'Fine Lines' in Media: Unattainable Discourse of Beauty in Cosmetics Advertisements

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Abstract

Language is considered as a powerful tool of persuasion. For this reason, advertisements use language as a medium to gain control and subjectify people towards it. Due to the increased concept of glorifying fair complexion in society, advertising agencies manipulate the use of language for the promotion of their beauty products and to promote good-looking ideology. This study focuses on how language in advertisements of fairness products for women and men persuades and manipulates common people in the Pakistani context. The key aim of this study is to concentrate on the use of language in some beauty product advertisements and reveal how these advertisements use language as a medium to grab the audience's attention. This paper presents a multidimensional study of the language used by advertising agencies to have a 'look good' influence on both genders. This study using Foucault's theoretical perspective on "The subject and Power" employs Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar's Ideational, Interpersonal and textual levels to explore contextual semantics implicit in the advertisements. The study also surveyed through a questionnaire to explore the impact of language on people. The results of the questionnaire were compiled through SPSS and it reveals that the language of advertisements has equal influence on both genders and 80% of the people tend to buy products because of the language used in advertisements. It tries to understand how these advertisements can increase their customer numbers by using "one line statement" or "a simple bolded phrase" and capture the attention of people by their persuasive language and celebrities performing in these ads, who may have limited knowledge about the products and may not use the products themselves.
Keywords: Language, Power, Advertisements, subjectification, beauty products.

1. Introduction

Language plays a significant role in social communication as it has a powerful influence over people and their behaviour. Language and power are interrelated and it is one of the obvious characteristics of how language functions in social communications. Thus, language influences us and creates the desire to act in a certain way or accept views or thoughts without obvious power. That's why, advertisement companies always use language as a medium to exert power and gain control over people. Marketing communication experts are hired by advertising companies to formulate promotional strategies, develop communication and promote the brand amongst the

masses. The process of advertising communication is complex, and its language can have a powerful influence on people and their behaviour. Specific language choices are vitally important to convey specific messages which aim to influence people. Persuasive communication employs persuasive techniques to catch consumer's interests. The language of persuasion is very important for a successful advertising campaign and the goal of advertisements is not just to sell products but also to persuade consumers to act or think in a particular way by making them signify towards that product. Advertisement is basically an art of persuasion which depends on creating advertisements designed specifically to convince people to buy the products being advertised. To achieve this purpose the advertisers, rely primarily on the linguistic and semiotic features of language in their advertisements. The linguistic features in a text include vocabulary, grammar etc. Whereas the semiotic features comprise imagery, cinematic effects, colours etc.

Significance of the Research

This study mainly focuses on how people tend to be influenced by the advertisements of fairness products. Consumers gather knowledge about products and services through ads. After watching these ads, they get the impression that they know which product is suitable or not suitable for them. Ads of fair products tend to use catchy language and attractive models to promote their products and influence consumers. In Pakistan, the majority of people have dark skin complexion and have variations in complexion. Advertisements for fairness products promote the idea that fairness is the symbol of beauty, confidence and control over one's life, self-confidence and security, marriage, love and career prospects. The ad producers take advantage of this and produce the advertisements to convince the people through catchy language and partial truths. This research will raise awareness of the manipulating language of advertisements.

Purpose of Research

This study aims to raise awareness so that consumers do not get influenced by the use of persuasive language in advertisements before buying any kind of fair product. Furthermore, this research is beneficial for common people to become cognizant of the persuasive language used in advertisements which can turn them into subjects by influencing them. Hence it will help the uninformed people of the society.

Research Questions

1. Which linguistic features do the advertisements use to exert power and gain control over the common people?
2. How do advertisements work on influencing and inducing "looking good ideology" and subjectify the common people?
3. How language is used as a medium in advertisements to influence and target the common people?

2.   Literature Review

Through language, people can exercise power. "Technologies of power" is the term coined by Michael Foucault (1975). According to him, power is not an individual task to do rather it is forced consciously. In the advertisements, we can see that they make a false need amongst the people. It attempts to show that the consumers would be more satisfied and will get the desired results by getting the particular product which is also a kind of power exercising. Michael Foucault (1975) in his paper attempted to interpret the way different technologies make people their subjects and take control over their bodies, gestures and eventually their behaviour. (p.9). According to Alperstein (1990), the language of advertisements has a greater impact on people both on social and individual levels.

Kruti and Alan (2009) explain that the persuasive effect of advertising messages is

governed by not only what is said, but also by how it is said. The advertiser has to turn the big idea into real advertisements that will capture the audience's attention and interest. Graeme (2005) insists that devices of persuasion always have beliefs and values at their heart. Classically, advertisements are about rewards or punishment- it is good to purchase, it is bad not to purchase- based on core values about the love of family, the importance of self-image and so on.

Shankar (2007) says that in South Asia, pale skin is considered a social marker of aristocratic lineage and class allegiance. He further says that dark skin is associated with labour and field workers who work in the sun and "white" skin has a colonial notion of power and superiority. According to Kamath (2008), a man wants to have his fiancée or wife to be very fair. He also says that men will never ever think of marrying dark-coloured girls. In the same way, most of the girls want to marry a man who is fair in complexion. Williamson (1978) stated, "It is not the ads that evoke feeling, it simply evokes the idea of feeling, it uses feeling as a sign which points to the product. But then emotion is also promised when you buy the product". So, the feeling and the product become interchangeable as a signifier/signified.

According to Leeuwen (2008), "In advertisements, the image gives us the dreams of glamour or fulfilment, or the allusions to forbidden pleasures, and gratifications, the words give us the information we need, the specification of the product".

Wadak and Meyer (2009) also discussed about power. The languages used by those who are in power have the ability to dominate others who are not in that position. In this way, social inequality is created (p.9). According to Alperstein, the language of advertisements has a greater impact on people both on social and individual levels. Alperstein (1990) quoted this "Language plays, and then it is like life imitating art a kind of Meta communication in which the content of advertisements becomes social discourse". Wagatsuma (1967) states that "the beauty ideal of white skin in Asia predates colonialism and the introduction of Western notions of beauty".

1. Methodology

The current section provides the facets of the theoretical domain and methodological models induced for scrutiny of emerging trends of fair beauty standards. The study tries to build analysis on the integration of approaches central to discourse and underlying theoretical ideology. Michael Foucault's theoretical perspective on 'The Subject and Power' expresses the base assumption that power is not wielded through oppression but rather through the manufacturing of 'individuals. Foucault's argument is that power rests in the ability to create subjects. This is not meant in the sense that power is imposed from above or that the subject is necessarily the victim of oppression. Power as a social relationship works by turning individuals into subjects. Moreover, in modern societies, it works by making individuals turn themselves into subjects to better conform to the standards of respectable or permissible society. Foucault describes power as turning the subject into an object, an object of knowledge and language and power which is mediated through them and that creates subjects.

Systematic Functional Grammar (SFG) or Systematic functional linguistics is a model of grammar that was developed by Michael Halliday in the 1960s. It is part of a broad social semiotic approach to language called systemic linguistics. The term 'systemic' refers to the view of the language as "a network of systems, or interrelated sets of options for making meaning". The term 'functional' indicates that the approach is concerned with meaning, as opposed to formal grammar, which focuses on word classes such as nouns and verbs, typically without reference beyond the individual clause.

Systematic functional grammar is concerned primarily with the choices that the grammar available to speakers and writers. These choices relate speakers' and writers' intentions to the

concrete forms of a language. Traditionally the 'choices' are viewed in terms of either the content or the structure of language used. In SFG, language is analysed in three different ways or strata: semantics, phonology and lexicogrammar. SFG presents a view of language in terms of both structure (grammar) and language (lexis). The term "lexicogrammar" describes this combined approach.

SFL is a theory of language centred around the notion of language function. It accounts for the syntactic structure of language. It is concerned with people using the language to construct or interpret meaning. People cannot achieve a communicative purpose if words do not address specific cultural or contextual issues.

It places the function of language as central (what language does, how it does it), in preference to more structural approaches, which place elements of language and their combinations as central. SFL starts with social context and looks at how language acts upon and is constrained by the social context. Thus, language is seen as a social means to help humans convey meaning but this meaning cannot be achieved if words are conveyed in isolation. It needs context or situation in which more sentences and words can be placed so that readers can understand the reasoning behind utterances and words.

The central notion is 'stratification' such as language is analyzed in terms of four strata: Context, Semantics, Lexico-Grammar and Phonology-Graphology. The context concerns the Field (what is going on), Tenor (the social roles and relationships between the participants) and the Mode (aspects of the channel of the communication, e.g., monologic/ dialogic, spoken/written, visual contact etc.) Semantics is divided into three components:

- Ideational Semantics (the propositional content, representing or describing something)
- Interpersonal semantics (concerned with speech function, exchange structure, expression of attitudes)
- Textual Semantics (how the text is structured as a message, i.e., theme structure, rhetorical structure)
  The Lexico-Grammar concerns the syntactic organization of words into utterances. Even here a functional approach is taken, involving analysis of the utterances in terms of roles such as Actor, Agent/ Medium, theme, mood etc.

The data analysis was also carried out with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) which consists of a questionnaire sample and was distributed amongst 51 university students of both genders, aged between 18-30 years and the results are presented through the use of frequency tables. The users' mean score reveals that the language of advertisement has equal influence on both genders and most people buy a product because of that influence.

Group Statistics

	gender of participants	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
language	Male	26	51.9231	8.93498	1.75229
	Female	25	48.2000	8.58293	1.71659

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
language	51	28.00	68.00	50.0980	8.87751
Valid N (listwise)	51				

4. Discussion and Analysis

The current section provides the analysis of the data explored in light of the theoretical perspective induced for the study and the integrated model formulated for the analytical interpretation. This section seeks to explore the influence of language through the analysis of context, linguistics and semantics dominances of advertising language in different TVCs. Text and language of the advertisements are analyzed based on systematic functional grammar and the images in them are reckoned as they also convey messages. The impacts of the language and the visual images are analyzed in relationship with the subjection of the people in the socio-cultural context.

4.1 Analysis of the TVCs:

Asian countries are obsessed with the so-called concept of white and glowing skin as the standard for their beauty. This obsession is mostly found in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Although India has started a campaign "Black is beautiful" against this white complexion obsession but still the Indian media is using Indian celebrities for the endorsement of their products to have an influence on the people. Pakistan is also obsessed with the white and fair skin complexion and uses language as a medium in advertisements to subjectify the common people as in Foucault's view in "The Subject and Power" is the base assumption that power is not wielded through oppression but rather through the manufacturing of "individuals" (1982).

10 TVCs are selected from the most famous brands in Pakistan which influence the common people through manipulating the use of language using persuasive techniques. Every ad is broadcast for a certain period of time and after that full version of ads is not broadcast that is why some ads are downloaded from YouTube. The most popular ads are selected to show the influence of language on people's minds. In the past, the concept of beauty and fairness products was usually associated with women but now this concept is also associated with men as well. Man wants to have his fiancée or wife to be very fair. In the same way, most of the girls want to marry a man who is fair in complexion.

4.2 Analysis of Advertisements for Women

Among the 10 TVCs 6 fairness product ads were for Women. The common themes include 'success' and 'love' linked with using fairness products. The famous brand for promoting fair beauty products is Fair and Lovely. They provide various varieties including multivitamins, laser light treatment creams and face washes. From the start till now they promote the same idea that success and love are linked with beauty and fair skin either, it is to get a job or become a celebrity or to marry someone, it's all dependent on fair complexion. To gain the confidence of consumers most ad companies use celebrity endorsement techniques for their product marketing. In the recent

ad of Fair and Lovely F1, they use Sajal Ali, the famous and gorgeous actress to put the influence on people. The concept was that from now on the improved formula of Fair and Lovely not just give fairness because fairness is not enough. Now it gives an 'HD glow'. It deepens in the skin and removes dark spots. As for Tenor which is the social roles and relationship between participants, they use the technique of Celebrity endorsement to influence the people and use persuasive language like "HD glow" and "naye zamane ka glow ab naye price mai". It tackles with psychic of viewers into believing that they certainly want that product even if they don't actually need it. The second advertisement F2 is about 'Fair and Lovely multivitamin cream' and portrays the concept that ordinary cold creams darken the skin complexion but only Fair and Lovely multivitamin restores the dead cells and provides an instant glow in winter. They use the same idea of fairness glow, starring a renowned actress who in the ad wants to become famous on TV screens but is insecure due to her dark complexion in winter. When she used multivitamin cream, she became fairer, more beautiful and a successful celebrity. The Tenor in the ad is to persuade the people to believe in this irrationality that success is linked with beauty and fair skin tone. The third advertisement F3 is about Fair and lovely face wash. They always use influential techniques to attract consumers. As the field concerned with the subject matter of the discourse, in this ad, they delivered the message in the form of a song to grab the attention of people. In this ad, a group of girls complained about their ordinary face washes which give no result and the lead actress introduced them to Fair and Lovely face wash which gives them an instant "parlour wala instant glow". They promote the idea that fair and lovely face wash not only removes dirt particles but also provides a fair glow. Just to persuade the viewers they show that after using fair and lovely face wash, girls get the desired result. Fourth advertisement F4 is a Pakistani brand promoting their fair products by using persuasive language. Their motto is "jo face fresh wohe beautiful" starring Ahsan Khan and Ayeza Khan as lead cast, using celebrity endorsement techniques to attract the audience. They convey that along with fairness, freshness is also important and the Face Fresh lightens the complexion and restores the dead cells making it fresh. They promote and persuade the idea that due to her fresh and light skin tone, everyone is staring and embracing her looks. So, fairness and freshness are linked with attractiveness. The fifth advertisement F5 is about 'Skin White Gold Cream' starring Sarah Khan, famous celebrity. They brought up the new idea that other beauty creams contain harmful chemicals which damage the skin but she only uses skin white gold cream which steadily lightens the skin tone without any chemicals making the consumers believe in false assumptions. The sixth advertisement F6 is about 'Skin white soap' which fascinates the audience by promising fair glowing skin from head to toe in just 15 days due to its goat milk properties. Their advertising slogan is 'Glowing white skin in just 15 din'. This ad attracts typically brides because of its wedding theme and main focus on the bride.

In the above six ads, the main consumers are girls, and it is for girls of all classes, ages, and backgrounds. Through the use of effective language and statements like "naye zamany ka nikhar ab naye price mai", "jo face fresh wohe beautiful", and "get parlour wala instant glow" these brands become more popular, long permanent and trustworthy amongst all categories of viewers and listeners. If they don't use such catchy and mind-blowing titles then these products can be a big flop and would not compete with other brands. Voiceover is important in all the TVCs, which are collected, along with the verbal dialogues and catchy language. The characters also communicate with their gestures, postures and eye contact. TVCs F3 and F5 convey their messages in the form of songs to grab the attention and to make the ad more appealing. The settings of all the TVCs are important. The Field indicates the basic idea about the ads. In F1 all the audience shows they are praising the beauty and confidence of renowned celebrity Sajal Ali. In F6 the setting relates to a wedding with the main focus on the bride. Images in each advertisement are very eye-

catching and related to our socially constructed norms that fair girls are given more importance in every field. Language is at the same time so well chosen and precisely stated that one line statement is enough to convey the main motive of this particular fairness product and bring a huge profit and popularity in their side like in F3 "Parlor wala instant glow" and F6 "Glowing white skin in just 15 din" is enough to catch the attention of dark complexion girls and brides to be.

4.3 Analysis of TVCs of Fairness Products for Men

Among the 10 TVCs 4 of them were for men. These ads express the concept that men need some extra effort to make their skin fairer and fairness creams help to rejuvenate their skin. The basic concept of men's fairness ads is that a man is successful if he is good-looking enough to draw the attention of ladies. The 1st advertisement M1 is about "Fair and Lovely Men's Face Wash" starring Fawad Khan, a well-known celebrity. Again, they use the celebrity endorsement technique to influence the audience. Fawad Khan is famous nowadays in Pakistan as well as in India because of his looks and talent. The message was to unveil the hidden secret of his fair and fresh skin. The catchy words like "bikers" are used especially to address the middle class. Because of the pollution on roads, soaps are not just enough to clear their skin that's why, fair and lovely men work as "magnet action" and provide an instant bright look which attracts girls. Their message is that it works as a 'magnet' to remove all the dirt from men's tough textured skin that accentuates influence on common people. The second advertisement M2 is about "Fair and lovely Max Fairness" starring Shahid Afridi, the famous heartthrob Pakistani cricketer who portrays the concept that Max fairness protects the skin from heat and sunlight. It provides sun protection, spot reduction and Max lightening. That's why they remain fresh and fair after playing for hours in heat and sunlight. As they are celebrities, they have to remain fresh and fair on the ground and in front of the camera. They portray the same idea of fair complexion just to attract consumers. The third advertisement M3 is about Golden Pearl Face Wash also starring Fakhar Zaman, a well-known cricketer promoting the same message as M2 with the advertising slogan "Ab chamko mery yar". Golden pearl deep cleansing formula gives a bright effect in seconds and they appear to be attractive, especially to girls. The fourth advertisement M4 is about "Fair Menz" which claims to be 'Pakistan's no 1 fairness cream only for men. The boy used his sister's cream but didn't get the desired result and also got insulted by her sister because of using her products. They promote the idea that males' skin texture is different from females that's why men need their separate skin care creams and the product fair men are made with a special formula to work on rough skin.

The main concept in all the above advertisements is that men also need a fair and glowing complexion to be accepted by society's norms and to be popular amongst girls. They convey this message through the use of persuasive language. In TVCs M1 and M3, the male models try to draw attention to the opposite gender. In those two ads, the women were in awe and amazed by the model's beauty and confidence. The idea these ads are promoting is that confidence is linked with fair complexion and chic style. They are setting a wrong example for the youth by encouraging good-looking ideology. The theme of attracting women is found in all four ads. Similar to the TVCs for women, voice-over is also important for men's fairness ads. Usually, voiceover provides a clear message to the audience regarding the function of fairness products.

Jingles are also important in both women's and men's advertisements. The background music matches the theme of the ads. The background music expresses that every boy and girl should use fairness cream for popularity and success which is portrayed in F1, F2, F6, M1, and M2. In the analysis, the setting is also very important. The viewers can easily identify the theme by the setting. For instance, in M2 the cricket ground indicates a cricket match in heat and sunlight. Through the use of effective language and statements, they attract consumers to buy their products. It is also referred to doctors that using such creams is not good at all for the skin, such fairness

cannot be achieved in such a short period of time, and if it happens, it leads to damage to the skin. But still, due to the appealing themes of these ads, people get betrayed every time, because the story they create is so close to reality and is related to the phenomenon of daily life, the young generation gets influenced very easily, even though they don't want to get trapped as Foucault gives his description of power as turning the subject into an object, an object of knowledge, of language and of the power which is mediated through them and that create subjects (1982). The young generation relates themselves to the situation which is portrayed in the ads and tends to believe that they have no other option except to use these beauty fairness creams to get rid of dark complexion, and impurities of their skin and that ultimately will give them confidence to overcome all the odds. Such ads and images portray a negative cultural stereotype, deliberately stating that beauty is measured by the degree of fairness of their skin and this good-looking ideology is so infused in that dark complexion that people get bullied because of this stigma. At this point, such companies have a social responsibility, or corporate responsibility not to encourage such negative acceptability standards and crucial ideas among ordinary people. Fairness advertising methods are socially very harmful as they reinforce prejudices against dark-skinned girls/women.

It is significant to mention that, dark skin has more melanin, which protects the skin from the sun, and in turn, prevents certain diseases. Light skin has just the opposite role, and for this, they have less protection against UV rays. Without using fair products, one cannot find a good job or qualified groom for herself, and in an actual comical notion, society believes in these ads unconsciously, because they are not ready to face reality and live in a world of fairytales and imaginations. For all these, language is the mastermind and has the central role to play; language has the power to send us to a dreamland where anything is possible. Reality can be changed by the use of highly explicit-impressive-wonderful language that simply diverts our minds from practicality to irrationality. Language can simply influence one's thought process and understanding powers and make them believe whatever the ad-makers want them to believe. That is why it is said, "Ads are all about illusions-fictions, and nothing real", but the language makes it real and fulfils the gap between audiences' trust and the profit gained from all these fake ads/products. Language makes it trustworthy for all of us.

Thus, the study has shown that the analysis of linguistic features not only helps in understanding the structure of the text but also the deep meanings of it. Language is pluralistic in nature and reality can be twisted by the use of highly explicit impressive language that can divert the mind from reality. Such analysis reveals that fairness advertising methods are socially very harmful and unfair as they reinforce prejudices against dark skin complexion. That's why it is said 'Ads are all about illusions, fictions and nothing real'.

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