LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF ADVERTISEMENTS ON ROAD SAFETY EQUIPMENT IN ENGLISH

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Abstract - Nowadays, the use of road safety equipment to protect ourselves from accidents has become a great necessity in our lives. In this paper, we are interested in eight types of road safety equipment namely *helmets, seat belts, child safety seats, safety vests, safety glasses, safety gloves, safety shoes* and emergency *motor/car kits* with the aim to help customers choose the best and safest equipment for use in traffic. In line with this, we have collected and analyzed online advertisements on these types of road safety equipment with a view to finding out the common linguistic features in terms of their syntactic features, lexical choices and cohesive devices. We do hope that this investigation into advertisements on road safety equipment (ARSEs) at the linguistic level will be beneficial to the teaching and learning of English in Vietnam. This study may also be useful for those who are interested in advertising, especially advertisements on road safety equipment.

Key words - linguistic features; road safety advertisements; syntactic features; lexical choices; cohesive devices.

1. Rationale

Nowadays, road safety has become an increasingly growing public concern since it is closely related to traffic safety. In order to protect ourselves from road accidents, we must equip ourselves with the safest equipment. As a matter of fact, the need for road safety equipment which includes specially designed items to protect people - especially pedestrians, motorcyclists, cyclists, drivers and passengers in transport - from accidents has been increasing rapidly.

There are various kinds of road safety equipment which can help prevent and protect people from accidents. In this article, due to their popularity and necessity, the eight essential kinds of road safety equipment namely *seat belts, child safety seats, helmets, safety vest, safety glasses, safety gloves, safety shoes* and *motor/car kits* are chosen for investigation. These kinds of equipment, especially helmets, are commonly used in our daily lives.

Thanks to the importance of road safety equipment in transport, advertisements on road safety equipment have attracted much of our attention. To seek the information for road safety equipment, customers can look up on newspapers, magazines, televisions or on the Internet. Nowadays, however, searching on the Internet for information as well as advertisements is becoming more and more widespread. In addition, online shopping has been increasingly popular in the world as well as in Vietnam. Therefore, ARSEs in this article are selected from the prestigious websites in the United Kingdom and the United States of America, for instance, www.amazon.com, www.ebay.com, www.bestbuy.com, www.tesco.com, www.argos.co.uk.

This research is conducted with a strong aspiration to help English language students with comprehension and production of the advertising language. Additionally, this study will probably bring students and teachers of English an insight into a number of linguistic features of ARSEs.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Definitions of Terms

- Road Safety Equipment is considered as a set of specially designed items necessary for protecting people from road traffic accidents.

- Advertisements on road safety equipment are the ones that introduce to customers specially designed items necessary for protecting people from road traffic accidents.

All in all, advertisements on road safety equipment in this article are online advertisements in the field of road safety equipment selected from prestigious websites of companies in the United Kingdom and the United States. They provide detailed information about the equipment or the products with a view to influencing the audience as well as persuading them to purchase the equipment or the products.

2.2. Methodology

The aim of the study is to identify and clarify the nature of ARSEs in order to find out their linguistic features in terms of syntactic features, lexical choices and cohesive devices. In order to achieve this aim, we combined different research methods as follows:

The descriptive method is used to give a detailed description of linguistic features of ARSEs.

The analytic method is used to classify and justify a certain feature or characteristic.

The inductive method is helpful in drawing out the generalizations from the findings and making conclusions.

Three criteria for selecting samples have been established: 1-the samples must be advertisements on road safety equipment, 2-the sources of the samples must be the official websites in the United States and the United Kingdom, 3- The samples are from 100 to 300 words in length.

With such set of criteria, 112 ARSEs have been collected to build up the data.

3. Findings and discussion

3.1. Syntactic features of ARSEs

Advertising language has specific characteristics in terms of syntax and syntactic features. In order to make advertisements become more persuasive, advertisers make great efforts to convey the information in the most concise manner. ARSEs are not exceptions. The outstanding syntactic structures in ARSEs are the passive voice, relative clauses, imperative sentences and conditional sentences. In 112 collected ARSEs, the passive voice,

relative clauses, imperative sentences and conditional sentences are used with high percentages for the purpose of making the ARSEs more appealing and persuasive.

Here is the distribution of the passive voice, relative clauses, imperative sentences and conditional sentences in ARSEs.

Table 1. Distribution of Passive Voice, Relative Clauses, Imperative Sentences and Conditional Sentences in ARSEs

Syntactic Structures	Occurrence	%
Relative Clauses	175	20.3
Conditional Sentences	89	10.3
Passive Voice	473	54.8
Imperative Sentences	126	14.6
Total	863	100

Table 1 shows that the passive voice takes up the highest percentage in ARSEs with 54.8%, relative clauses account for 20.3% and imperative sentences and conditional sentences are the lowest with 14.6% and 10.3% respectively. Here are a number of reasons for this trend:

First of all, the passive voice is the most frequent because it makes ARSEs more objective and persuasive. The second reason is that relative clauses make the advertisements concise and succinct. Last but not least, imperative sentences and conditional sentences play important roles in urging customers to purchase the equipment.

In the passive voice, we can see that two auxiliary verbs *be* and *get* are often used in sentences. However, Quirk, R. et al. [5, p.161] argue that the *get*-passive is avoided in formal style, and even in informal English, it is less frequent than the *be*-passive. The reason for this trend is that the *get*-passive puts the emphasis on the subject rather than the agent, and on what happens to the subject as a result of the event.

Conversely, it is interesting to know that, in ARSEs, two cases of the get-passive are found. Here are the examples:

(1) *Sharks first LED helmet:* ***Get seen*** *on those dark nights!*

(http://www.getgeared.co.uk/shark......300)

(2) *The ANSI 2 5-PT Breakaway Safety Vest system keeps you from* ***getting caught*** *on vehicles, machinery, and more.*

(http://www.tsasafety.com/ansi......safety-vest)

Despite accounting for a very small percentage, the *get-passive* shows their necessity in replacing the *be-passive* in cases where there is a potential confusion.

In ARSEs, relative clauses are found to convey the indispensable or vital information about origins, functions, and benefits of the equipment. The following examples are illustrated for each kind.

The origins of equipment

(3) *The helmets,* ***made with a composite fibreglass shell and polystyrene shock absorption liner****, is fully leather liner.*

(http://www.davida.co.uk/type.php?id=speedster)

The equipment's functions

(4) *The Viking wear ANSI 3 DOT safety Vest is designed for jobs and situations* ***that demand maximum visibility****.*

(http://www.tsasafety.com/viking....vest)

The equipment's benefits

(5) *This is a superb warm weather street riding glove* ***that subtly incorporates advanced polymer knuckle guards to provide great impact performance and improved street styling****.*

(http://www.jsaccessories.co.uk/spartan....black.html)

The results also suggest that relative clauses are essential in the advertising language because they help to arouse the reader's attention, proved by the high frequency in ARSEs.

It can be easily seen that the affirmative imperative sentences with a high percentage (85.9%) dominate the negative ones.

Here are some examples of affirmative and negative imperative sentences:

(6) *Get Yours today – because you deserve safety, comfort and peace of mind!*

(http://www.jsaccessories.co.uk/spartan.....black.html)

(7) *Use for Striker Series Goggles only.*

(http://www.amazon.com/FAA.....B00701EIRS)

(8) *Do not purchase this item, unless your seat belt metal tongue's dimensions (where you need the extender) match all the above measurements.*

(http://www.argos.co.uk/static/....2668938)

One of the best ways to increase the consumption of the equipments is to urge customer's immediate action. In example (6) and (7), the verbs *get* and *try* are instances of this action. They appear to urge customers to buy the equipment as soon as possible. Additionally, *get* and *try* connote the meaning of doing the purchase voluntarily, not paying money to buy the equipment. Hence, readers can consider these imperative sentences as recommendations.

In example (8), the negative imperative sentence is used to stress the warning to customers.

In addition to relative clauses, conditional sentences play an important role in ARSEs. The conditional sentence is one of the syntactic features that need studying in advertisements, especially in ARSEs. Before making a decision to buy any equipment, customers often have a strong tendency to wonder whether the chosen equipment is as good as they have expected or not. In this case, making customers believe in the equipment is very important and necessary. In ARSEs, three groups of conditional sentences are identified:

Group 1: persuading customers to buy their equipment with a number of sensible reasons.

(9) *If you are in need of a sturdy helmet for the great outdoors, the VFX-W is one of the best.*

(http://www.revzilla.com/shoei....helmets)

Group 2: giving customers instructions for using the road safety equipment. Below is one example:

(10) *If you intend to wear over a bulky jacket; you will require at least one or two sizes larger than your regular size.*

(http://www.ebay.co.uk/...221655699069)

Group 3: raising questions, making customers feel reasonable to buy the equipment:

(11) *If an accident or personal injury were to occur during your trip, would you be ready to deal with it?*

(http://www.amazon.com/.....B0006MQJ20)

As can be seen from above, the unreal conditional sentences are only used in group 3 with the aim to convince customers to buy the equipment by raising some unexpected situations in traffic. However, this is not a good method in persuasion because readers may feel stressed or doubtful about the equipment at the thought that bad things may happen to them. That is the reason why unreal conditional sentences are not commonly used in ARSEs.

3.2. Weasel words in ARSEs

Hornby [4, p.1745] defines *weasel words* as terms that are deliberately not clear or frank, used when one wishes to avoid committing oneself to a definite statement.

Weasel words have become a powerful device in advertising. Weasel words are used to evade or retreat from a direct or forthright statement or position. Although the ultimate goal of advertising is to persuade readers to buy a certain kind of product, the word "buy" is rarely used in ads. Linghong, [22, p.73] explains that because the word "buy" contains the meaning "to obtain something by giving money" which often makes people associate with their "unwilling outgoing". Accordingly, in ARSEs, we found a wide range of verbs with the connotation of "buy", for example, "give, provide, offer, bring, help, keep, try". Here is an example:

(12) ***Give** your child (and yourself) a smooth and easy ride with the SleekRide Premier Travel System featuring an OnBoard 35 Infant Car Seat with side impact protection.*

(http://www.walmart.com/.....36932147)

The word "give" here connotes the meaning of "causing someone to have something as present", and so it avoids giving readers the impression that they are being persuaded or even lured to do the purchase. The advertisers use weasel words to convince readers that they are trying to offer help with their product or equipment instead of simply selling it out. For example:

(13) ***Provides** protection whilst skating, scootering and skateboarding, with foam padding for extra comfort and fit.*

(http://www.argos.co.uk/....2268424)

(14) *Designed to offer secure protection to the head of your child should they ever require it, **offering** you some peace of mind.*

(http://www.argos.co.uk/...1512975)

In the above examples, a large number of verbs are used in order to persuade the readers to buy the equipment such as *provide, offer, bring*. These verbs belong to the **offer** group. According to Wierzbicka [6, p.191], **offer** has some typical semantic features:

- The speaker thinks of X as something that could be good for the hearer.

- The speaker thinks that the hearer may want it to happen.

Thus, when we offer to do something or a product offers something, we mean that we are willing to do it and will do it if the hearer says that he wants us to do it because X is beneficial to the hearer as the customer.

3.3. Personal reference in ARSEs

According to Halliday and Hasan [1, p.37], personal reference is reference by means of function in the speech situation, through the category of person. The category of personals includes the three classes of personal pronouns, possessive determiners (usually called possessive adjectives) and possessive pronouns. In the collected data, only personal pronouns and possessive determiners were found.

Below are some examples for personal references and possessive determiners:

(15) *In-Mold construction provides strength, integrity and is so lightweight, you'll have to remind yourself that you've got a helmet on at all.*

(http://www.dickiesstore.co.uk/product/FA13310)

(16). *With a harness rated to 65 pounds, the Alpha EliteTM Convertible Car Seat lets you keep your child safely in a harnessed seat for longer.*

(http://www.davida.co.uk/type.php?id=speedster)

It can be easily seen that the use of personal reference **you** and possessive determiner **your** is extremely frequent in ARSEs in private and in advertising in common. Linghong [2, p.74] takes the view that the personal reference **you** and possessive determiner **your** make the language sound warm and friendly, helping to narrow the gap between the advertiser and the reader, and make the advertisements more appealing.

In the above examples, the use of personal reference **you** and possessive determiner **your** make the reader feel that he/she is the particular person the advertisers care about and are eager to help. Through the use of personal reference **you** and possessive determiner **your**, the advertisers try to convince the reader that all the equipment they offer is for his/her particular needs and benefits, and hence persuade the reader to do the purchase.

3.4. Ellipsis in ARSEs

Nunan [3, p.25] defines *ellipsis* that *a certain structural element is omitted from a sentence or clause and only can be recovered by referring to an element in the preceding text*. Ellipsis is normally an anaphoric relation and consists of three types: nominal, verbal and clausal. However, in ARSEs, only nominal and verbal ellipses are found.

Nominal

(17) *This vest is made of soft polyester mesh to keep you cool and has zipper front closure. It includes four front **pockets**, two Φ on chest and two Φ on lower waist.*

(http://www.tsasafety.com/...vest)

In the above example of nominal ellipsis, the noun as the subject of the sentence is omitted and it can be only referred

to the preceding text, which is the name of the equipment.

Verbal

(18) *It still made to the same precise and exacting manufacturing standards as it has always been Φ, although now unable to be approved for road use due to recent regulatory changes. The helmet, made with a composite fibreglass shell and polystyrene shock absorption liner, is fully leather lined.*

(http://www.davida.co.uk/...Leather_Jackets)

The omitting of the verb **made** in the clause **it has always been** makes the sentence more appealing.

3.5. Repetition in ARSEs

Repetition is an expressive means of language used when the speaker is under the stress of strong emotion. It shows the speaker's state of mind. In ARSEs, it is found that repetition is used mainly as a means to bring the specific qualities of the equipment. Let us consider the example below:

(19) *The Premium Flame-Resistant Mesh Safety Vest by Occunomix protects you two ways and keeps you cool too. This safety vest boosts your visibility as well as provides flame resistance. **Plus**, it uses a mesh material for added ventilation. It is constructed of 100% ANSI Modacrylic mesh with NomexThreas FR binding and hook and loop closure. **Plus**, it uses 2''W Flame-Resistant 3M^{TM} Scotchlite^{TM} Reflective Material. One outside pocket for your tools. Material meets ASTM F1506.*

(http://www.safetygearonline.com/...class-2-safety)

In ARSEs, repetition is employed to make the preceding element stand out and to intensify the benefits of the equipment. In addition, the repetition of certain safety expressions can help the reader memorize some safety characteristics of the equipment.

3.6. Conclusion

This article is aimed at clarifying some common linguistic features of ARSEs in terms of syntactic features, lexical features and cohesive devices. Hence, this article was of much benefit not only for writing advertisements on road safety equipment in English on websites but also for the field of teaching and learning English.

To teachers:

The study will probably be a useful resource for teaching English to Vietnamese learners. Hopefully, the result of this study will provide teachers with useful knowledge of linguistic features, especially the linguistic features of ARSES. Additionally, teachers can pay more attention to writing skill to help students know how to write advertisements in general and ARSES in particular effectively.

To English learners:

This study will provide a good knowledge of linguistic features, especially the linguistic features of ARSEs, which help them have a basic background and good methods to write an effective and persuasive ARSE.

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