

# The Use of Idioms in Advertisements

استخدام التعبيرات الاصطلاحية في الاعلانات

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## Abstract

The power of advertising is immense. Producers of commercial goods and services routinely pour vast sums into promoting their wares through the advertising media, knowing that a successful campaign can win them vital market share , and that failure to advertise effectively can have devastating results . The function of advertising is promotional ; to draw our attention. In order to achieve this function it must reach its target audience , then capture that audience with a message that is both attractive and memorable.

From a linguistic point of view, the language of advertising must be informative, instructive , distinctive and persuasive . It must employ a style of language that will help in attracting people`s attention and at the same time passing the information across . One of the linguistic devices used in advertising is the use of idioms. Idioms are used in advertisements because they are familiar to most potential customers in a society , where an element of an idiom is slightly changed or replaced by another word to create a pun and consequently a connection with a product.

Idioms are frequently used in commercial advertisements as a rhetorical device to promote a given product by creating humor, attracting the reader`s attention and adding persuasive force to the message . They also reflect the cultural preferences and traditions of the country, therefore they can be fruitfully used for pedagogic purposes to raise awareness of the specific linguistic and cultural features of the foreign language.

The research discusses the use of idioms in advertisements by analyzing examples chosen randomly from the advertisements websites. It also discusses the concept of advertisements , the language of advertising and the use of idioms in advertisements.

## 1- Advertising

Advertising has been defined as " a powerful communication force and a vital marketing tool helping to sell goods and services, image and ideas" ( Wright, 1983: 8). It is a message that seeks influence; a communication system that reaches out to an unknown audience and intends to affect and inform. Advertising may also be seen as " a group of activities aiming at and including dissemination of information in any paid product or service to compel action in accordance with the intent of identifiable sponsor " ( Doghudje, 1985: 8).

Advertisements are predominately used for commercial purposes; especially for the so called consumer advertising where the intention of of the ad is the marketing of a certain product. Commercials and advertisements function by means of persuasion – the messages are defined in a manner that influences the way the consumer perceives goods.

The expression " advertising" derives from the medieval Latin verb " advertere" and means " to direct one`s attention " . Advertising has a long history , Wright ( 1983:4) points that advertising started in ancient Babylon in about 3000 B.C when inscriptions for an ointment dealer, a scribe and a shoe maker were made on clay tablets. Sandage and Fryburager( 1963: 6) argue that Egyptians first wrote runaway- slave announcements on papyrus at about 3200 B.C . While in Greece and Rome lost – and- found advertising on papyrus was common. Wall or rock paintings for commercial advertising is another manifestation of an ancient media advertising form.

As the economy and trade were expanding during the 19<sup>th</sup> century the need for advertising grew. Gradually, advertising transformed into a modern, more scientific and sophisticated concept. New visual techniques have been launched. Not only the content of the message is important, but also the form.

Bloor and Bloor (2007) state that advertisements can come in a multitude of shapes and via different media :print,film,radio,electronic( the internet, electronic billboards,etc). Most often, advertisements are multimodel, exploiting both linguistic and pictorial resources. They may involve human or animal actors or animations. They can contain hundreds of words,one word or no words at all. Sometimes they don`t even mention the thing they are advertising, but rely on intertextuality and mutual knowledge to make the connection.

It goes without saying that advertising means promotion of goods, services and companies and that marketers see advertising as part of an overall promotional strategy. Geoffrey Leech(1966:25) states that the most frequent and important type of advertising is " commercial consumer advertising" ; advertising directed towards a mass audience with the aim of promoting sales of a commercial product or service. However ,Woods(2006: 6-30) states that not all forms of advertising are aimed at simply selling commodities; ( social advertising) are companies that encourage us, for instance, to give up smoking , avoid speeding or donate money to charitable affairs. Moreover, (political advertising) has been a key weapon in the armory of politicians , and not necessarily in its most obvious form. As an example of non- commercial advertising, we may mention appeals from associations and societies whether their purposes are charity or political propaganda:

**" Thanks to the Unicef, this little girl in Somalia knows she won't have to quit her school"**

## **2-TheLanguageofAdvertisements**

Rodenrick (1980:4) defines advertising as " a message specified by its originator, carried by a communication system and intended to influence and\ or inform an unknown audience" , and since human language serves as a means of cognition and communication; it follows that advertising is a kind of communication between the creator of advertisement and the consumer. That communication seeks to persuade the consumer to purchase goods or services. The message of the advertisement may address us directly or indirectly, subtle or even subliminal. The function is to draw our attention with a message that is both attractive and memorable.

Leech(1966:25) posits that " most advertising language comes under the broader heading of " loaded language" that is aimed to change the will, opinions or attitudes of its audience" Leech refers to the general style used in advertising as public colloquial because formal language is difficult, therefore advertiser favor a colloquial style to make contact with the general public regardless of their level of education.

In their study,Ezejdeaku and Ugwu (2010)discuss some of the linguistic devices used in advertising and they include:

1-Alliteration: this involves the repetition of speech sound in a sequence of nearly words; e.g. Peak of the Pack (milk advert).

2- Idiophones: this refers to words whose meanings are derived from their sounds.

3- Repetition: this is a situation in which a particular word is repeated in the same construction for either emphasis or memorability; e.g. Sharp Mind, Sharp Product (Sharp`s advert for cameras)

4- Acronyms: this is a kind of shortening device whereby the first letter of several words are picked out and pronounced together to derive a new word. e.g. BOGOF (MTN telephone company advert) the word BOGOF is an acronym for: buy one, get one free.

5- Personification: this attributes human qualities to non-human entities.

6-Pun: this refers to play upon words that are almost identical in sound but contrast sharply in meaning ;e.g. The Real Virgin has Arrived ( Virgin Airline advert)

7- Clichés: a cliché may be described as a saying which has become trite because of over- use; e.g. All That Glitters is no Gold ( Skoda Fabio car advert).

In her thesis Lapsanska( 2006:27) states that " advertising language often uses the techniques similar to those in poetic texts. The advantage of so- called mnemonic devices( rhyme, rhythm, alliteration and assonance) is the mnemonical effect. It guarantees that the receiver of the advertisement better remembers the text and recalls it at the right moment".

In addition, Lapsanska( 2006: 32-38) discusses the use of certain lexical means in advertisements including:

- 1- Fixed phrases, idioms and collocation ( A smooth Move Hair Removal from Head-to- Toe)
- 2- Quotations of famous people and statements of historical persons ( I think, therefore I Mac)
- 3- Proverbs and sayings
- 4- Names of literary work, films or television programmes (Not Trying would be a Greek Tragedy)
- 5- Formation of new words and phrases( neologisms), e.g ( don`t send jobs to India, send them to Idaho! LOL)
- 6- Blending: it is a process of fusing the elements of two different words, e.g.( Egg is the least Eggspensive form of nutrition).

Wordplay has been shown to be an effective means of fulfilling the persuasive function of promotional language in business communication by capturing and holding the reader`s attention. "Wordplay or ( pun) is a witticism that are frequently used in commercial advertising as a rhetorical device to promote a given product... puns that rely on the different meanings of polysemic words, literal and non-literal senses of idioms and bringing two homonyms together produce witty remarks that are used for its effect on playing with different levels of language" ( Laviosa,2005: 25) ,( see for comparison, Zahra Akbari,2004: 1-6)

### 3- Idioms in Advertisements

An idiom is an expression ( term or phrase) whose meaning cannot be deduced from literal definitions and the arrangements of its parts, but refers instead to a figurative meaning that is known only through conventional use. In linguistics, idioms are figures of speech that contradict the principle of compositionality (the principle- which tells the meaning of a complex expression is determined by the meanings of its constituent's expression and the rules used to combine them. ( Richards and Schmidt,2002:42 ; Fromkin and Rodman,1988:236-239).

Idioms have multiword character ,they are fixed and they have common figurative meaning. "Idioms are conventionally defined as clusters of words whose meaning cannot be read off their constituent parts, although it is important not to lose sight of the often metaphorical origin of a particular idiom "(Simpson, 2004: 93) e.g :

### **She washed her hands of the matter**

The figurative meaning is :she refused to have anything to do with the matter

According to (lapsanksa,2006:36) idioms are used in advertisements because these constructions are familiar to most potential customers in a society. The idiom or a proverb in a text may be used without formal changes, or in a creative way. Where an element of an idiom is slightly changed or replaced by another word to create a pun and, consequently a connection with a product; e.g.

### **All that glitters is style ( the advertisement of Skoda Fabia car)**

This is an obvious deconstruction or replacement of the popular idiom ( All that glitters is no gold)

If the picture accompanies the text, the picture usually does not represent the figurative, but it represents the image and the representation of the literal meaning and its constituents ;e.g

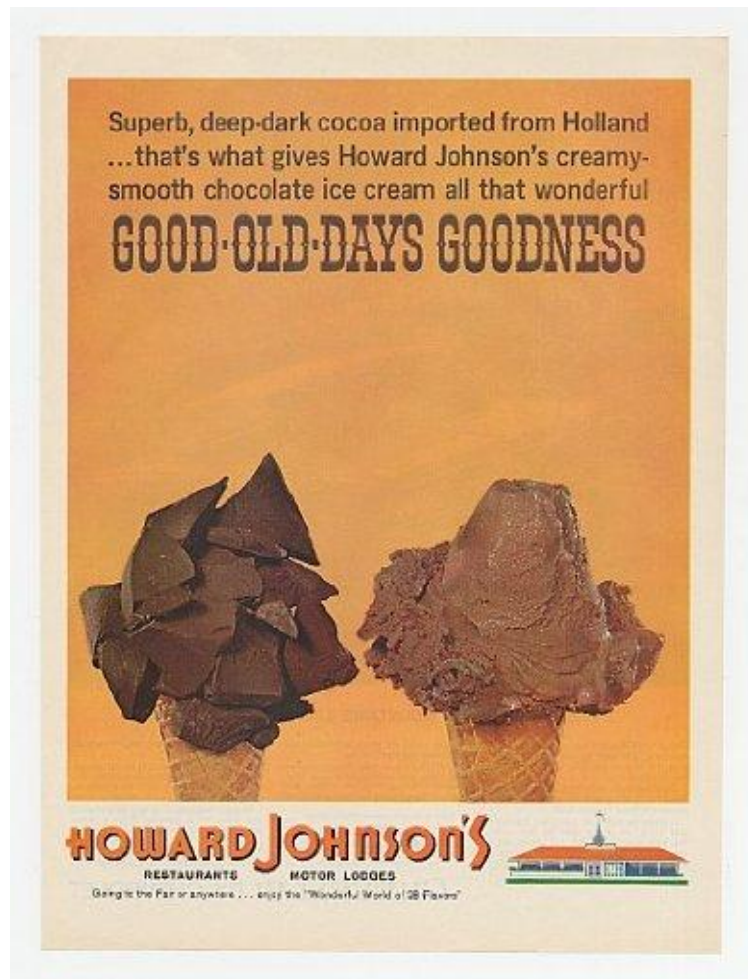
**Challenge us- and get yourself a bigger slice of the cake** ( Siemens Financial Services advertisement)

The idiom ( bigger slice of the cake) means a share of the available money or benefits that you have a right to, the picture of the ad represents two happy young women eating a cake.

#### **4- Analysis of Idioms in Advertisements**

##### **1-Good Old Days Goodness :**

The expression (good old days) is a popular BBC television light entertainment programme which ran from 1953 to 1983 . As an idiomatic expression it means a time in the past when you believe life was better. In this ad the idiom is used to describe the one of a kind flavor of Howard Johnson ice cream



## 2- Blow your Mind Away :

The original meaning of this idiom that :to overwhelm someone and to excite him . In this ad, it is used to describe the amazing taste of (Burger King) and since the meaning of the idiom means to overwhelm someone because it is exactly surprising , the picture of the ad pictures a woman who is astonished , opening her mouth and ready to taste the Burger King.





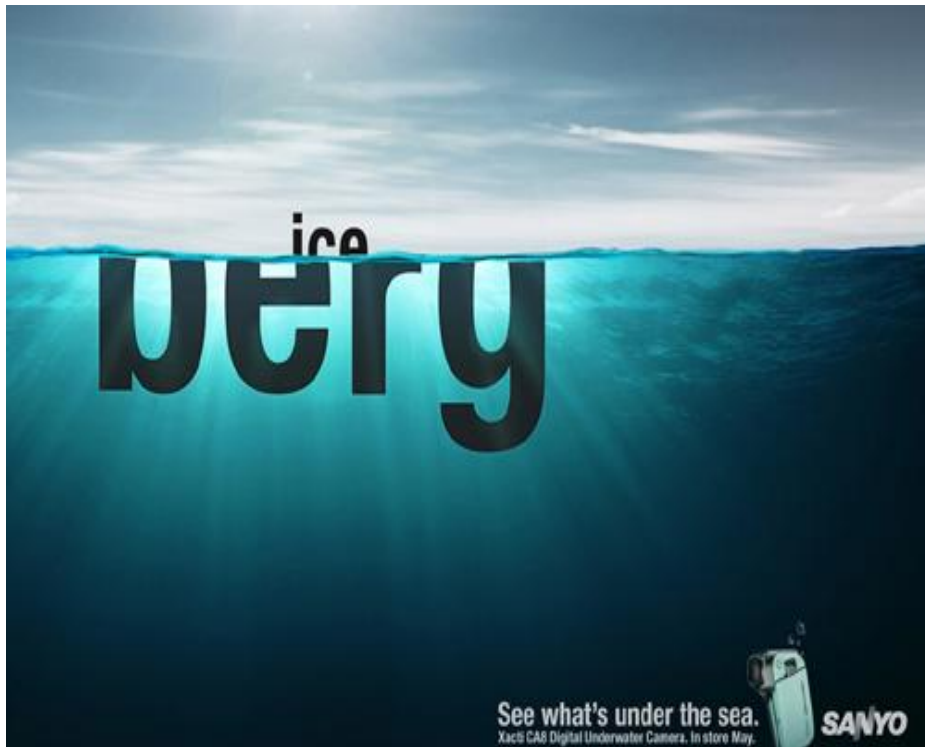
### 3- It Grows on Trees :

The idiom (doesn't grow on trees) is used to give the meaning of not being abundant, or expendable. In this ad, the positive form of the idiom is used to give the consumer the impression that he can drink as much as he desires from (Sun- Ripe) juices because simply they are abundant.



#### 4- Tip of Iceberg:

The meaning of the idiom : a small evident part or aspect of something largely hidden. The ad pictures the new techniques of Sanyo digital camera used under water. The idiom is used to give the impression that the sea hides unseen world and Sanyo camera is capable of picturing the hidden world, the picture of the ad magnifies the word (berg) to shed light on the idea that only Sanyo can make invisible hidden part of the sea visible to everyone.



### **5- To Make a Hash of it :**

The idiom was used to announce for the London Olympics 2012. The original meaning of the idiom is that : hash is a dish of chopped meat, potatoes and vegetables and usually browned and the idiom means reworking or restatement of already familiar material. The ad shows the London Olympics torch and a sentence which says( we promise not to make a hash of it ) ; it means that the Olympic team promises that the event will be original, innovative and surprising.



## 6- Flag a Dead Horse :

The ad shows (Pedigree) food for dogs, with the idiom in an interrogative pattern (who said you can't flog a dead horse?). The original meaning of the idiom is :to insist on talking about something that no one is interested in, or that has already been through discussed. The use of the idiom in the ad makes use of the negative form of the idiom; it means that we can discuss the great qualities of ( Pedigree) over and over again because simply we are the best.

# Who said you can't flog a dead horse?



**Pedigree**

We're for dogs

## 7- Think Small :

The ad promotes for VolgesWagen small cars. The expression used (think small) is the opposite of the well-known idiom (think big) which means that one should have big hopes, dreams and plans for the future. The ad wants to say that one should change the attitude , make an exception and think small by buying VolgesVaagen cars .



## Think small.

Our little car isn't so much of a novelty any more.  
 A couple of dozen college kids don't try to squeeze inside it.  
 The guy at the gas station doesn't ask where the gas goes.  
 Nobody even stores at our shape.  
 In fact, some people who drive our little

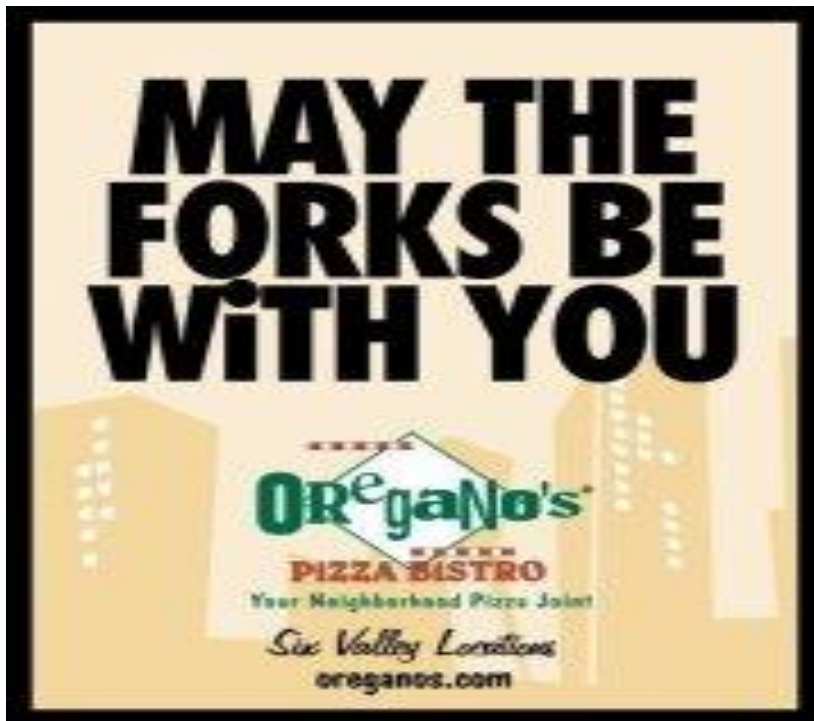
flivver don't even think 32 miles to the gallon is going any great guns.  
 Or using five pints of oil instead of five quarts.  
 Or never needing anti-freeze.  
 Or racking up 40,000 miles on a set of tires.  
 That's because once you get used to

some of our economies, you don't even think about them any more.  
 Except when you squeeze into a small parking spot. Or renew your small insurance. Or pay a small repair bill.  
 Or trade in your old VW for a new one.  
 Think it over.



### 8- May the Forks be with you :

The original idiomatic expression ( May God be with you) which is used as a prayer asking for God`s mercy and protection. The ad shows the use of the idiom in a different form to suit the promotion of the restaurant in order to encourage people to get into it. The word (forks) was added as a touch of humor.



**9- Get your Hands on :**

The idiom ( get your hands on it) means to have , get and own something. The ad shows a picture of Toyota car and the sentence ( get your hands on a Toyota) to encourage us to buy one.

# Get Your Hands On a TOYOTA

James Bond Did.

Toyota gave James Bond the features he needed: speed, agility and lots of electronic gadgets. And Toyota has designed a car for your needs. Not TOYOTA CORONA Corona's 90 HP engine lets you keep up with fast-moving traffic easily. It quietly hurries you along at maximum highway speeds... even tops 90 mph. Yet owners report up to 30 miles per gallon. Corona's 47 safety and comfort features help not just speed, but they make dollar sense for you. They're included at no extra cost. There is also the option of driving Toyota Corona with automatic transmission. Even if you were James Bond, you couldn't have driving pleasure any better. **\$1760**



Optional automatic drive shaft. 47 safety and comfort features. 90 HP engine. 47 safety and comfort features. 90 HP engine. 47 safety and comfort features. 90 HP engine.



**TOYOTA**  
CORONA

Get Your Hands On a TOYOTA ... You'll Never Let Go!

TOYOTA, Japan's No. 1 Automobile Manufacturer

66-1000-1000

## Conclusions

-Advertising is widely regarded as the driving force behind our consumerist culture; it is a stunning powerful means of communication and it mixes in a highly interactive way with genres of modern art like music and films.



- Advertising slogans or catchphrases pass into everyday usage to draw our attention and keep in our minds the availability and desirability of a product, service or brand.

- In order to reach its target audience, advertisements need to be attractive and memorable. Much of the power of advertising derives from language; no other field is so much creative in producing so few, carefully chosen words.

- One of the most intriguing aspects of the creative language used in advertisements is idioms . The idiom is a group of words that has a special meaning that is different from the ordinary meaning of each separate word. Idioms are fixed and they have common figurative meaning.

- The research focuses on the fact that idioms have been shown to be an effective means of fulfilling the persuasive function of promotional language in advertisements. They are used because they are familiar to most potential consumers. Idioms may be slightly changed to create a pun and consequently a connection with a product.

- Unfamiliar idioms and partial knowledge of the meaning of idioms can result into wrong deduction of figurative meaning of idioms and consequently undermine the effectiveness of the message intended by the advertisement. The research has dealt with examples where additional information and explanation are necessary to explain the figurative meaning of idioms to consumers whose English language is not their native language.

- Idioms reflect the cultural preferences and traditions of a country, therefore; advertisements which employ idioms can provide us with an excellent opportunity to learn about different languages and cultures.

- Knowing the specific cultural context that gives rise to an advertisement is often essential to disambiguate the subtle intended meaning conveyed by the creative use of promotional language.

- Since idioms are the mirror of cultural aspects of a society, they can be fruitfully used for pedagogic targets to enrich the field of foreign language studies based on the specific linguistic features of these languages.

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## استخدام التعبيرات الاصطلاحية في الاعلانات

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### ملخص البحث

للأعلانات تأثير كبير ، ولذلك يسعى اصحاب الصناعات والماركات التجارية لتوظيف الاعلانات بغية الترويج لبضائعهم وتخصيص مبالغ ضخمة تُرصد للترويج عن منتجاتهم . ولأن الغاية هي الوصول للمستهلك ، لذلك يجب ان ينجح الاعلان في لفت نظر المستهلك عن طريق اعلان لافت وجذاب وناجح .

من الناحية اللغوية ، يتوجب على الاعلان التجاري ان يكون واضحا ومقنعا وغنيًا بالمعلومات . ومن الاساليب اللغوية الشائعة في الاعلانات هي توظيف التعبيرات الاصطلاحية خاصة المعروفة منها ، اذ يتم توظيف هذه التعبيرات الاصطلاحية لأغراض بلاغية ويجري تبديل بعض اجزاء المصطلح بما يتوافق ونوع البضاعة المطلوب ترويجها وتسويقها . الامر الذي يخلق اثرا فكاهيا في بعض الاحيان فضلا عن تعميق الدور الاقناعي الذي يتوجب على الاعلان الناجح القيام به – بعد نجاحه في لفت نظر المستهلك - اضافة لما للمصطلح من تأثير حميمي كونه يتأصل في لغة وثقافة المستهلك . ولذلك يمكن توظيف الاعلانات لأغراض تعليمية نظرا لما تنطوي عليه دراستها من رفع الجانب التوعوي بأهمية المزايا الثقافية واللغوية الكامنة في دراسة اللغات الاجنبية .

يتناول هذا البحث مفهوم الاعلانات و لغتها واستخدام المصطلحات فيها وكيفية توظيفها باختيار مجموعة من الاعلانات التجارية الموجودة في المواقع الالكترونية .