

## **Tactics of Implicit Comparison**

### **In US Advertising Discourse**

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In this paper we go on with the analysis of the strategy of comparison realization in the US advertising discourse (for other materials see [Anikin 2005, Anikin 2006]) and more thoroughly deal with a tactics within the given strategy – the tactics of implicit comparison.

Under implicit we understand the kind of information not constituting the immediate meaning of text components (words, grammemes) indicated in the dictionary and, however, perceived by the hearer or reader of the text [Implicitness in Language and Discourse, 1999:8].

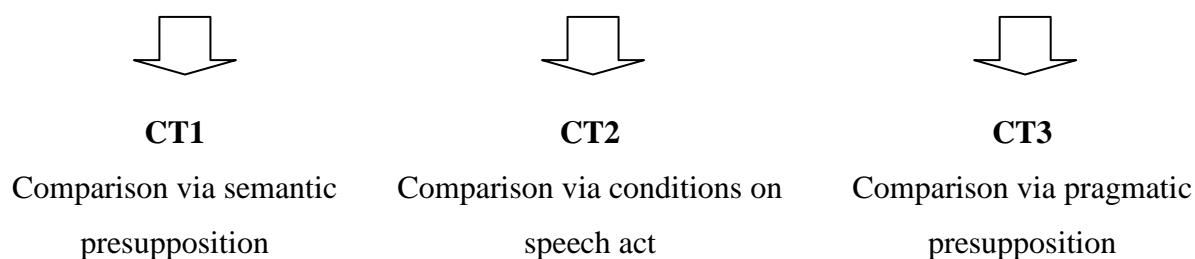
The division of information into explicit and implicit is connected with the asymmetrical dualism of linguistic signs, i.e. with the linguistic unit having both the plane of expression and the plane of content. According to F. de Saussure's concept of linguistic units' dual nature, a linguistic unit is realized in a certain material form (phonic or graphic) representing its significant ('le signifiant'). But it carries as well a certain content constituting its signified ('le signifié'). A linguistic sign assigns a certain signified to a certain significant. The fact of non-conformity of a signified to a significant represents implicitness.

Thus, implicit information represents discrepancy between the said/written and the heard/read, i.e. comprehended, extracted. According to P. Grice's postulates, the listener's activity consists not only in deciphering signs (i.e. understanding meanings of words, grammemes, etc), but also in making numerous conclusions on the ground of the text, context and background knowledge [Grice, 1985: 221]

The use of implicit information is especially characteristic of advertisements and represents a distinct feature of a well-structured advertising text. The reason is that the imperative "Buy!" expressed explicitly will be interpreted by the recipient (the would-be customer) as an attempt to impose somebody else's will upon him, and hence, rejected. If the appeal, however, is implicit, it won't be judged directly, and hence, may be interpreted by the recipient as his own conclusion, which substantially increases the efficacy of the commercial message. The use of implicit information for the sake of creating the comparison effect in commercials has a clear-cut pragmatic implication: explicit comparisons are often prohibited by advertising regulations, and besides can provoke competitors' as well as customers' antagonism.

There exist numbers of types of implicit information [Paducheva 1985; Novelty in Foreign Linguistics 1985; Implicitness in Language and Discourse 1999; etc]. In our research we rely upon the typology offered in the monograph *Implicitness in Language and Discourse* [1999]. According to the three types of implicit information outlined in the monograph, we define in American advertising discourse comparisons based on semantic and pragmatic presuppositions as well as via speech act success conditions. Thus, the tactics of implicit comparison in US advertising discourse may be presented by the following chart:

### Tactics of Implicit Comparison



#### CT1 – Comparison via semantic presupposition

One of the widespread tools of creating semantic presuppositions consists in placing the main thesis into the sub-clause where it looks as a well-known axiomatic fact. This method can be illustrated, for instance, by the telecommunication company *Vodafone*'s message:

*“Find out why more business people prefer Vodafone”*

The addressant's pragmatic goal consists in convincing the recipient that *Vodafone* is the best telecommunication system for business people. The sub-clause “*why more business people prefer Vodafone*” carries the obvious presupposition “*most business people prefer Vodafone*”. It remains true even through the negation of the statement:

*“Don't find out why more business people prefer Vodafone”.*

Thus, the message originators manage to avoid the laborious process of proving the thesis implied through the semantic presupposition. It is introduced as a self-evident fact and as far as introduced implicitly is perceived like it by the recipient. Analyzing this type of messages Y.K. Pirogova argues that should the presuppositional part of the slogan be introduced explicitly... the slogan would provoke an inner protest of many people [Pirogova 2001].

One more example of introducing the advertising comparing thesis in the form of presupposition is the slogan of the *AOL* online-company:

*“So easy to use, no wonder it's number one” – AOL*

The presupposition – “*AOL is number one in the world*” – remains true even if we negate the statement:

*“So difficult to use, it's surprising it's number one”*

One more means of creating semantic presuppositions implying comparison consists in the so-called sentences-equations (“If A then B”) carrying the presupposition C. When negating both parts of the statement the presupposition has to stay intact:

*“If it's Borden's, it's got to be good” – BORDEN, INC*

The semantic presupposition of this pseudo logical equation is the implication: *“Only BORDEN, INC's products are really good. Other companies' dairy products do not comply with high standards.”* The same implication is true even when negating the equation: *“If it's not Borden's, it hasn't got to be good”.*

### **CT2 – Comparison via conditions on speech act**

Creating conditions on speech act success may be considered another effective means of producing messages with implicit comparisons possessing a powerful perlocutionary potential. This type of implicit information is based on the creation of such a communicative situation when the implication necessary to the advertiser is most probably actualized in the recipient's mind. This conversational turn is widespread in the US advertising discourse.

One of the most popular ways of its realization consists in explicitly expressing general self-evident truths about the category of the advertised product and describing elementary procedures of its production. It might seem the advertiser is just wasting his time and money explaining what is well-known to anybody. In reality this kind of messages implies a hint at the incompetence, greed, and other vices of the competitors:

*“We never stop working for you” — Verizon Wireless*

It seems absolutely self-evident and matter-of-course that a wireless operator provides its services 24/7 without pausing. However, the explicit declaration of the main wireless market principle implies a hint that other companies from time to time stop providing customers with their service without any good reason. The communicative situation created by the advertiser helps distinguishing the publicized item and obliquely discredit competitors. In the meantime the explicit part of the statement is absolutely legitimate and evokes no suspicion of dishonest competition.

The same tool is used in *GENERAL ELECTRIC* HR department's slogan:

*“There are no Whites working at G.E. No Blacks either. Just people. And we need more.”*  
*Human Resources GENERAL ELECTRIC.*

The principle of racial equality is one of the founding in the US Constitution. In sober fact the situation remains controversial though. Making use of the substantivized adjectives ‘Whites’ and ‘Blacks’ this message implies the hint that other companies might base their recruiting campaigns on discriminatory factors.

Very often advertisers benefit from the effect of sensation that helps diverting the recipient's focus from the thesis to prove and makes the message endure criticism:

*"Finally! An airline that recognizes business travel for what it really is" – Canadian Air Travel*

In this message the advertiser manages to kill two birds with one stone: on the one hand, the air-company is introduced as competent and innovative, on the other hand, the message discredits the competitors. The following statement may serve as a possible implication: *'older air companies aren't competent.'*

### **CT3 – Comparison via pragmatic presupposition**

Pragmatic presuppositions are presuppositions concerned with the addressee's extralinguistic knowledge and beliefs [Pirogova, 2001: 218]. Most often pragmatic presuppositions in the US advertising discourse actualize through allusions as well as through signs of everyday life.

Allusions in the American advertising discourse strike with the diversity of the donor-spheres. Very often the source of allusion is religion:

*"The first truly feminine cigarette - almost as pretty as you are. Women have been feminine since Eve, now cigarettes are feminine. Eve, also with menthol" – EVE CIGARETTES.*

The advertiser successfully uses the brand name coinciding with the name of the first woman. The implication of the message is: *"Smoke EVE and you'll be as feminine as the first woman on the Earth."*

In the next slogan the *American Coach Lines* bus company implicitly compares itself to Lord while hinting that air companies are void of godlike characteristics. Hence it's more preferable for people to travel by bus than by plane:

*"If man were meant to fly, God would have lowered the fares" – American Coach Lines*

Biblical and look-alike allusions reflect a characteristic feature of American society, namely, its piousness. Much rarer are allusions to ancient mythology:

*"I seem to be Achilles ... but, my dear, it happens to be your heel that is my vulnerable spot. Such slenderness! Such grace! One look and I am slain." – PEACOCK SHOES*

The implication from the message is – *'buy PEACOCK SHOES and Achilles will be at your feet'*

Folklore (fairy tales, legends) is a favourable source of comparative allusions:

*"Quicker than Rudolf, bigger than Santa, more sensual than mistletoe, warmer than socks, miles better than charades and the biggest surprise of all" – Interflora flowers*

In this message the *Interflora flowers* company compares itself to fairy characters like Rudolf, Santa Claus and the mistletoe having a deep symbolical meaning. The choice of these

symbols may be considered undoubtedly successful since all the three are irrevocably associated with Christmas – the Americans' favourite holiday evoking the warmest feelings. Besides, the message implies an appeal: *'Christmas is a great occasion to present Interflora flowers to your dears.'*

Allusion to "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" can be traced in the message from the *Continental Insurance Company*:

*"Your client is a poor, rejected stepchild, whose best friends are dwarfs. Can you insure her against poisoned apples?" – Continental Insurance Company*

Among the other donour-spheres of advertising comparative allusions we can outline:

- Art:

*"Each Record a Masterpiece"* - Van Dyke Records (a word-play exploiting the relation of paronymy between the brand name and the name of a great painter of late Renaissance)

- Science:

*"Einstein's Theory of Relativity: give strangers the same price you give relatives"* *Einstein-Moomjy Carpets* (a word-play exploiting the relation of paronymy between the brand name and the name of a famous scientist)

The conversational turn under consideration, as well as the tactics of implicit comparison on the whole, presents a highly effective means of speech influence. Their advantage over the other means consists in that the analyzed messages let the recipient take an active part in decoding them, capture his interest. Besides such type of commercials help avoid the triviality and prosiness of the advertising discourse, bring in a whiff of fresh air and distinguish the advertised item.

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