

Advertising Strategy of Comparison as Violation of Cooperative Principle

In the making of the anthropocentric scientific paradigm in the middle of the last century P.Grice's communicative conception became a real breakthrough as far as problems of speech interaction were concerned. Striving to answer questions concerning patterns of speech interaction as well as this interaction optimization, he presented the so-called cooperative principle, which essence consists roughly in the following: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged." (P.Grice) He argued that in order to make a conversation effective, its participants should follow a range of unwritten rules – "categories under one or another of which will fall certain more specific maxims and submaxims, the following of which will, in general, yield results in accordance with the Cooperative Principle." Among these four categories P.Grice distinguished:

1. The category of QUANTITY (make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange; do not make your contribution more informative than is required);
2. The category of QUALITY (do not say what you believe to be false, do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence);
3. The category of RELEVANCE (be relevant);
4. The category of MANNER (avoid obscurity of expression, ambiguity; be brief, avoid unnecessary prolixity; be orderly).

The Cooperative Principle seemed to solve lots of problems. However, already in the 70-s, trying to analyze the cases of the Cooperative Principle violation, R.M.Blakar came to a conclusion, that it is absolutely impossible to express one's thoughts neutrally. Language possesses the power to interpret reality in a variety of ways. The language-provided opportunity to give totally contrary evaluations of one and the same situation (e.g.: a rebel – a terrorist, an intelligence officer – a spy) creates numerous possibilities for speech influence, which results in the transgression of one side of the conversation's rights.

Contemporary linguists distinguish speech influence in the narrow as well as in the broad sense. Under speech influence in the narrow sense they imply "a deliberate creation of messages, possessing a high ability to influence the addressee's consciousness and behaviour." (P.Parshin). This definition presupposes a highly-developed (usually by copywriters and speechwriters) technology of the cooperative principle violation with the help of the language. Speech influence in the broad sense is usually defined as "any change in the world image of interlocutors in the process of receiving newer information." This definition includes cases of interpersonal and professional conversations, which may be characterized by the absence of a deliberate desire to violate the interlocutor's rights.

It seems interesting however, that even in everyday interpersonal communication very often people deliberately transgress the cooperative principle, thus performing speech influence rather in the narrow sense.

Let's illustrate the above-mentioned with the help of an example. After a game of lawn-tennis a young boy is dating an attractive girl. She asks him if the game was all right and he gives the following answer: "I've smashed him to atoms!"

The desire of the boy to produce a good impression on the girl made him violate a variety of categories and maxims of the cooperative principle, which certainly resulted in performing speech influence. Among the infringed maxims we can distinguish:

- The maxim of quantity. The question was about the quality of the game, the answer contained redundant information about the winner. The interlocutor could have answered "OK", "All right", "Oh yeah", which, in theory, would have been in line with the Principle.
- The maxim of quality. The sports metaphor "to smash to atoms" means "to be much stronger", "to defeat". However, enjoying his victory, the boy could have said the same after winning an equal match, thus a little boasting and telling not quite the truth.
- The maxim of relation. The girl asked about the game, not about the result.
- The maxim of manner. The metaphoric expression "to smash to atoms" is ambiguous and can be misunderstood by the interlocutor.

Although the violation of all the 4 categories is obvious, we can't nevertheless speak of a communicative failure. An essential mistake would sooner have been a tame colourless answer "All right", which would have led the conversation almost into a stalemate. This conclusion suggests us the idea that violating the cooperative

principle and performing speech influence don't always denote a communicative failure via infringing upon one of the interlocutor's rights.

The narrow kind of speech influence (infringing upon the addressee's interests) is particularly typical of advertising discourse, which can be characterized by a set-into-line creation of texts, possessing a high ability to influence the addressee's consciousness and behaviour. It is noteworthy, that a complex use of speech influence tools is metaphorically defined with the help of the military term "strategies of speech influence". To our mind it emphasizes the aggressive character of technologies, used within the advertising sphere. The strategy of speech influence is commonly defined as "a total of speech acts, aiming at achieving the interlocutors' general communicative intention" (Issers, p. 109).

Advertisers are actually in the state of war against each other in order to attract as much recipients and would-be customers as possible, they strive to achieve the maximum effect of their messages upon their recipients. One of the most structured and, as a result, powerful and influential is the strategy of comparison of the advertised object. Its communicative purpose consists in discrediting the competitors' goods (obliquely, as direct discredit in commercials is forbidden) and in self-idealizing (directly).

Among speech tactics, constituting the strategy, we can distinguish:

- Explicit self-idealizing tactics;
- Improper comparison tactics;
- Implicit comparison tactics.

Almost all the conversation turns, constituting the self-idealizing tactics, break the maxim of quality. This can be justified by the fact that its pragmatic purpose consists in stating the uniqueness of the advertised item via distinguishing it from a set of similar goods, produced by competitors. In fact most of advertised goods have equivalent analogues, hence stating their uniqueness is not true.

Within the self-idealizing tactics we can distinguish the following conversation turns:

- The use of the absolute superlative degree of adjectives:

*Vicks Ny Quil. Multi-symptom cold/flu relief. **The best** sleep you ever get with a cold... medicine.*

The maxims, violated in this message, are:

1. The maxim of quality. The quality of the sleep can't be defined solely in terms of physical state. It also depends upon other factors, independent of taking this medicine.
 2. The maxim of quantity. The information of the message is incomplete. For one, it remains unknown, whether there are any contra-indication to this medicine.
- The use of the relative superlative degree of adjectives:

***Best** selection. **Best** deals. Chevrolet Co.*

The superlative degree of an adjective without the definite article presupposes a relative character of superiority. This very message merely means that choosing Chevrolet is one of the best decisions. However, in actual fact, the tendency of human thinking to understand statements in a stronger meaning snaps into action. The recipient will memorize the fact that Chevrolet is the best, not the fact that Chevrolet is one of the best. In this case we can see that the maxim of manner is violated thanks to the similarity of grammatical forms and hence its ambiguity.

- The use of adjectives with the meaning of uniqueness (superb, extraordinary, only, unique).

*Zantrex-3. The **first** and **only** Non-Ephedra Diet-Pill with a Kick! Rapid weight loss. Incredible energy!*

In this message we can observe the violation of the following maxims:

1. The maxim of quality. Zantrex-3 aren't the only weight loss pills without ephedrine.
 2. The maxim of quantity. Nothing is mentioned about contra-indication to this medicine.
- The use of comparative constructions with negative pronouns (nothing, never, no, not... ever, not... anything).

***Nothing** lasts **longer than** Final Net's New Advanced Natural Touch formula. Even in 90% humidity! It's your day – **don't** trust your dream to **anything less**.*

The message doesn't give enough evidence to explain why Final Net's effect lasts longer than the effect of its analogues, produced by competitors. Hence violation of **the maxim of quantity**.

The statement, strong in meaning but lacking enough proofs or argumentation, may be considered insinuating. Hence violation of **the maxim of quality**.

The very name of the next tactics – 'improper comparison' – hints at the violation of the cooperative principle thanks to the conversation turns, bringing this tactics into being. With the help of this tactics the copywriter creates a short-cut or an expanded range of comparison, thus excluding competitors' goods from the

sphere of comparison. Within this tactics incommensurable items are very often compared to each other, or there exists only an illusion of comparison while the advertised items aren't compared to anything.

Let's consider some of the conversation turns within the tactics of improper comparison:

- Comparison to the item from a totally different group:

*"We sell **more** cars **than** Ford, Chrysler, Chevrolet, and Buick combined."* **MATCHBOX TOY CARS**

In this message a toy-company compare themselves to such world-famous car-makers as Ford, Chrysler and Chevrolet. Such a comparison is obviously improper – the company had to compare themselves to real competitors – other toy-companies. Hence, the following maxims are violated:

1. The maxim of quantity – no information about real competitors.
 2. The maxim of manner – the recipient is likely to make an improper conclusion that the company produces real cars.
- Comparison to nothing:

*"Get **more**" - T-Mobile*

After reading such a message the recipient is confused – more what is he to get and more than from whom? The following maxims are broken:

1. The maxim of quantity – the information is incomplete.
2. The maxim of manner – the meaning remains uncertain due to the previous maxim violation.

One more tactics within the strategy of comparison is the implicit comparison tactics. Implicit information possesses a stronger potential to influence people's minds, compared to explicit information. Messages that contain implicit information usually have a variety of possible interpretations. Among the conversation turns within this tactics one can distinguish:

- Comparison via semantic presupposition:

"If it's got to be clean, it's got to be Tide." **TIDE LAUNDRY DETERGENT**

In this case we can trace an implicit comparison via semantic presupposition "Tide is more effective than other powders". This implication remains relevant while affirming as well as while denying the original statement:

"If it isn't got to be clean, it isn't got to be Tide." (= "If it isn't got to be clean, it can be anything else")

The following maxims are broken:

1. The maxim of quality – it isn't true that Tide is the most effective powder, as there exist its analogues – Ariel, Omo, etc.
 2. The maxim of quantity – there's not enough evidence, why Tide the best is.
 3. The maxim of manner – the use of implicit information makes the message ambiguous.
- Comparison via the speech act success conditions.

One of the most popular conversation turns within this tactics is the initiation of a question that pushes the recipient to the very answer the advertiser finally gives. The recipient takes it for granted, considering it to be his own conclusion:

"Where's the beef?" - WENDY'S RESTAURANTS

The definite article with the word "beef" creates a comparative effect, due to the grammatical meaning of uniqueness. The question "Where's the beef?" ("the real beef") is answered easily by the recipient himself: "Of course in WENDY'S RESTAURANTS, otherwise why should they be advertised?" However, we can't fail to question the propriety of such a deduction.

The following maxims are violated:

1. The maxim of quantity – there's no explanation, why "the beef only in WENDY'S RESTAURANTS is".
2. The maxim of manner – it's not quite clear what the difference between "the beef" and generally "beef" is.

As seen from the examples, the Cooperative Principle is violated on a regular basis in commercials. Nevertheless, people keep watching commercials as well as buying advertised goods. Complaints about dishonest and fraudulent advertising although numerous don't lead to any fatal consequences. Otherwise, advertising as a form of communication would have long ago stopped being.

All that allows us to speak about the efficiency of advertising communication, independent of its conformity with P.Grice's maxims. Each of communicators generally gets what he wants, despite the transgression of the Principle. As a result we can seemingly speak of a set of unwritten rules, which might be conventionally marked as a "principle of Metacooperation". Logically its main maxims should prescribe in what way and to what extent Grice's maxim's might be violated. One of the maxims for advertising discourse could be the maxim of the so-

called “half-belief”. A. Baranov argues that such a phenomenon is also typical of the theatre and the cinema, when people, very well aware of the fact that nothing is really true, sincerely sympathize with what is going on.

Another matter is that advertisers, trying to optimize the advertising discourse, very often transgress the principle of metacooperation as well. In this case linguists speak about language manipulation and not about speech influence. Yet much remains unclear in this field and there exists no proper linguistic definition, differentiating between speech influence and language manipulation.

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