

The Role of Systemic Functional Grammar in Crafting Humorous Advertisements

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This study examines how Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is used in humorous advertising to create engaging and memorable messages. Drawing on Halliday's three metafunctions, the analysis explores how selected humorous ads employ ideational resources to construct exaggerated or ironic scenarios, interpersonal resources to build a playful relationship with audiences, and textual resources to organize humor coherently. The findings suggest that SFG offers an effective framework for explaining how language and visuals interact to produce humor in advertising and influence audience perception.

Keywords: humorous advertisements, ideational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction, textual metafunction

Introduction

Advertising plays a central role in contemporary consumer culture, where language functions not only to convey information but also to persuade and shape audience attitudes. Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), proposed by Halliday, provides a useful framework for analyzing advertising language through its three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. This study applies SFG to selected advertisements to examine how linguistic choices construct meaning, engage audiences, and organize messages effectively, revealing how language in advertising operates beyond information delivery to achieve persuasive goals.

Literature Review

Previous research has shown that Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) provides an effective framework for analyzing advertising discourse. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) propose three metafunctions—ideational, interpersonal, and textual—which explain how meaning is constructed in context. Extending this model to visual and multimodal texts, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) demonstrate how images contribute to meaning alongside language. Studies such as Cheong (2004) apply this framework to print advertising, revealing how linguistic and visual resources are strategically combined for persuasive purposes. Building on these studies, the present research examines humorous advertising from a metafunctional perspective.

Research Methods

This study adopts a qualitative approach based on Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) to analyze 20 humorous print and digital advertisements from industries such as food, technology, and consumer goods. Using

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Halliday's ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions as the analytical framework, the study examines how linguistic and visual strategies are employed to create persuasive and humorous advertising messages across different media.

Metafunctional Analysis of Humorous Advertisements

This section analyzes humorous advertisements based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, focusing on the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. Representative advertising examples are examined to illustrate how specific linguistic choices work together to generate humor, enhance persuasion, and improve message memorability.

Table 1

Halliday's Three Metafunctions in Advertising Discourse

Metafunction	Function	Example	Key elements	Description
Ideational	Represents experience and constructs reality	"Beware of pickpockets"	Material process; implied participants; implicit circumstance	The material process <i>beware</i> urges action, positioning the audience as actors and fries as valuable objects in an implied public setting, creating an exaggerated humorous scenario.
Interpersonal	Enacts social relations and engagement	"Please do not eat the billboard"	Imperative mood; deontic modality; informal tenor	A humorous imperative with deontic modality creates playful authority, reducing social distance and engaging the audience.
Textual	Organizes information coherently	"Once you pop, you can't stop"	Theme-rhyme structure; rhyme; repetition	Clear thematic progression and cohesive devices ensure memorability and smooth information flow.

Across all three metafunctions, the analysis shows that humorous advertisements employ systematic linguistic strategies rather than relying on humor alone. As summarized in Table 1, each metafunction contributes a distinct yet interconnected role.

Overall, the integration of ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions enables humorous advertisements to be engaging, persuasive, and memorable. This confirms that humor in advertising is a carefully structured linguistic strategy that enhances consumer perception and message effectiveness.

Results

This study applies Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) to humorous advertisements across different media and yields three main findings.

- (1) At the ideational level, advertisements frequently construct idealized experiences by representing products as agents that enhance everyday life, often through vivid language and supportive imagery.
- (2) At the interpersonal level, advertisers commonly employ imperatives, direct address, and emotional appeals to establish engagement and reduce social distance, fostering positive audience-brand relationships.
- (3) At the textual level, advertising messages are carefully organized through thematic progression and cohesive multimodal design, ensuring clarity, memorability, and effective message delivery.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that humorous advertising gains persuasive strength through the coordinated use of ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions within the framework of Systemic Functional Grammar. By constructing exaggerated scenarios, establishing playful engagement with audiences, and organizing messages coherently, advertisements effectively employ humor to enhance memorability and audience appeal. The findings

highlight the value of SFG as an analytical tool for explaining how linguistic and visual resources interact to produce humor in advertising. Future research may extend this analysis to different cultural contexts and digital platforms to further examine how humor functions across evolving advertising media.

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