

IMPROVING LEARNER'S READING SKILL THROUGH ADVERTISEMENT

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Abstract: People do different things with their language and they expect to achieve a large number of different aims and purposes by talking and writing, and by listening and reading (Halliday & Hasan, 1989:16). In a reading classroom, teachers need to provide the learners reading exercises related to implicit message of the text. Thus, they would require more critical reading and thinking than just comprehension for factual questions. In this case, the use of authentic materials - that is materials, which are not specifically designed for pedagogical purposes - would be advisable to improve learner's reading skills. The purpose of using authentic reading materials is to give learners the skill to cope with the think they might need to interpret in their real life reading. The authentic reading materials selected here are advertisements on billboards that are displayed in strategic places in the city. There are some steps teachers need to consider if they want to use advertisements as reading materials. First, they should introduce that the meaning of an advertisement is not something there, statically inside an advertisement, waiting to be 'revealed' by a 'correct' interpretation. Second, they should train the learners to get the implicit as well as an explicit meaning of the verbal texts in the advertisements. Concerning implicit (intended) meaning, train them to use the three features of context of situation. Thus using advertisement as reading materials would improve their learners' language knowledge as well as reading skill the explicit and implicit meaning of a reading text.

Keywords: authentic, discourse, explicit, implicit

INTRODUCTION

People who wish to learn a foreign language may have a great number of reasons for doing so, they expect to achieve a large number of different aims and purposes by speaking and writing, and by listening and reading (Halliday & Hasan, 1989:16). Reading is one of the skills that plays an important role in acquiring knowledge. Learners have been highly motivated to improve their reading skill through many kinds of reading materials. However, in their real life situations they still find problems when they have to read the target language. One of the problems faced by student is they often fail in comprehend an article in magazine, newspaper or when they have to read the science book because they are not specifically designed for teaching reading materials. Therefore, teachers should consider providing their reading materials with authentic materials since it is what the students find in their real life activities so the purpose of using it is to expose the learners to language in real use.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Authentic materials can be taken from various sources since they refer to "materials such as newspaper articles, brochures, train tickets, letters, advertisements, recording of the news, airport announcements, et cetera, which were originally used in real situations and were not designed for use in language teaching" (Tomlinson in Cummingsworth, 1989:81). In other words, authenticity means that nothing of the original text is changed and also that its presentation and layout are retained. Therefore, since the authentic reading materials are taken from real life reading with real life language, they would be more interesting materials for the learners compared to designed reading materials.

One of the advantages of using authentic reading materials is that learners would also learn about the target culture of the second language because the materials contain "the authentic cultural

information about the target culture" (Richard, 2001:252). Due to this matter, the use of authentic materials in this article is specified to the use of written advertisement in reading class.

Written advertisement could be good authentic reading for some reasons. First, the advertisements are easy to find and learners are often encountered or even confronted with advertisements in their daily life. Therefore, they will be familiar with selected advertisements that will be discussed in class. Second, advertisements contain verbal and non-verbal text so that it will be interesting to read them besides it may create a joyful learning atmosphere for the learners. Third, advertisements contain the expression of culture because advertising reflect the way people think, how they relate each other, how they live, eat, relax, and enjoy themselves. This shows that learning a language cannot be separated from learning its culture so that this will also widen the learners understanding about the target language. Fourth, advertising language is "loaded language" (Dyer, 1996:139) since its primary aim is to attract people's attention and dispose them towards the product on offer. When the copywriter chose a word, they do more than name an object, person or situation, they also convey feelings about what they are describing. What they feel or their attitude towards what they describe is an important part of meaning. This means that learners cannot depend only on the words explicitly used in the advertisements but they should be able to reveal what reveal what lies behind the text and it is usually called the intended meaning. Therefore, written advertisements could be good reading materials to train learners to think critically to reveal the hidden message.

When teachers have decided to use written advertisements as their authentic reading materials, they need to choose the suitable advertisements based on the learners level of language mastery. It is important for the teachers to know that advertisements can be classified into three categories namely *compound*, *complex*, and *sophisticated advertisements* (Dyer, 1982:88). Compound advertisements contain information, but it relies on picture to do the persuading, while the facts are left to the copy. For example, in some fashion advertisements in women's magazines, the name of the store, the address, the telephone number, the brand of the garment might be listed alongside a drawing or photo of it. If there is a headline or a caption, it is of a semi-technical nature such as 'New Spring from Guess'. The word "new" might be regarded as persuasive rather than informative but the real persuasion comes in the picture, which is usually featuring attractive-looking models or an 'artistic' modernist line drawing of a poised slim and elegant woman. In a compound advertisement, the advertiser is obviously hoping that the reader will associate the product with the total impression – garment with model.

Complex advertisements usually concentrate on the presentation of luxury and status; the background takes over, the product merges into it. The visual and verbal imagery evoke the status feelings associated with money, wealth, elegance, luxury and the public display of these things. For example, in most advertising for expensive consumer durable – carpets, bedroom suites, etcetera – it is the 'image' created by the combination of commentary and photography that is selling point, not the specific carpet or site. At first glance, it is sometimes hard to see what precisely is being offered because the product is buried in the total image created.

Sophisticated advertisements are extensions of the complex advertisements, they usually explore hidden or subconscious feelings; subtle associations are made between products and situations. Sophisticated advertisements imply what copywriter's intended meaning is. Different 'read' and 'interpret' advertising text in different ways. This type of advertisements will challenge the learners to bring out the hidden meanings.

METHOD

There are some possible stages suggested when teachers want to use the sophisticated type of advertisements as their authentic reading materials. First, introduce the learners with the language of advertising claims and the language style used in the advertisements. Second, describe the context of situation of the advertisements as suggested by Halliday & Hasan (1989:12) and the third, describe the possible intended meanings of the advertisements.

The first stage teachers should do is introducing the language of advertising claims and the language style. The simplest and most direct way to study advertisements is through an

analysis of the advertising claims. The "claim" is the verbal or print part of an advertisement that makes some claim, learners should be able recognize those that are misleading and accept as useful information those that are true. A few of these claims are downright lies; some are honest statements about truly superior product, but most fit into category of neither bold lies nor helpful consumer information. They balance on the narrow line between truth and falsehood by a careful choice of word.

Eschholz et al. suggests that there are ten basic claims in language advertisements (1992:180). The first is **"the weasel claim"**. A weasel word is a modifier that practically negates the claim that follows. The expression "weasel word" is named after the egg-eating habits of weasels. A weasel will suck out the inside of an egg, leaving it appear intact to the casual observer. Upon examination, the egg is discovered to be hollow. Words or claims that appear substantial upon first look but disintegrate into hollow meaninglessness on analysis are weasels. In other words, weasel words seem to say something, but on fact they say the opposite or nothing at all. Some examples of weasels words are "helps, like, virtual or virtually, acts or works, can be, up to, as much as, refreshes, comfort, tackles, fights, come on, the feel of, the look of, looks like, fortified, enriched, and strengthened" (Eschholz, 1990:187). For example:

- ❖ "Helps control dandruff" symptoms with regular use."

The weasel words are "helps control" and possibly even "symptom" and "regular use". The claim is not "stops dandruff"

The second Claims is **"unfinished claim"**, it is one in which the advertisements claims the product is better, or has more of something, but does not finish the comparison (p. 181). Some examples are:

- ❖ "Super gloss does it with more color, more shine, more sizzle, more!" (More what?)
- ❖ "Coffee mate gives coffee more body, more flavor" (weasels: "body and flavor")
- ❖ "You can be sure if it's Westinghouse." (Sure of what?)
- ❖ "Maggiavox gives you more." (More what?)

The third claim is **"we're different ad unique claim"**. The kind of claim states that there is nothing else quite like the product being advertised and it is supposed to be interpreted by readers as a claim to superiority (p.182). Some examples are:

- ❖ "There's no other mascara like it."
- ❖ "Either way, liquid or spray, there's nothing else like it."

The fourth claim is **"water is wet claim"**. It says something about the product that is true for any brand in that product category. The claim is usually a statement of fact, but not a real advantage over the competition (p. 182). Some examples are:

- ❖ "Mohl: the detergent Gasoline." (Any gasoline acts as a cleaning agent)
- ❖ "Great Lash greatly increases the diameter of every lash."
- ❖ "SKIN smells differently on everyone." (As do many perfumes)

The fifth claim is **"so what claim"**. This is the kind of claim to which careful reader will react by saying "so what?" (p.183). the claim made is true but does not give a real advantage to the product. It is similar to the "water is wet" claim expect that it claims an advantage, which is not shared by most of the other brands in the product category. Some examples are:

- ❖ "Strong enough for a man but made for a woman." (This deodorant claim says only that the product is aimed at the female market)
- ❖ "Campbell's gives you tasty pieces of chicken and not one but two chicken stocks." (Does the presence of stocks improve the taste?)

The sixth claim is **"vague claim"**. It means simply not clear. The key to the vague claim is the use of words that are colorful but meaningless, as well as the use of subjective and emotional opinions that defy verification and most contain weasels (p.183). Some examples are:

- ❖ "Lips have never looked so luscious." (Can you imagine trying to either prove or disprove such a claim?)
- ❖ "Winston tastes good like a cigarette should."
- ❖ "Lipsavers are fun – they taste good, smell good and feel good."

The seventh claim is "**endorsement or testimonial claim**". A celebrity or authority appears in an advertisement to lend his/her stellar qualities to the product. Sometimes the people will *usually* claim to use the product, but very often the don't (p. 184). Some examples are:

- ❖ "Joan Fontaine throws a shot-in-the-dark party and her friends learn a thing or two."
- ❖ "Darling, have you discovered Masterpiece? The most exciting men I know are smoking it".

The eight Claim is "**scientific or statistical claim**". This kind of advertisement uses some sort of scientific proof or experiment, very specific numbers, or an impressive sounding mystery ingredient (p.184). Some examples are:

- ❖ "Wander Break helps build strong bodies 12 ways." (the use of number 12 makes the claim far more believable than if it were taken out)
- ❖ "Easy-Off has 33% more cleaning power than another popular brand." ("Another popular brand" often translates as some other kind of even cleaner sold somewhere).
- ❖ "Special Morning – 33% more nutrition." (it is also an unfinished claim)

The ninth claim is "**compliment the consumer claim**". It is a claim that butter up the consumer by some form of flattery (p.185). Some examples are:

- ❖ "We think a cigar smoker is someone special."
- ❖ "If what you do is right, no matter what others do, then RC Cola is right for you."
- ❖ "You pride yourself on your home cooking..."

The tenth claim is "**rhetorical question claim**". This claim demands a response from the audience. A question is asked and the viewer or listener is supposed to answer in such a way as to affirm the product's goodness (p.185). Some examples are:

- ❖ "Plymouth – isn't that the kind of car American wants?"
- ❖ "Shouldn't your family be drinking Hawaiian Punch?"
- ❖ "What do you want most from coffee? That's what you get most from Hills."

Besides introducing the ten claims of language advertising above, teachers should also introduce the language style found in advertisement will help the learners find the intended meaning. Teachers should realize that copywriters (advertisers) consider themselves as word mechanics-skilled professionals with a fondness for words. They must be imaginative, and still, their writing must be succinct and eye catching. They are good writers, even though some of their vocabulary and structures maybe somewhat unconventional. After all, their job is to attract the reader. If their advertisement is grammatically perfect but lacks fire and vitality, readers will not be interested and the product will not sell. Copywriters usually use simple words, short sentences, catchy phrases, and apt comparisons. The language style used in advertisement is informal in the sense that pop words of a certain dialect are mostly used since usually these words are very popular in the society.

The **second stage** teachers should do is **motivating learners to find the explicit and implicit meaning** or intended meaning of the advertisements. After discussing the explicit meaning, teachers could challenge learners to find the meaning lies behind it by discussing the three features of context of situation suggested by Halliday & Hasan (1989:12). It will be used to interpret the social context of a text (written advertisement), the environment in which meanings are being exchanged.

- ❖ The **field of Discourse** refers to what is happening, to the nature of the social action that is taking place: What is that the participants are engaged in, in which the language figures as some essential component?
- ❖ The **Tenor of Discourse** refers to who is taking part, to the nature of the participants, their status and roles: What kind of role relationship obtain among the participants, including permanent and temporary relationships of one kind or another, both the types of speech role that they are taking on in the dialogue and the whole cluster of socially significant relationships in which they are involved?
- ❖ The **Mode of Discourse** refers to what part the language is playing, what it is that the participants are expecting the language to do for them in that situation: the symbolic organization of the text, the status that it has, and its function in the context, including

the channel (is it spoken or written or some combination of the two?) and also the rhetorical mode, what is being achieved by the text in terms of such categories as persuasive, expository, didactic, and the like.

The third stage is motivating learners to get the possible intended meaning revealed from the discussion of the context of situation. Probably it will be difficult for the learners to do this stage. A possible way is to choose an Indonesian advertisement as an exercise but the discussion in comprehending the culture of the target language. While within Indonesian advertisement, the only barrier left lies in learners' language mastery since the discussion should be conducted in the target language.

DISCUSSION

In the classroom, teachers can implement the three stages above into "pre-reading, whilst-reading and post-reading" (Tupan, 1994: 6). In pre-reading section, teachers can do the first stage, which is introducing the language of advertising claims and language style to the learners. In whilst-reading, teachers can ask learners to read the advertisement and identify the weak words. After that teachers could also ask the students to comment on the language style used in the advertisement. In whilst reading section, teachers could stimulate learners to find the explicit meaning and the implicit meaning. In post-reading, teachers could challenge learners to read other advertisements by implementing the suggested stages. It is advisable that they choose the advertisements on their own. Two examples of Indonesian advertisements are given as authentic reading materials. Later teachers could select English advertisements that are suitable with learners' mastery of the target language.

1. *KALO NGAK DIBERSIHIN, KUTU BUSUKNYA NGAK BAKALAN PERGI*
"If it is not cleaned up, the bugs will not go!"

a. **Description**

The advertisement is written in an imperative statement that implies a warning. The subject in the advertisement is omitted so actually it should be read this way:

Kalo Kursinya Ngak Dibersihin, Kutu Busuknya Ngak Bakal Pergi!

"If it is not cleaned up, the bugs will not go!"

The language style used is informal and it can be seen from the use of the words 'Kalo' instead of 'Kalau' (If), 'Ngak' instead of 'Tidak' (No), and 'Bakal' instead of 'Akan' (will). Besides, it also uses *Jakartanese* dialect, a dialect, which is widely used by youngsters even though they do not settle in Jakarta. This can be seen from the suffixes *-in* and *-an* in the words 'Dibersihin' (cleaned up) and 'Bakalan' (will). It has a broken armchair, an armchair with many holes on it, as a symbol and it substitutes the subject. An armchair is supposed to be a comfortable seat but it is no longer a comfortable one when it is broken.

b. **Context of situation**

- (1) Field: A warning to the society

When this advertisement was issued, political parties in Indonesia were having campaign for general election. At that time, each political party has its own way to win the election. Many of them used 'dirty' trick to reach their goal and win the election. The word "Kutu Busuk" (bugs) refers to any politicians who used 'dirty' tricks to win the general election.

- (2) Tenor: The participants are the authority to society especially the young people. The youngsters are expected to have an ability to clean up the 'dirty' politicians from any political parties so that the election can run smoothly.

- (3) Mode: The advertisement is written on billboards displayed in strategic places in the city and published in any printed media to be widely informed and understood by the society. It functions to educate the society by challenging them to act bravely towards any mistakes happen in their surrounding.

c. **Intended Meaning**

The copywriter wants to warn the society about the danger of 'dirty' politicians. It uses an armchair that symbolizes a seat in the House of Parliament and the armchair is broken because of too many bugs on it. There was a political condition in which key members of a certain political party left their party for becoming VIP members of another party. Besides that, senior members of a 'grass root' political party quitted from their party because the new members, who had just joined their party, were listened more compared to theirs. They even influence the political decision due to political strategy in the general election campaign. The possible intended meaning of the advertisement is that if 'dirty' politicians sit as members of parliament, they will not represent the society especially young people. If this happens, youngsters will let their votes wasted. It implies that *A mild cigarette* has a good quality of tobacco since it is free from tobacco bugs. This might also reveal an impression that smoking *A mild cigarette* is harmless for someone's health since the word 'mild' itself means 'light' in nicotine. Therefore, *A mild cigarette* offers good quality of tobacco and light nicotine. In other words, people can continue smoking this cigarette brand, as it is harmless for their health.

2. **JANGAN CUMA RISA MANAS-MANASIN DOANG!**

"Be not only capable to provoke!"

a. **Description**

The advertisement is written in an imperative statement that implies a challenge. The language style used is informal and it can be seen from the use of the words "Cuma" instead of "Hanya" (only) and "doang" instead of "Saja" (nothing else than). It uses the suffix *-in'* in the word *Manas-Manasin* (to provoke) which is one of *Jakartanese* dialect characteristics. The advertisement has a 'wok' as a symbol. A wok is an ordinary kitchen utensil that has two major functions, which are to fry something/cook something and to warm a meal. Whatever it is, a wok is used to make what is on it become warm/hot.

b. **Context of situation**

(1) **Field:** A warning to political commentators

When the advertisement was issued, many political commentator's often gave their comments that could provoke a certain political party. The word *'Manas-Manasin'* refers to the function of a wok that is to make something hot and figuratively, it means 'to provoke'.

(2) **Tenor:** The participants are the authority to political commentators. The job of political commentators is to give an objective opinion about what they have been observing so far but not to create a chaotic situation by provoking a certain political party against each other.

(3) **Mode:** The advertisement is written on billboards displayed in strategic places in the city, published on any printed media to be widely informed and understood by the society. It functions to educate the society by challenging any political commentator's to be brave and objective in giving their opinion.

c. **Intended meaning**

The copywriter wants to warn any political commentators to be careful in giving their opinion. It is widely known that not all members of political parties are well educated. The society of this country is multilingual, multiethnic, and multireligious. Therefore the society is easily provoked by factors of ethnicity, race, and religion. The possible intended meaning of the advertisement is that the copywriter wants the political commentators not to provoke the society but to propose a peaceful political condition. It implies that *A Mild Cigarette* Company wants to warn its competitors to be objective in claiming that their products have as low nicotine as *A Milds*. If not, they can be sued for being cheaters.

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