

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF PRAGMATICS IN ADVERTISING DISCOURSE: CONCEPTUAL AND FUNCTIONAL PERSPECTIVES

<https://doi.org/10.70728/phil.v05.i02.038>

Askarova Robiyaxon Baxtiyor qizi
ORCID: 0009-0007-5237-2980
askarovarobiya@gmail.com
International Nordic University

Abstract: This article examines the theoretical foundations of pragmatics in advertising discourse from conceptual and functional perspectives. The study explores how pragmatic theory explains the communicative mechanisms underlying persuasive media texts. Special attention is given to speech act theory, implicature, presupposition, and politeness strategies in advertising communication. The research aims to systematize key pragmatic categories relevant to advertising discourse. It also analyzes how these categories function within mass communication frameworks. The study applies qualitative discourse analysis to selected English and Uzbek advertising texts. The methodological framework integrates speech act analysis, pragmatic inference analysis, and functional discourse analysis. Findings demonstrate that advertising discourse operates primarily through directive and commissive illocutionary acts. The results reveal that implicatures and presuppositions significantly enhance persuasive impact. The research confirms that pragmatic strategies are culturally conditioned yet structurally comparable. The study contributes to theoretical pragmatics by contextualizing classical theories within advertising discourse. It also provides a foundation for comparative and cross-cultural investigations. The article concludes that pragmatics offers a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding advertising as strategic communication.

Keywords: pragmatics, advertising discourse, speech act theory, implicature, presupposition, politeness strategies, mass communication, persuasive communication

INTRODUCTION

Advertising discourse represents one of the most strategically constructed forms of modern mass communication. Unlike ordinary conversation, advertising is intentionally persuasive, goal-oriented, and pragmatically structured. Pragmatics, as a branch of linguistics, studies language use in context and focuses on meaning beyond literal interpretation ¹.

¹ Stephen C. Levinson (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press. p. 35.

The theoretical basis of pragmatics was formed through the works of philosophers such as J.L.Austin, who introduced the concept of performative utterances and illocutionary force². His ideas were further developed by John Searle, who classified speech acts into representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations³.

Another fundamental contribution was made by H. P. Grice, who formulated the Cooperative Principle and conversational maxims, introducing the concept of implicature⁴. In advertising discourse, meaning is often constructed through implied messages rather than explicit statements.

Politeness theory, developed by Brown and Levinson, also plays a significant role in persuasive discourse, explaining how advertisers maintain positive face while minimizing imposition and encouraging action⁵.

Despite extensive research in pragmatics, the theoretical systematization of its foundations within advertising discourse remains insufficient. Therefore, this study aims to examine the conceptual and functional perspectives of pragmatics as applied to advertising communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pragmatics emerged in the 20th century as a response to structural linguistics, shifting focus from language form to language use. Early pragmatic theories emphasized performativity and contextual meaning. Speech act theory laid the groundwork for understanding advertising slogans as performative acts. According to Searle, directive acts attempt to get the hearer to do something⁶. Most advertising messages function as indirect directives. Grice's theory of implicature explains how advertisers violate conversational maxims intentionally to generate persuasive interpretations⁷. For example, exaggeration in advertising can be seen as a strategic flouting of the maxim of quality. Politeness theory demonstrates how persuasive texts balance authority and friendliness, maintaining consumer engagement. Discourse scholars such as Teun van Dijk argue that discourse must be analyzed within socio-cognitive frameworks, linking linguistic choices with ideology and power⁸. Advertising discourse reflects cultural values and social hierarchies. However, previous studies often focus either on linguistic form or marketing effectiveness, lacking integrated theoretical models. This article attempts to bridge this gap.

METHOD

² J. L. Austin. *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.(1962) p. 52

³ John Searle. *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge University Press. (1969). P. 42

⁴ H. P. Grice. *Logic and Conversation*. In *Syntax and Semantics*, Vol. 3.(1975). P. 46

⁵ Brown, P., & Levinson, S. *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge University Press.(1987) P.68

⁶ John Searle. *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge University Press.(1969) P. 66

⁷ H. P. Grice. *Logic and Conversation*. In *Syntax and Semantics*, Vol. 3.(1975) P.46

⁸ van Dijk, T. A. *Discourse and Power*. Palgrave Macmillan.(2008) P.28

The methodological foundation of this study is based on the theory of speech acts introduced by J.L.Austin, who distinguished between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts⁹. This tripartite distinction enables a layered examination of advertising texts: what is said (locution), what is intended (illocution), and what effect is achieved (perlocution). Advertising slogans often function not merely as statements but as performative acts designed to trigger consumer response.

The classification of illocutionary acts follows the taxonomy developed by John Searle¹⁰, particularly his categories of directives and commissives. In advertising discourse, directives (e.g., "Try it today") are frequently combined with implicit commissive promises (e.g., "You will feel the difference"), forming hybrid persuasive structures.

The inferential dimension of meaning is analyzed through the Cooperative Principle formulated by H.P.Grice¹¹. Advertising discourse often deliberately flouts the maxims of quantity and quality to produce implicatures. Hyperbole, understatement, and evaluative generalizations operate as pragmatic strategies rather than literal assertions. Presupposition analysis is conducted following the theoretical explanations of Stephen C. Levinson¹², who defines presupposition as background assumptions embedded in utterances. In advertising, presuppositions construct implicit consumer needs ("When you switch to better quality..."), thereby naturalizing product necessity.

Politeness strategies are examined through the model of Brown and Levinson¹³, particularly their concept of face-threatening acts and mitigation strategies. Advertising inherently attempts to influence behavior, which may threaten negative face (freedom of action). Therefore, indirectness, modal verbs, and inclusive pronouns function as politeness devices.

In addition to Western pragmatic traditions, the methodology integrates Uzbek pragmalinguistic scholarship. According to Sh. Safarov in *Pragmalingvistika asoslari*, speech behavior in Uzbek communicative culture is deeply connected to social hierarchy and respect norms¹⁴. This cultural dimension is particularly relevant in analyzing Uzbek advertising texts, where honorific expressions and collectivist appeals are prominent.

Furthermore, N.Mahmudov in *Til va nutq madaniyati* emphasizes that communicative effectiveness in Uzbek discourse depends on context-sensitive lexical

⁹ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 94–108.

¹⁰ John Searle, *Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 23–42.

¹¹ H. P. Grice, "Logic and Conversation," in *Syntax and Semantics*, Vol. 3 (New York: Academic Press, 1975), p.45–58.

¹² Stephen C. Levinson, *Pragmatics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 167–200.

¹³ Brown and Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 61–68.

¹⁴ Safarov, Sh. (2008). *Pragmalingvistika asoslari*. Toshkent: Fan, pp. 42–58.

and stylistic choices¹⁵. His observations support the methodological necessity of contextual interpretation when analyzing persuasive media texts.

B.Yo'ldoshev's work on text linguistics also contributes to the present research, especially regarding the structural coherence and pragmatic unity of media texts¹⁶. Advertising discourse must therefore be examined not only at the sentence level but as a cohesive pragmatic structure.

The empirical corpus consists of 120 advertising texts (60 English, 60 Uzbek) collected from television, print, and online media platforms. The corpus was selected according to three criteria: (1) explicit persuasive intention, (2) presence of implicit pragmatic mechanisms, and (3) thematic diversity.

The analytical procedure includes four stages. First, each text undergoes speech act classification. Second, implicatures are identified through maxim analysis. Third, presupposition triggers are coded and interpreted. Fourth, politeness strategies are categorized according to cultural context.

To ensure reliability, theoretical triangulation was employed, combining speech act theory, inferential pragmatics, and discourse analysis. Repeated textual examination and contextual reconstruction were conducted to minimize subjective interpretation.

RESULTS

The expanded analysis demonstrates that advertising discourse is structurally directive, yet pragmatically mitigated. While the ultimate communicative goal of advertising is to stimulate action (purchase, subscription, engagement), direct imperatives such as "Buy now!" or "Choose the best!" are frequently softened through indirect constructions, modal verbs, or suggestion-based framing. This confirms the theoretical premise of Speech Act Theory that directive force can be expressed implicitly rather than explicitly¹⁷.

According to John Searle, directives aim to make the hearer perform an action, but their illocutionary force may vary in strength depending on linguistic form¹⁸. In the analyzed corpus, English advertisements often employed modal constructions such as "You might want to try...", "Why not experience...?", or interrogative structures that function as indirect directives. Uzbek advertising discourse demonstrated similar mitigation strategies, frequently using respectful or culturally embedded appeals such as "Sinab ko'ring" (Try it) or "Siz bunga loyiqsiz" (You deserve this), which soften command into suggestion.

¹⁵ Mahmudov, N. (2012). *Til va nutq madaniyati*. Toshkent: O'zbekiston Milliy Ensiklopediyasi, pp. 75–89.

¹⁶ Yo'ldoshev, B. (2015). *Matn lingvistikasi*. Toshkent: Tafakkur, pp. 101–118.

¹⁷ Austin, J. L. *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 94.

¹⁸ Searle, J. R. *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969, pp. 66–67.

Implicature emerged as one of the most significant persuasive mechanisms. Building on H.P. Grice's Cooperative Principle, implicature allows advertisers to communicate meanings beyond literal expression¹⁹. For instance, slogans such as "Because you're worth it" imply exclusivity and superior quality without explicitly stating product characteristics. The persuasive force lies not in explicit claims, but in what consumers are invited to infer.

Grice's theory explains how advertisers deliberately manipulate conversational maxims, especially the Maxim of Quantity and Maxim of Quality²⁰. Advertisements often provide less information than required, encouraging consumers to fill interpretative gaps themselves. This strategic ambiguity enhances memorability and engagement.

Presuppositions were frequently used to construct assumed truths. Statements like "Upgrade your lifestyle today" presuppose that the consumer's current lifestyle is inadequate. Similarly, Uzbek advertising often presupposes product necessity through constructions such as "Har bir oilaga kerak" (Necessary for every family). According to George Yule, presuppositions function as background assumptions embedded within utterances and are powerful persuasive tools because they bypass critical evaluation²¹.

Politeness strategies varied across cultural contexts. English-language advertising frequently emphasized autonomy and personal choice, aligning with individualistic cultural values. In contrast, Uzbek advertising highlighted collective well-being, respect, and social harmony. This corresponds to Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness, which distinguishes between positive and negative face strategies²². Uzbek advertisements more often relied on positive politeness strategies (solidarity, shared values), while English advertisements tended to use negative politeness strategies (freedom of choice, minimal imposition).

DISCUSSION

The findings confirm that advertising discourse cannot be adequately explained through structural linguistics alone. Pragmatic theory provides the necessary framework to interpret communicative intention beyond surface-level meaning.

Speech Act Theory clarifies the structural organization of advertising intention. As Austin originally argued, utterances perform actions²³. In advertising, the locutionary act (the literal slogan) is secondary to the illocutionary act (persuasion) and the perlocutionary effect (consumer action). Advertising thus operates as a performative genre where language functions instrumentally.

¹⁹ Grice, H. P. "Logic and Conversation." In: *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989, pp. 24–40.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 30–32.

²¹ Yule, G. *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 25–27.

²² Brown, P., Levinson, S. C. *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 61–68.

²³ Austin, J. L., 1962, pp. 98–100.

The dominance of indirect directives supports Searle's classification of directive speech acts as varying in strength and formality²⁴. Advertising discourse can therefore be understood as a hybrid commissive-directive form: it both promises benefit and encourages action.

The frequent manipulation of conversational maxims demonstrates that persuasion often depends on controlled non-cooperation with literal truth conditions. Grice explains that when maxims are flouted rather than violated, audiences search for additional meaning²⁵. Advertising capitalizes on this interpretative effort, transforming inferential reasoning into emotional persuasion.

Cultural differences in politeness strategies reflect broader socio-cultural norms. As Brown and Levinson argue, politeness is culturally conditioned²⁶. In collectivist contexts such as Uzbekistan, appeals to family values, respect, and shared responsibility are more common. In individualist English-speaking contexts, advertisements foreground self-expression and personal achievement. These pragmatic variations reveal that advertising discourse is deeply embedded in social ideology.

Furthermore, from a cognitive-pragmatic perspective, implicature and presupposition activate mental schemas and consumer expectations. This aligns with the broader cognitive turn in pragmatics discussed by contemporary scholars. Advertising thus operates at the intersection of language, cognition, and socio-cultural structure.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the theoretical foundations of pragmatics in advertising discourse from both conceptual and functional perspectives.

The findings show that advertising communication consistently uses speech acts, implicature, presupposition, and politeness strategies as core persuasive mechanisms. Directive force is frequently softened through indirect constructions, while implicature enables advertisers to convey superiority, exclusivity, and urgency without making explicit statements.

Pragmatics offers a comprehensive analytical framework that explains both linguistic structure and persuasive intent. Without pragmatic analysis, advertising discourse might seem simply like stylistic flair; however, applying pragmatic theory reveals that advertising is a strategically designed and culturally embedded form of communication.

²⁴ John Searle. *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge University Press.(1969)

²⁵ Grice, H. P. "Logic and Conversation." In: *Studies in the Way of Words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989, pp. 24–40.

²⁶ Brown, P., & Levinson, S. *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge University Press.(1987)), pp. 61–68.

Future research may expand the corpus, incorporate quantitative pragmatic frequency analysis, and explore multimodal pragmatic strategies in digital advertising environments.

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