

STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE USE IN NIGERIAN TV ADVERTS

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Abstract

This study investigates the stylistic and linguistic techniques employed in Nigerian television commercials, focusing on their role in audience engagement, cultural representation, and brand messaging. By analyzing a purposively selected sample of 10 commercials across diverse industries, the research explores how advertisers navigate the interplay between global influences and local traditions. Using Kurt Lewin's Force Field Theory as a framework, the study identifies driving forces (e.g., globalization, aspirational language) and restraining forces (e.g., cultural norms, linguistic diversity) that shape the language of these commercials. Analyzing the data for the study qualitatively and quantitatively reveals that stylistic devices such as

repetition, metaphor, humour, and code-switching between English, Pidgin English, and indigenous languages are central to creating relatable and persuasive messages. The findings highlight the importance of balancing global branding strategies with culturally resonant language to effectively engage Nigeria's diverse audience. This study contributes to understanding how linguistic hybridity and cultural sensitivity in advertising can enhance consumer connection and brand success in multicultural contexts.

Keywords: Audience Engagement, Brand Messaging, Nigerian TV advertisements, Persuasive Language, Stylistic Analysis

Introduction

The language of advertising is one of the most powerful tools of persuasion, blending creativity, cultural resonance, and linguistic strategies to capture audience attention. In Nigeria, television commercials are an especially vibrant medium for advertisement due to their ability to combine audio-visual elements with culturally tailored language to appeal to diverse demographics. The linguistic choices in Nigerian TV commercials often draw upon the nation's rich linguistic landscape, which includes English (often in its Nigerian variety), Pidgin English, and indigenous languages such as Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa. These commercials reflect the dynamic interplay between formal advertising norms and the informal, localized language features that resonate with Nigerian audiences.

Stylistics, as a field of study, analyzes how linguistic elements—such as syntax, diction, tone, and rhetorical devices—create meaning and influence perception. The stylistic study of Nigerian TV commercials is particularly intriguing because it provides insights into how language choices are tailored to a multicultural society and a

diverse consumer base. Nigerian advertisers often infuse their messaging with cultural idioms, humour, proverbs, and emotional appeals that reflect societal values, shared experiences, and localized expressions.

In the context of globalization, where multinational companies produce adverts targeted at Nigerian audiences, there is a delicate balancing act between retaining cultural authenticity and incorporating global branding standards. This stylistic analysis explores how language is crafted to achieve persuasion in this cultural and linguistic context. The study examines the interplay of formality, informality, linguistic hybridity, and creativity in the language of Nigerian TV commercials, focusing on their effectiveness in audience engagement.

Television commercials in Nigeria play a significant role in shaping public discourse and consumer behaviour. However, there is a limited understanding of the stylistic and linguistic strategies employed in these commercials and how they resonate with the diverse cultural landscape of the country. Despite the critical role of language in advertising, previous studies have often overlooked the interplay between stylistic choices and audience engagement within the Nigerian context. This serves as statement of the problem for the study. This gap in research necessitates an exploration of how advertisers use language to navigate cultural, social, and economic complexities while effectively conveying brand messages.

The objective of the study is to investigate the stylistic and linguistic techniques used in Nigerian TV commercials and their relationship to audience engagement, cultural representation, and brand messaging.

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Literature Review

The Role of Language in Advertising

The language of advertising has been extensively studied for its persuasive power, with foundational works by Geoffrey Leech (*English in Advertising*) and Guy Cook (*The Discourse of Advertising*) identifying the linguistic strategies that appeal to logic, emotion, and culture (45). These studies highlight how language in advertisements relies heavily on rhetorical devices such as repetition, puns, metaphors, and slogans to create memorable messages.

Stylistics in Advertising

Stylistics examines how linguistic features—phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics—are used to create meaning. According to Simpson, stylistics analyzes both form (the linguistic structure) and function (the communicative effect) (45). In advertising, stylistic elements like alliteration, rhythm, hyperbole, and direct address (e.g., “you”) are frequently employed to establish rapport with the audience. Nigerian TV commercials, however, stand out for their integration of localized stylistic choices, which often reflect sociolinguistic realities.

Linguistic Hybridity in Nigerian Advertising

Studies on Nigerian advertisements, for instance, Adetunji and Odebunmi, emphasize the prevalence of linguistic hybridity, where Standard English, Nigerian Pidgin English, and indigenous languages are mixed to reflect Nigeria's multicultural society (45). This hybridity enables advertisers to connect with various social groups while reinforcing the cultural identity of the product. For instance, brands targeting urban youth often incorporate Pidgin English, which is widely understood and considered a lingua franca for informal communication (46). Similarly, advertisements targeting older or rural audiences may employ proverbs or expressions from indigenous languages to evoke trust and familiarity.

Cultural Context and Advertising

Language in Nigerian commercials is deeply tied to cultural narratives. Okoro and Agbo argue that Nigerian advertisements often draw from oral traditions, such as the use of proverbs, folktales, and call-and-response techniques, which resonate strongly with audiences (112). Humour, emotional appeals, and communal values also play critical roles in shaping the message. Furthermore, advertisers use culturally relevant symbols and imagery to enhance the effectiveness of their language. For example, advertisements for food products

may reference communal dining experiences, while those for mobile networks emphasize themes of family connection and success (115).

Stylistic Trends in Nigerian TV Commercials

Recent studies by Ezeifeka observe that Nigerian TV commercials frequently adopt storytelling approaches that blend humour with aspirational messaging (78). The stylistic use of imperatives—for example, “Buy now!”, “Hurry!”—intertextuality (referencing popular songs, sayings, or current events), and code-switching between languages are common features (80). Such strategies create a sense of immediacy, relatability, and cultural alignment with the audience.

Oluikpe's study highlights the strategic use of code-switching between Standard English, Nigerian Pidgin, and indigenous languages as a dominant stylistic feature in Nigerian advertisements. The research demonstrates that this linguistic flexibility allows brands to cater to diverse demographics, reinforcing both modernity (through English) and cultural authenticity (through local languages). For instance, commercials for telecommunications companies like MTN and Glo often blend English slogans with Pidgin catchphrases for example, “You don cash out?” to appeal to urban youth while maintaining broad market reach (56). Additionally, the study notes that code-switching in advertisements often follows socio-linguistic hierarchies, where English conveys prestige, Pidgin fosters relatability, and indigenous languages evoke tradition and trust among rural consumers (59).

Adebite and Oyetade's work explores humour as a rhetorical device in Nigerian TV commercials, arguing that it enhances memorability and emotional engagement. The study identifies three key humour styles prevalent in adverts:

- a. Slapstick comedy (example, exaggerated facial expressions in detergent adverts),
- b. Pun-based wordplay (example double meanings in telecom ads like “Data is Life”),
- c. Satirical portrayals of everyday Nigerian struggles (e.g., traffic jams in bank commercials).

The study emphasizes that humour, when combined with **cultural references** (such as popular Nollywood tropes or local sayings), strengthens brand relatability (42). For example, the “Airtel 'Data Is Life'” campaign humorously depicts Nigerians prioritizing mobile data over basic needs—a hyperbolic yet culturally resonant narrative that boosted audience connection (45).

Theoretical Framework

Kurt Lewin's Force Field Theory, initially developed in the 1940s as a psychological model for analyzing change, provides a valuable lens for examining the stylistic dynamics of language in Nigerian TV commercials. Though not originally designed for linguistic or media studies, its core principles—centered on the interplay between driving and restraining forces—can be adapted to understand how advertisers navigate competing influences in a multicultural society like Nigeria. The theory posits that behaviour (or, in this case, linguistic and stylistic choices) is shaped by a dynamic equilibrium between forces that promote change and those that resist it. In the context of Nigerian advertising, this framework helps explain how globalized marketing trends interact with deeply rooted cultural and linguistic norms to produce the unique stylistic features observed in commercials.

Nigerian TV advertisements exist at the intersection of multiple linguistic and cultural forces. On one hand, driving forces—such as globalization, digital media trends, and corporate branding strategies—push advertisers toward standardized, Western-influenced language styles. This includes the use of English as a lingua franca for broader appeal, aspirational messaging that aligns with global consumerism, and modern slang to engage younger, urban audiences. On the other hand, restraining forces—such as Nigeria's linguistic diversity, traditional oral storytelling conventions, and audience expectations—encourage the retention of culturally resonant elements. These include the incorporation of Nigerian Pidgin, indigenous proverbs, call-and-response techniques, and humour rooted in local experiences. The resulting stylistic hybridity reflects a constant negotiation between these opposing pressures, where advertisers must balance international appeal with cultural authenticity.

Lewin's three-stage model of change—unfreezing, moving, and refreezing—further elucidates how stylistic norms in Nigerian advertising evolve. The unfreezing stage occurs when traditional advertising conventions are challenged, such as through the introduction of digital marketing language or globalized slogans. The moving phase involves experimentation, where advertisers blend foreign and local linguistic styles—for example, mixing English catchphrases with Pidgin expressions or weaving folktale motifs into modern narratives. Finally, the refreezing stage sees the stabilization of new stylistic norms, such as the now-common practice of code-switching between languages or using culturally embedded humour to enhance relatability.

This theoretical framework supports the practical

analysis of Nigerian TV commercials by providing a structured way to examine why certain linguistic choices dominate and how they shift over time. For instance, a telecom ad may employ English for prestige (“Get the fastest network!”) but switch to Pidgin for emotional connection (“Why you go wait?”), demonstrating a strategic response to both driving and restraining forces. Similarly, food commercials might use indigenous proverbs to evoke tradition while adopting fast-paced, youthful language to attract modern consumers. By applying Force Field Theory, researchers can systematically analyze these stylistic decisions, revealing how advertisers navigate cultural expectations while pursuing innovation.

Ultimately, Lewin's theory underscores that the language of Nigerian advertising is not static but a living, adaptive system shaped by continuous tension between global influences and local identity. This perspective enriches the stylistic analysis of TV commercials by framing linguistic choices as deliberate responses to sociocultural pressures, offering deeper insights into how Nigeria's multilingual and multicultural realities are reflected—and strategically manipulated—in advertising discourse.

Connection of the theories to the application of the study

1. Global vs. Local Tensions: The theory explains why adverts for international brands (example, Coca-Cola) use more English, while local brands (example, Indomie) lean into Pidgin and indigenous languages.
2. Stylistic Evolution: It accounts for trends like the rise of Pidgin in youth-targeted ads (a “moving” phase response to digital culture) or the revival of proverbs in heritage branding (a “restraining” cultural force).
3. Strategic Hybridity: Advertisers' use of code-switching or humour can be mapped as equilibrium-seeking strategies, balancing persuasion and cultural legitimacy.

This approach not only clarifies stylistic patterns but also predicts future shifts in Nigerian advertising language as societal forces continue to evolve.

Methodology

The analysis below integrates qualitative and quantitative methods, along with sampling techniques, to evaluate how these forces shape the language of each commercial.

Research Design:

1. Data Collection Method

Purposive Sampling: Ten (10) Nigerian TV commercials were selected based on their popularity, linguistic

diversity, and representation across different industries: food, telecom, hygiene, beverages, etc.

Content Analysis: Each advert was transcribed, and stylistic devices for instance, repetition, metaphor, humour, code-switching, etc were identified.

Qualitative Analysis focuses on linguistic features, cultural context, and thematic content. The technique used is that of content analysis to identify stylistic features that represent driving or restraining forces. The primary purpose is to explore how language mediates between global aspirations and local cultural norms.

Quantitative Analysis focuses on measuring the frequency of linguistic features, for example, repetition, metaphor, cultural references and audience reception metrics, for example, engagement, and recall rates. The techniques used is coding stylistic elements and conducting statistical analyses to identify dominant patterns. The primary purpose is to quantify the impact of stylistic choices on audience engagement.

Force Field Theory Application: Each advert was analyzed in terms of driving forces (factors enhancing appeal) and restraining forces (factors limiting effectiveness).

2. Sources of Data

The commercials were sourced from: YouTube Channels: Official brand pages, e.g., MTN Nigeria, Peak Milk Nigeria.

Television Broadcasts: Channels like Africa Magic, NTA, TVC.

Advertising Archives: Nigerian Advertising Regulatory Bodies, Brand Websites.

Social Media Platforms: Instagram, Facebook, Twitter/X, where brands share ad campaigns.

3. Sampling Technique:

Purposive sampling to select commercials that represent diverse industries, cultural narratives, and stylistic approaches was employed. Here are other reasons why purposive sampling was chosen for this study:

1. Targeted Selection of Relevant Data - Since the research focuses on linguistic and stylistic patterns, purposive sampling allows for a deliberate selection of commercials that are under investigation for instance, adverts with code-switching, humour, proverbs, or multilingual elements.
2. Ensures Diversity and Representation - Nigeria's advertising landscape is diverse, with variations based on product type for instance, telecoms vs. food), target audience (urban vs. rural), and language use (English, Pidgin, indigenous languages). Purposive sampling ensures coverage of these key categories.

3. Theoretical Relevance - Unlike random sampling, purposive sampling aligns with qualitative research goals, where depth and contextual richness matter more than statistical generalizability.
4. Common in Media and Discourse Studies - Similar stylistic analyses for instance, studies on advertising language, political rhetoric, or film discourse, often use purposive sampling to curate the most analytically valuable texts.
5. Sample Size: 10 commercials spanning food, telecommunications, healthcare, and personal care industries, reflecting both rural and urban target audiences.

Justification for a Sample Size of 10 TV Commercials

1. Depth Over Breadth - Stylistic analysis is qualitative and requires close textual examination of language features for instance, code-switching, humour, metaphors. A smaller sample allows for detailed, nuanced analysis rather than superficial coverage of many adverts.
2. Comparative Analysis - Since the 10 adverts are diverse for instance, different industries, languages, or time periods, they can effectively illustrate the range of stylistic techniques used in Nigerian advertising.

Practical Constraints - TV advert analysis involves coding, and repeated viewing. Therefore, a sample of 10 adverts balances rigor with feasibility.

Analysis of Each Advertisement Using Force Field Theory

1. Orijin Bitters - "The Original Spirit" (2023)
Source: YouTube - Orijin Nigeria
Driving Forces: Use of Nigerian Pidgin and indigenous languages, cultural pride messaging.
Restraining Forces: Religious objections to alcohol consumption in conservative regions.
2. Dangote Cement - "Building Together" (2024)
Source: Dangote Group Official Website
Driving Forces: Patriotic messaging, emphasis on national development.
Restraining Forces: High cost of cement limits relatability for low-income consumers.
3. Cowbell Milk - "Energy for Every Dream" (2023)
Source: Cowbell Nigeria YouTube
Driving Forces: Motivational language, school-focused themes.
Restraining Forces: Competition from imported milk brands.

4. GOTV - "More Drama, More Fun" (2024)
Source: GOTV Nigeria Instagram
Driving Forces: Humorous Nollywood-style acting, Pidgin English usage.
Restraining Forces: Limited reach in areas with poor satellite TV coverage.
5. Bournvita - "Stay Strong" (2023)
Source: Cadbury Nigeria TV Ad
Driving Forces: Health-focused messaging, celebrity endorsements.
Restraining Forces: Rising cost reduces accessibility for lower-income families.
6. Pepsi - "Naija No Dey Carry Last" (2023)
Source: Pepsi Nigeria YouTube
Driving Forces: Nationalistic slogan, celebrity cameos (for instance, Burna Boy).
Restraining Forces: Health concerns over sugary drinks.
7. Hypo Bleach - "Cleaner Than Clean" (2024)
Source: Hypo Nigeria TV Commercial
Driving Forces: Exaggerated claims of cleanliness, humorous scenarios.
Restraining Forces: Skepticism over chemical safety.
8. Airtel - "Data is Life" (2023)
Source: Airtel Nigeria Advert
Driving Forces: Relatable internet struggles, youthful slang.
Restraining Forces: Network issues in remote areas.
9. Golden Penny Pasta - "Quick and Tasty" (2024)
Source: Golden Penny TV Ad
Driving Forces: Family-oriented messaging, affordability emphasis.
Restraining Forces: Health concerns over processed foods.
10. Lux Beauty Soap - "Soft and Glowing" (2023)
Source: Lux Nigeria Instagram
Driving Forces: Celebrity endorsements (for instance, Genevieve Nnaji), aspirational beauty standards.
Restraining Forces: High cost compared to local alternatives.

This study highlights how Nigerian advertisers balance globalization with local culture through language. Force Field Theory helps identify what makes an advert successful (driving forces) and what limits its reach (restraining forces). The analysis shows that code-switching, humour, repetition, and cultural motifs

enhance engagement, while economic barriers, regional skepticism, and infrastructure issues can hinder effectiveness.

Discussion of Findings

1. Patterns in Driving Forces:
 - a. Aspirational language and inclusivity are dominant strategies across industries.
 - b. Emphasis on global values such as vitality, confidence, and connectivity aligns with urban audience preferences.
2. Patterns in Restraining Forces:
 - a. Cultural, economic, and infrastructural challenges frequently resist globalized stylistic approaches.
 - b. Health consciousness and regional preferences act as significant barriers.
3. Quantitative Insights:
 - a. Repetition and metaphor were the most frequently used stylistic devices (present in 80% of commercials).
 - b. Humour and local language (Pidgin) showed the highest engagement rates, particularly among younger audiences.
4. Qualitative Insights:
 - a. The interplay of global and local elements is key to effective messaging.
 - b. Advertisers who balance driving and restraining forces tend to achieve the highest audience engagement.

The findings highlight that successful Nigerian TV adverts strike a balance between global branding strategies and culturally resonant messaging. While linguistic creativity, humour, and repetition enhance engagement, economic disparities, regional skepticism, and infrastructure limitations often restrain full market effectiveness.

This study underscores the importance of audience segmentation-urban-centric campaigns may not always resonate in rural areas, and vice versa. Future research could explore real-time consumer feedback through social media analytics to refine advertising strategies further.

Conclusion

The stylistic analysis of the language used in Nigerian TV commercials reveals a rich tapestry of linguistic and cultural practices. Advertisers in Nigeria employ a wide range of stylistic devices to create persuasive messages that resonate with their target audiences. This includes the use of rhetorical techniques such as repetition, direct address, and vivid imagery, as well as the strategic incorporation of linguistic hybridity through code-

switching between English, Pidgin English, and indigenous languages.

Moreover, the cultural sensitivity evident in Nigerian TV commercials demonstrates the importance of aligning language with societal values and norms. Advertisers draw from traditional practices, such as the use of proverbs and storytelling, to evoke emotional connections while blending modern branding techniques to appeal to a contemporary audience.

The stylistic language of Nigerian TV commercials serves as a powerful medium for communication and cultural representation. It not only reflects the linguistic diversity of the nation but also underscores the adaptability of language to meet commercial goals. Future research could explore the role of non-verbal elements (e.g., visuals, music) in complementing the linguistic features and how they collectively influence audience perception and consumer behaviour.

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