

Case Studies on Soft-sell and Hard-sell Types of Advertisement English and on Features of Journalistic English

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Abstract: Sociolinguistics studies the relation between language use and social factors, one sub-discipline of which is the study on English varieties, which are defined into five categories: register, dialects, social dialect, functional genres, and diachronic study on English. As common forms of functional genres, both advertisement English and journalistic English display their respective features and hence worthy of attention and analysis. The research is based on two case studies. Analysis of one case study on advertisement English shows both hard-sell type and soft-sell type are persuasive and informative to varying degrees. The other case study on a news story about a bank holdup identifies the features of journalistic English.

Keywords: English varieties; Advertisement English; Journalistic English; Style; Sociolinguistics

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1. Introduction

For language learners and users, it's important not only to know what to study and how to study a language, but also to account for the variation that exists in every language^[9]. Increasingly popular in the field of linguistics is the research on sociolinguistics. One of the main factors that has led to the growth of sociolinguistic research has been the recognition of the fact that language is a very variable phenomenon^[2]. Language users usually communicate for a particular purpose in a certain context^[10]. Given the broad scope of English varieties and the length of the research article, we hereby delimit the study on functional varieties. Functional variation of language refers to the variety of language in relation to its function, such as advertisement English and journalistic English. Advertisement English is a type of variation in relation to its persuasive function and informative function. Journalistic English as well is a variation used in its informative function, but sometimes it is used in its emotive or persuasive function. Both advertisement English and journalistic English are typical examples of English

variations. As Albakry, Mohammed A stated in his thesis *Style in American Newspaper Language: Use and Usage*, 'findings also underline the importance of considering newspaper language as a range of registers or sub-registers^[1]. Only in this way, can we account for the complexity of variation of newspaper language and allow for the overlap of its style with other varieties of English.' The demarcation of the study on journalistic English either as a register or as a functional genre does not necessarily entail much differences. As we find that Linguist Rod Ellis has used a case study, which is a detailed study of a learner's acquisition of an L2^[3], to illustrate specifically L2 acquisition. Similarly to help language learners appreciate the two functional varieties, we will examine them through two case studies.

2. A Case Study on Two Advertisements

Advertisements, a special type of non-prose and functional writing, are written to instantly catch the attention of the readers and to encourage them to take action, namely, to purchase the product being advertised^[7]. To achieve this aim, a business commercial assumes dual

functions: informative and persuasive.

In terms of their features, advertisements are basically categorized into two types: hard-sell type and soft-sell type. As the name suggests, hard-sell type highlights information on the product's merits, such as the processing, the special effect, the price and the guarantee. This hard-sell type can always be found in promoting lines of products of machinery and medicines because of their relatively complex nature. The language adopted in these advertisements is accurate, objective and clear.

On the other hand, the soft-sell type resorts to readers' emotions, aiming to stir up excitement, passion, or fondness, hence to prompt readers to make a purchase.

The soft-sell type mostly finds its application in advertising luxury products such as expensive liquor, perfume and brand-name purses. It can also be used in advertising gas, chocolate, washing powder, etc. The language used in this type of advertisement is elegant, refined, and brilliant in color.

Then a case study is conducted on two advertisements so as to better understand the genre of advertisement English from the perspective of linguistics and its variety. A genre is a socially sanctioned type of communicative event, either spoken or printed^[8].

A glance at the following Ad. 1 and Ad. 2 reveals that both commercials sell houses. They use almost the same limited number of words, given the time and space nature of advertisements, because the costly fees do not allow a piece of advertisement to last long, neither does the attention span of people. From advertisers' aspect, concise language means economy of cost; from readers' aspect, concise language is more interesting, more effective and more persuasive^[5]. A closer look at both advertisements can illustrate more. Here are the Ads.

Ad. 1

Buy an aluminum-sided house. Our special aluminum is rust-proof and erosion-resistant. You'll never have to paint it or worry about rust. It will save your money, time and work. A life-long saving!

Ad. 2

The best people are looking at new, new aluminum-sided housing. It appeals to

the home-lover who wants style, distinction and that luxurious look. Join the

Australians who care for quality.

(Source: ^[4])

Granted, the hard-sell type appeals to readers' mind, with emphasis on the reasons, explaining why readers (prospective buyers) should favor this product over the

other ones. The tone of the hard-sell advertisement is invariably calm, objective, and reasonable. In contrast to the hard-sell type, soft-sell type appeals to readers' emotions. It tries to establish a link between the product being advertised and a sense of beauty, wish-fulfillment or success. The general tone of soft-sell type is, however, emotive, imaginative, and subjective.

Apparently the first advertisement belongs to the hard-sell type, while the second one belongs to the soft-sell type. The reasons are self-evident as follows.

Comparing these two advertisements, we find that these two Ads. reflect the general features of the respective advertisement type. Specifically, Ad. 1 gives a scientific description of this kind of aluminum-sided house, telling people of its advantage—its supreme quality. It chooses the diction such as 'rust-proof' and 'erosion-resistant' to achieve its aim. The reasons for the customers to choose this house are obvious: the house owner needn't paint it or worry about its rust; it will save house owner's money, time and effort in maintaining the house. The house buyer gets a good deal if he/she strikes a deal. In stark contrast, Ad. 2 doesn't mention what is emphasized in Ad. 1. It mainly tells the prospective buyer that if he/she chooses it, he/she is one of those people who care for quality. And he/she identifies himself/herself with one of 'the best people' if he/she buys the house. In addition, he/she is a home-lover. Who doesn't love a home-lover? Obviously, a rational reader can fight the vague and illusory correlation between himself/herself and the created image of a home buyer. But the fact is, when under the bombardment of advertisements, a common reader can hardly miss the association. Besides, this advertisement chooses the refined words such as: 'style, distinction, luxurious look, best,' to build up a mental connection in a potential buyer between purchasing this house and staying stylish, distinct and wealthy.

Although it is noticeable that Ad. 1 is typical of a hard-sell type, it can't be ignored that in Ad. 1 there is also a touch of soft-sell type, which is reflected in, especially the last sentence, which goes: 'A lifelong saving!' This exclamation strongly evokes the readers' emotions. It conveys the message that the home buyer actually gains profit by making a money-saving purchase. What a bargain it is! Syntactically, Ad. 2 employs co-ordination, repetition and parallelism to bring a strong impact on the reader. As Mr. Yule defines it, syntax is the study of the relationship between linguistic forms, how they are arranged in sequence, and which sequences are well formed^[11]. To realize a strong sense of persuasion, words such as 'new,

new', 'style, distinction and luxurious look' find their way in the first and second sentences of Ad.2. The repetition and the use of refined words can be well received by the reader.

To sum up, Ad. 1 and Ad. 2 are different in diction, syntax and style, but there also exist some similarities, for both advertisements try to impress the prospective buyer and hence motivate him/her to take action. Both advertisements use imperative sentence once, which is strongly persuasive: 'Buy an aluminum-sided house' from Ad. 1; and 'Join the Australians who care for quality' from Ad. 2. The function of imperative sentence is echoed in Ge's essay when Ge wrote: "Take one of the most often-used syntactical structures in advertising language—imperative sentence for instance. The structure, like "Buy x" or "Do x", and "you will..." in advertisements means something more like the structures "You need X", "X will bring you..." or "You'll find comfort and relief with X...And they bring immediate effectiveness to advertisers"^[5]. But the distinctions between the two advertisements are too apparent to escape a careful reader, since hard-sell and soft-sell types indicate clearly so.

This case study on two advertisements throws a new light on the distinction and similarities of the two types of advertisement English. No matter the hard-sell type or the soft-sell type each advertisement belongs to, both advertisements are functionally persuasive and informative.

3. A Case Study on a News Story

As a vital tool of mass media, newspaper carries reports on the important events or incidents at home and abroad at the swiftest speed^[7], so this social function determines its unique style and features of journalistic English. Distinct from advertisement English, journalistic English takes on its own features. Since people read newspaper to get themselves up to date with the ongoing outside world, the central function of a newspaper is to inform. "The reporters and readers of newspaper achieve the interaction of information through the news though not face to face. In the course of interaction, hard news has its own communicative characteristics, such as informing, objectivity, authority, accuracy, credibility, simplicity and readability. These communicative characteristics are represented through linguistic features in hard news text. For example, to inform the readers about the latest events in the shortest time, the priority information is put at the beginning, followed by quotations and comments from authoritative people; frequent use of the

neutral speech word 'say' in the quotation achieves the requirement of objectivity; accurate figures make news both accurate and credible; the avoidance of hard words and the coinage phenomenon in hard news improve the readability of the texts"^[6]. To shed more light on the features, we intend to comment on the headline, lead, reporting method as well as general stylistic effects. To illustrate clearly, we will conduct a detailed study on the following news story. Here is the news story.

BANK HOLDUP

Two masked gunmen held up the Cedar Bluff Branch of Jefferson National Bank shortly after 9 a.m. today and fled with an undetermined amount of money.

Branch Manager Mel Kirkland said the doors of the bank had just been open about 10 minutes when the two men wearing masks came in waving guns and demanded 'all the money you've got.'

Kirkland said it took them less than five minutes to clear out the cash drawers of the three tellers. They forced the tellers, Kirkland and two customers into the manager's office and fled, he told police.

The branch is located at the west entrance of the Cedar Bluff Shopping Mall.

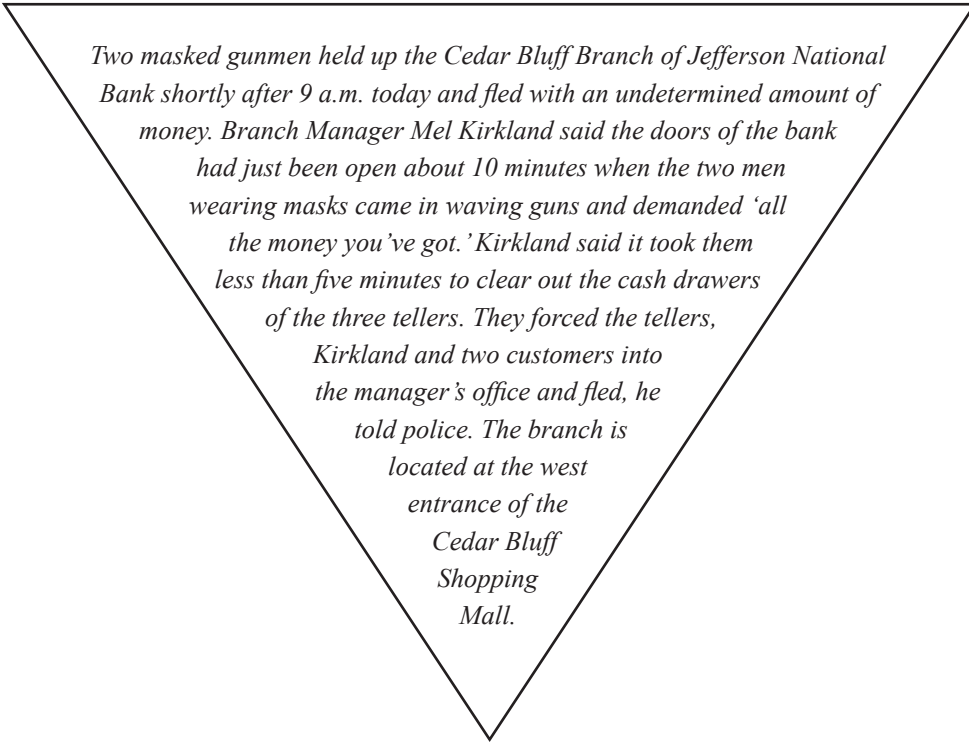
(Source: Final Exam Paper)

Presumably, a headline is the soul of a piece of news. A good headline meets two requirements: eye-catching as well as informative.

The headline in this news story is made up of merely two words: BANK HOLDUP, which immediately gives the readers the main idea of the news. In order to achieve brevity, a headline is supposed to use as few words as possible. When a journalist composes a headline, the deletion of words is a common practice. Otherwise, a full sentence can be like this: 'A Bank Holdup Takes Place at a Shopping Mall Today.'

Next comes the lead. A lead must tell the essence of the news report using as few words as possible, as the limited space in a newspaper calls for. This lead in the news story uses twenty-six words in all and gives the five elements of the 'who (two men), what (held up a bank), where (Cedar Bluff Branch of Jefferson National Bank), how (masked, waving guns, demanded all the money, forced, fled), and when (9 a.m. today, open about 10 minutes)' of the lead. The one-sentence lead is concise in that short and simple words, such as 'masked, held up, fled with,' are used.

This news story is written in the inverted pyramid method. Here is the inverted pyramid format of this news story on the bank holdup.



Two masked gunmen held up the Cedar Bluff Branch of Jefferson National Bank shortly after 9 a.m. today and fled with an undetermined amount of money. Branch Manager Mel Kirkland said the doors of the bank had just been open about 10 minutes when the two men wearing masks came in waving guns and demanded 'all the money you've got.' Kirkland said it took them less than five minutes to clear out the cash drawers of the three tellers. They forced the tellers, Kirkland and two customers into the manager's office and fled, he told police. The branch is located at the west entrance of the Cedar Bluff Shopping Mall.

(Source: Final Exam Paper)

Unlike the conventional stories where various events build up to a climax, a news story in the inverted pyramid method states the climax at the outset, the most important coming first and the other facts being arranged in the descending order of importance. This method is handy not only to the journalist, but also to the editor. For the journalist, the reporting will be logical and clear by following the sequence of importance. As a matter of fact, the editor benefits from this method of arrangement as much as the journalist does, because it gives the editor flexibility in editing, that is to say, when he/she wants to trim a news story, he/she can begin from the last paragraph and work upward. Work efficiency is therefore greatly enhanced.

The general style of this news story is calm, objective and serious. Syntactically, it is clear, concise and short. The description of the holdup is given from the perspective of the bank manager. There is no exaggerated word or sensational color in his narration. The journalist chooses small and short words in the news story, such as 'held up, fled, waving guns, clear out.' Small and short as they are, they are powerful and exact. Pre-modification is also used: 'Branch Manager' is positioned in front of his name, Mel Kirkland. Economy in the use of words is realized in this way. In order to make the news story look compact, the journalist also adopts the expansion on the adverbials and adjectives, as can be noticed in the second

paragraph ('wearing masks', 'waving guns'). The fourth paragraph supplies additional information on the crime scene. Comparatively speaking, this supplementary information is the least important, because even if for the sake of economy, if this information is chopped, it makes little difference on the overall effect of the news story.

The case study on the news story identifies the lexical, syntactic, and stylistic features of journalistic English (brevity, compactness, objectivity) as well as the inverted pyramid method of reporting.

4. Conclusions

For language learners and users, a good knowledge of the varieties can promote their language proficiency and understanding. Both advertisement English and journalistic English are common forms of English varieties. Empirically, this research has provided some insights into the two types of varieties. As functional genres, advertisement English and journalistic English assume a striking similar function: to deliver succinct information by virtue of the diction, syntax and style. Evidence from the two case studies on the house advertisements and on the news story about a bank holdup shows that various language devices are employed successfully in this regard. An additional function of advertisement English is to make readers empathize, as evidenced by the hard-sell type and the soft-sell type. In advertising a commodity, hard-

sell or soft-sell techniques can be readily available for advertisers to achieve an optimum result among prospective buyers. Hard-sell type highlights information on the product's merits whereas soft-sell type appeals to readers' emotions. As are found in advertisement 2, such syntactic structures as co-ordination, repetition and parallelism are also used. On the other hand, the analysis of the headline, lead, reporting method as well as general stylistic effects of the news story showcases the features of journalistic English. With this in mind, a language learner and user can better understand advertisement English and journalistic English. Due to the fact that the two case studies are limited in number and inadequate in depth, more research in this area is needed.

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