memory the times of his music, which made an incredible emancipating influence on American sexuality [American Icons: an encyclopedia ... 2006, p. 134]. Scandalous teen idol Britney Spears makes nostalgic for the days of spreading gay and lesbian culture in the USA. Not to mention Michael Jackson who influenced a wide range of subjects, from celebrity studies to visual culture to gender and sexuality studies, and many more including ones not directly related to his profession [Roberts, Catanese, 2011, p. 1]. It seems that the king of pop music never goes out of style. All the above-mentioned names this way or other shaped the American psyche. Their images intensify the main message: «Thanks to the uniqueness of every American generation the country is considered to be a superpower»:

This is the Pepsi for every generation.

Analysis of the commercials of JP Morgan and PepsiCo vividly shows how dominating at this or that historical period cultural codes intertwine in the process of encoding advertising. Thus, the horizontal dimension of cultural context is a determining factor in the selection of cultural codes for advertising discourse targeted at the audience of its time.

II. The role of cultural dynamics in the process of encoding (vertical dimension of cultural context)

Culture is not a static system. It incessantly changes due to many external and internal reasons. As a result, new customs, traditions, norms, beliefs appear in the form of cultural codes within the given cultural framework. In this respect it's urgent to take into consideration that every culture undergoes historical evolution. Advertising discourse of companies with long history timeline may verify the influence of vertical context on encoding process. It's necessary to mark the following two points:

Firstly, dynamics of national culture means shift in axiological system of a linguaculture. Accordingly, cultural context embraces not only dominating codes that express prevailing values, but also obsolescent and emerging cultural codes, which very often contradict semantics of dominating ones. However, all three groups can peacefully coexist in the advertising space. Naturally, such blend inevitably leads to the conflict of values, and consequently, results in sense distortion. For instance, we have noted that contemporary ad regularly turns to global matters. Today advertising employ universal cultural codes, senses of which (collectivity, teamwork, cohesiveness, respectfulness) are contrary to US national values (individualism, privacy, self-dependance). Notably, despite rapid globalization aimed at establishing priorities in national axiosphere, there's a tendency to preserve the ethnocultural component of the plane of expression. No wonder, American adverts aggressively exploits visual signs of US culture (national symbols and icons) as a token of opposition to global policy. This once again emphasizes crude nationalism as the mainstream in the country of great opportunities as in Coca Cola's «It's Beautiful» commercial broadcasted during the Super Bowl games in 2014. Using the updated version of the well-known patriotic song «America is beautiful», advertisers managed to tap on the theme of racial discrimination, which until now stands as the never ending burning issue in American society. Scenes from the lives of Americans with different ethnocultural backgrounds embody the idea of multiculturalism. Multiple codes of the

upper discourse level (cowboy riding the mountains, children at the cinema, happy family at the dinner, surfers on the wave, Muslim girls and many more) symbolize acceptance, inclusion, diversity and integrity, i.e., values, encoded in dominating codes of the deep level. Interplay of the upper level codes, visual and song-like sound code, renders the sense level of the emerging code. The point is that, first, the soundtrack is not a national anthem; second, the song is sung in different languages (English, Hindi, Spanish, Keres, French and Hebrew). Seemingly, the advertisement moves away from the concepts of patriotism towards popularization of universal moral ideals. In fact, politically concerned Americans think different on the subject. The commercial drew much criticism and yielded long discussions, for it was launched right after Donald Trump had signed an executive order prohibiting Muslims from seven-muslim majority countries enter the USA [Szathmary, 2017]. Given that, the advert was purposed to alleviate political climate and social tension. Nevertheless, following trends of the time that seeks a common denominator for a variety of ethnocultural traditions, the ad maker managed to combine dominating and emerging values in one discourse space. Hence, decoding of the emerging cultural code gives another interpretation of cultural artifacts. Overlapping of codes of the upper sense level produces a synergetic effect that results in revaluation of values encoded in codes of the deep sense level. As can be seen, vertical cultural context defines the vector of interpretation either from the deep level to the surface one, or vice versa. Implementation of national symbols to share universal moral values in American advertising, as was exemplified above, proves the country's strenuous efforts to resist omnipresent global culture.

Secondly, verbal expression of core national values constantly changes according to language taste of every new epoch. Nowadays Media communication supplies copywriters with versatile linguistic means to create a really good multimodal commercial. Evidently, nonverbal register is gradually displacing the verbal text. As a result, the units of the verbal row become semantically more capacious. The text is no longer a mere explanatory note to the visual images of advertisements. Almost every word contains a vast number of senses of different cultural codes. Therefore, encoding means relentless search for verbal signs that adequately reflect the deep sense layer of advertising. That's why over the last decades American companies are inclined to launch global ad campaigns addressing consumers with slogans that are easily adapted to any country. Suffice it to recall Levi's roaring slogans of all times

The west grew up in Levi's (1950).
America's finest overall since 1850 (1950).
As Western as the West itself (1963).
Levi's jeans – an American tradition (1984).
The country was not made by men in suits (2010).

Verbal markers define the unique cut of national advertisement. This bears resemblance to anchoring technique, which is very popular in Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP). In advertising verbal anchoring facilitates comprehension of an ad's message [Phillips, 2000, p. 20], leading the reader towards visual's presumably intended interpretation [Forceville, 1996, p. 75]. The usage of verbal markers enables a copywriter to set the direction of decoding in the intended way. Unsurprisingly, hints of pride for the country (patriotism) and belief in its superiority (nationalism) are hidden in the present-day global commercial of the iconic American brand:

Global clothing consumption has doubled over the last 15 years. We can change that. When we make better, we can buy better. And when we buy better, we can wear longer. We wear longer, we can buy less. When we buy less, we can waste less. And when we waste less, we can change so good you [Buy better, wear longer].

There're three verbal markers in the text: *change, better, we*. At first sight the indexal sign *we* indicates the company itself, its staff, or corporate team. However, this clever deictic word is much broader in its semantic content. Small, but all-inclusive *we* takes the form of continual «flagging», or reminding, of nationhood through everyday discourse. Rather than grand memorable phrases, it offers constant, but rarely conscious, reminders of the homeland, making «our» national identity unforgettable [Billing, 1995, p. 6–8, 93]. Additionally, divided into separate sense blocks advertising text presents a succession of slogans declared by youngsters of multinational USA. Further, owing to constantly repeated key words the advertisement sounds like the text of propaganda, such as political leaders' slogans:

George Bush: Yes, America can.
Barack Obama: Yes, we can, Change we can believe in.

Evidently, global advertising addressed to the universal problem of conscious, environmentally friendly consumption has ethnocultural senses skillfully disguised in the verbal fabric of the text. This allows to retain ad's national identity, and, at the same time, strengthen suggestive, manipulative impact on the inner audience (Americans). So, we argue that

the vertical cultural context is crucial in determining the plane of expression of an advertising text, selection of code systems of the upper discourse level and the ways of encoding advertising space.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, we hold that advertising discourse is an unfolding scheme of senses encoded in cultural codes. The research, focused on the discourse nature of advertising and its close connection with other discursive practices of a human being, provides an in-depth view of how culture (verbal and nonverbal languages) and ideology (codes and signs) are intertwined in the discourse space (advertising). Also, the study expands theoretical findings about the ways of communicative influence in advertising with regard to specific features of the national character of an audience. Cultural codes have proved to be an appropriate vehicle of rendering the given message. Interplay of cultural

information conveyed by codes of culture with conceptual information of an advert grants an advertiser with freedom to speak to his audience indirectly and impose a certain worldview on a consumer. Further prospects of investigation imply profound analysis of every discourse level. Also, of critical importance is the issue of taxonomy of cultural codes within one level, their interrelation. Moreover, defining the criteria of effective interaction of cultural codes of two levels is undoubtedly of interest. This will validate the prospects of encoding theory for redefining problems of discourse-analysis that may be, and should be taken from cross-disciplinary angle. The proposed concept of linguacultural encoding may be applied in the study of any Media communication with its hidden methods of altering popular mentality. Moreover, the results may be of use in teaching courses of Linguoculturology, Intercultural communication and Translation studies. Finally, encoding theory may be used by copywriters as the manual for improving practice of writing advertising texts.

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Статья поступила в редакцию	12.11.2022	The article was submitted
одобрена после рецензирования	26.11.2022	approved after reviewing
принята к публикации	30.11.2022	accepted for publication