

INTRODUCTION

All works stem from knowledge, interest – or even passion – and objectives. This one here makes no exception. If a rather precise political outlook will certainly be clear to those who are going to read the following pages, I hope they will also find such content to be the fruit of critical and unbiased investigation. I acknowledge that the issues being scrutinized here could also be addressed from more neutral standpoints, but this would have necessarily ousted out at least one of the abovementioned starting factors. And all the others would have subsequently suffered from a lack of coherence that scholarly research should not endure.

This book is about the use of the English language and the sociolinguistic variables and identities entailed by its recently established global currency. In order to explore one of the main discourses which are responsible for and vehicle of the current success of English, I have decided to deal with texts which are so important from a sociological point of view that they are often argued to symbolically represent our age: advertisements. Moreover, I have focused on cross-disciplinary concepts such as those of style – here intended as a linguistic as well as a social notion – and media environment, which I considered fundamental to better understand the advertising discourse and to question how its modes of expression are trespassing into other cultural domains with a corollary of linguistic, social and perhaps anthropological consequences.

As far as the single chapters are concerned, Chapter One looks into how English has become a global means of communication, primarily on account of the economic and political prominence of its native speakers, of unprecedented technological advancements and of the international dimension of communicative practices made possible by these very advancements. It consequently deals with the implications of today's status and functions of English, and especially of English as a *Lingua Franca* (ELF), through a survey which gradually translates into an exploration of the current communication and media landscape and of its newly acquired global reach. Within this sociolinguistic framework, the use of English by the advertising discourse is appraised as a stylistic choice which works into social action and cross-discursive practices, thus partaking in processes of meaning-making and identity formation which have symbolic as well as material outcomes.

It is therefore through the lenses of a stylistic investigation that a rich corpus of advertisements is examined in Chapter Two, so as to check whether and how the persuasive messages conveyed by the advertising discourse shape a symbolic imagery and social models that strongly affect contemporary cultural processes, social relationships and communication in general. In this understanding, a detailed inquiry is made of the notions of style and life-style, as they are found to be increasingly relevant in contemporary cultures and societies. Subsequently, the rhetorical figures and argumentative techniques which are reported to occur more frequently within the same corpus of advertisements are listed and presented, also by means of examples. In drawing such a list, the use of tools inherited from the classical rhetorical tradition is integrated and reformulated according to an overall view of language as social semiotics, with special attention to those interpretive categories and models which better define the social space of style, while distinguishing its linguistic and not only linguistic manifestations. In fact, the chapter provides with a new and hopefully functional taxonomy of rhetorical devices. Moreover, theoretical developments formulated within the fields of visual rhetoric and multimodal analysis are also employed and discussed in the light of the pivotal role of images within advertisements.

The third and last chapter includes a case study where the signifying structures of the latest (Feb. 2012) audiovisual commercial of a British mainstream newspaper, the *Guardian*, are approached according to a semiotic theory of discourse and narrative texts. Given the particular nature of the product advertised, the global state of affairs of news media is first introduced, assessed by means of statistical considerations, and discussed in relation to recent technological developments and the ongoing revolution in social and participatory media which are gradually changing our conceptions of journalism and citizenship. These very cogent issues are actually among the core themes of the *Guardian's* commercial which is consequently endowed with rare sociological density. Finally, rhetorical and semiotic tools are brought together in the analysis of the valorization processes through which the British newspaper has recently been characterizing its brand equity by investing on Internet-oriented and mobile services, so as to acquire a social media identity of which the open journalism project is a crucial component.

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