

ANALYSIS OF LEXICAL MEANING IN COMMERCIAL ADVERTISEMENTS ON YOUTUBE

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze lexical meaning in commercial advertisements on YouTube, with a focus on both denotative and connotative meanings. The research uses a descriptive qualitative method, examining the language used in a selected advertisement: Nike's "You Can't Stop Us." The data were collected from the advertisement's transcript and analyzed using theories by Leech (1981), Palmer (1981), and Cook (2001) regarding lexical semantics and language in advertising. The results show that the advertisement relies heavily on connotative meanings to build emotional appeal and reinforce brand identity. Words like "together," "strength," and "you can't stop us" carry deeper symbolic meanings that relate to unity, resilience, and empowerment. These lexical choices are used not only to promote the product but also to connect with the audience on a personal and emotional level. The study concludes that lexical meaning is a powerful tool in advertising that significantly influences how messages are received and interpreted by audiences.

Keywords : Lexical Meaning, Connotation, Denotation, Advertisement, YouTube, Nike

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Language plays a vital role in delivering messages, especially in advertising, where word choice can influence the audience's thoughts and behavior. In commercial advertisements, particularly those on YouTube, the use of language is not only meant to inform but also to persuade, attract, and emotionally engage the audience. YouTube, as one of the most popular platforms for video content, hosts thousands of commercial advertisements that use strategic language to communicate their products' value.

Lexical meaning refers to the direct meaning of words, which includes both denotative (literal) and connotative (emotional or cultural) meanings. In advertisements, connotative meanings are often employed to create a certain impression or emotional connection. Words such as "fresh," "natural," "luxury," or "unlimited" are frequently used to evoke specific reactions from the audience.

The study of lexical meaning in YouTube advertisements is important to understand how language is used as a persuasive tool. By analyzing the lexical choices made by advertisers, we can gain insight into how language functions in marketing and media communication.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What types of lexical meanings are found in commercial advertisements on YouTube?
2. How are lexical meanings used to influence the message in those advertisements?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this research are:

1. To identify the types of lexical meanings used in commercial advertisements on YouTube.
2. To analyze how those lexical meanings contribute to the persuasive function of the advertisements.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This research aims to provide the following benefits:

- **Theoretical Significance:**
It contributes to the study of semantics, especially in understanding lexical meaning in real-life media contexts.
- **Practical Significance:**
This research can help:
 - Students of English or linguistics to understand the practical application of lexical meaning.
 - Advertisers to be more aware of word choices in creating effective advertisements.
 - Viewers to become more critical of the language used in media.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study focuses on analyzing lexical meaning in selected commercial advertisements on YouTube, particularly looking at the use of denotative and connotative meanings. The study does not cover other aspects such as visual elements, syntactic structures, or non-commercial (public service) advertisements.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Semantics and Lexical Meaning

Semantics is a subfield of linguistics that deals with meaning in language. It is concerned with how words, phrases, and sentences convey meaning. According to Leech (1981), semantics is “the study of meaning in language,” and it is essential for understanding how communication works. Semantics provides the tools to explore how meaning is constructed, interpreted, and communicated, particularly in contexts such as advertising, where language plays a central role.

One key concept within semantics is **lexical meaning**. Lexical meaning refers to the meaning of individual words and how those meanings function within language. Lexical meaning contrasts with grammatical meaning, which involves the function of words in a sentence (such as tense, number, or case).

Lexical meaning is usually divided into two main types: **denotative meaning** and **connotative meaning**. Understanding both is essential when analyzing texts—especially advertisements—that rely heavily on word choice to create emotional responses.

2.2 Denotative and Connotative Meaning

The distinction between **denotative** and **connotative** meaning is a fundamental concept in semantics. These two types of meaning often work together in communication, but they serve different purposes.

- **Denotative Meaning**
Denotative meaning is the literal or dictionary definition of a word. It is the objective meaning that does not carry any emotional or cultural associations. For instance, the word “rose” denotes a type of flower with a particular shape and color.
- **Connotative Meaning**
Connotative meaning refers to the emotional, cultural, or personal associations that a word carries beyond its literal definition. The word “rose,” for example, might

connote love, romance, or beauty depending on the context. Connotative meanings are more subjective and can vary between individuals or cultures.

According to Palmer (1981), connotative meanings are often more powerful in persuasive texts, such as advertisements, because they appeal to the audience's feelings and associations rather than to their logic. In the context of advertising, connotative meanings are often deliberately used to influence perception and encourage positive emotional reactions toward a product or brand.

2.3 Types of Lexical Meaning According to Leech

Leech (1981) outlines seven types of meaning, but not all are directly relevant to this study. However, for a deeper understanding of how lexical meaning works in advertising, it's useful to briefly review them:

1. **Conceptual meaning** (also called denotative or cognitive meaning): the literal meaning of a word.
2. **Connotative meaning**: what is communicated by virtue of what language refers to (e.g., emotions, values).
3. **Social meaning**: what is communicated about the social context or relationship (e.g., formal/informal language).
4. **Affective meaning**: what is communicated about the feelings or attitudes of the speaker.
5. **Reflected meaning**: when one sense of a word affects another sense (e.g., religious connotations).
6. **Collocative meaning**: the associations a word acquires because of its usual co-occurrence with certain words.
7. **Thematic meaning**: how the order and emphasis of words affect meaning.

In this study, the main focus is on **denotative** (conceptual) and **connotative** meaning, as these are most relevant to how words function in advertisements.

2.4 Language in Advertising

Advertising is a form of persuasive communication designed to influence the audience's behavior, usually to buy a product or support a service or idea. Language plays a central role in advertising, and lexical choices are made very carefully to ensure the message is both clear and emotionally effective.

Cook (2001) explains that the language of advertising is crafted not only to inform but also to manipulate, attract, and entertain. Advertisers often use short, powerful phrases, slogans, and emotionally charged words to make their messages memorable and impactful.

Features of advertising language include:

- **Positive connotation**: Words like "fresh," "pure," "trusted," and "innovative" carry positive emotional weight.
- **Imperatives**: Commands like "Try now!", "Feel the difference," or "Experience more."
- **Repetition**: Certain words or phrases are repeated to increase memorability.
- **Figurative language**: Use of metaphors, similes, and hyperbole (e.g., "The king of all burgers").
- **Neologisms**: Invented words or phrases (e.g., "Coca-Cola's 'Open Happiness'").

In YouTube advertisements, where time is limited and visual elements are strong, language must be concise, attention-grabbing, and emotionally appealing. The combination of visuals and lexical choices creates a powerful persuasive tool.

2.5 The Role of Lexical Meaning in Advertising

Lexical meaning in advertising does more than just describe a product; it shapes how the product is perceived. Advertisers often select words that will resonate emotionally with viewers, tapping into desires, fears, or aspirations.

For example:

- A skincare ad might use the word “radiant” to describe skin, not just in a literal sense but to suggest health, beauty, and confidence.
- A smartphone ad might use the word “limitless” to suggest freedom, possibility, and empowerment, even though the literal features of the phone may be limited.

Such uses of language show how **connotative meanings** are intentionally exploited to build brand image and influence consumer choices.

2.6 Previous Studies

Several researchers have explored the use of language and meaning in advertising:

- **Wahyuni (2020)** conducted a study on the use of connotative meanings in beauty product advertisements. She found that advertisers often use emotionally loaded words to appeal to customers' insecurities or desires.
- **Putri (2018)** analyzed semantic features in food advertisements and discovered that most of the language used focused on positive connotations and exaggerated benefits.
- **Herlina & Setyowati (2019)** explored the persuasive language in online advertisements and highlighted how both visual and lexical components combine to shape viewer perception.

While these studies contribute valuable insights, few have specifically focused on **lexical meaning in YouTube advertisements**, which are unique due to their digital format, short duration, and global audience. This research attempts to bridge that gap by focusing on lexical meaning—especially denotative and connotative use—in commercial YouTube ads.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the semantic theories proposed by:

- **Leech (1981)**: on the classification of meaning, especially denotative and connotative meaning.
- **Palmer (1981)**: on the role of meaning in language use.
- **Cook (2001)**: on the discourse of advertising and how language is used to influence.

The framework allows the researcher to identify the kinds of lexical meaning present in YouTube advertisements and analyze how they function to persuade or influence the audience.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a **qualitative descriptive** research design. Qualitative research is suitable for analyzing language, meanings, and interpretations in context. A descriptive approach is applied to describe the types and functions of lexical meanings found in commercial advertisements on YouTube without manipulating the data.

3.2 Source of Data

The data for this research are taken from **commercial advertisements** published on **YouTube**. The selected ads are from well-known brands across various industries, such as food and beverages, skincare, and technology. The criteria for selecting the advertisements include:

- The advertisement must be in English.
- It must be under 3 minutes long.
- It should be a commercial advertisement (not a public service announcement).

- It must have high view counts (e.g., over 1 million views) to ensure relevance and popularity.

A single advertisement was selected for in depth analysis.

3.3 Technique of Data Collection

The following steps were taken to collect the data:

1. **Searching** for suitable commercial advertisements on YouTube.
2. **Watching** the advertisements several times to understand their content.
3. **Transcribing** the spoken words and on-screen texts used in each advertisement.
4. **Identifying** words and phrases that are relevant to lexical meaning analysis.

3.4 Technique of Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the following steps:

1. **Identification**
The lexical items (words or phrases) used in each advertisement were identified and listed.
2. **Classification**
The identified words were categorized into **denotative** and **connotative** meanings based on semantic theories (Leech, 1981; Palmer, 1981).
3. **Interpretation**
The functions of those lexical meanings were interpreted in the context of advertising—how they contribute to the persuasive message of the ad.
4. **Conclusion** **Drawing**
After analyzing all the advertisements, conclusions were drawn regarding the general patterns and functions of lexical meaning in commercial YouTube ads.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Data Presentation

This research analyzed lexical meaning in several commercial advertisements from YouTube. One of the most impactful advertisements selected was **Nike's "You Can't Stop Us"** (2020). The advertisement was published on Nike's official YouTube channel and has gained millions of views. It lasts approximately **90 seconds** and uses narration over a split-screen montage of athletes from different sports, races, genders, and backgrounds, performing similar movements in perfect sync.

The advertisement aims to inspire unity, perseverance, and hope during global challenges, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of social movements like Black Lives Matter.

The **spoken transcript** of the advertisement is as follows:

Transcript (Selected Lines):

"We're never alone.

And that is our strength.

Because when we're doubted, we'll play as one.

When we're held back, we'll go farther, and harder.

Because nothing can stop what we can do together.

You can't stop sport.

You can't stop us."

4.2 Lexical Meaning Analysis

The table below shows lexical items taken from the transcript, along with their **denotative meanings**, **connotative meanings**, and **functions** in the advertisement.

Table 1: Lexical Meaning Analysis of “Nike - You Can’t Stop Us” Advertisement

No	Lexical Item (Word/Phrase)	Denotative Meaning	Connotative Meaning	Function in the Ad
1	You can’t stop us	Cannot prevent us	Unity, determination, resistance	To evoke strength and collective power
2	Together	With each other	Harmony, equality, connection	To encourage a sense of belonging and unity
3	Doubt	Feeling uncertain	Disbelief from others, obstacles	Highlights struggle to emphasize resilience
4	Strength	Physical or mental power	Inner power, courage	Boosts confidence, positive self-image
5	Held back	Prevented from progressing	Discrimination, inequality	Reflects societal challenges to be overcome
6	Go farther	Move a greater distance	Push beyond limits	Suggests ambition, effort, success
7	Nothing can stop	No barrier exists	Freedom, boundlessness	Creates powerful, limitless brand identity
8	One	A single unit	Unity, solidarity	Reinforces collectivism and equality
9	Sport	Physical activity	Spirit of movement, perseverance, identity	Used metaphorically to represent life and values
10	Us	The speaker and others	Community, shared experience	Strengthens brand-audience connection

4.3 Discussion

From the analysis above, it is clear that the **lexical choices** in the Nike advertisement are predominantly **connotative** rather than just denotative. The words are carefully selected to **evoke emotion, motivation, and a sense of unity** among viewers. For example, the phrase “*You can’t stop us*” does not only mean that no one can prevent the action of a group, but it **implies resistance, perseverance, and collective strength**.

According to **Leech’s theory (1981)**, connotative meaning refers to the communicative value an expression has by virtue of what it refers to, over and above its purely conceptual content. In this advertisement, connotative meanings are used to construct an emotional narrative that aligns with **Nike’s brand values**, such as **courage, equality, and inclusivity**.

In addition, **Palmer (1981)** states that lexical meaning is influenced by cultural and contextual interpretations. The use of words like “*held back*,” “*doubt*,” and “*go farther*” aligns with the context of current global issues, such as racial injustice and the COVID-19 pandemic. These expressions carry powerful connotations that speak directly to the emotional state of the audience.

Furthermore, the advertisement uses **inclusive pronouns** like “*we*” and “*us*” throughout, which creates a strong **sense of togetherness and solidarity**. This not only reinforces the **persuasive power of the message**, but also strengthens the **brand’s identity as a symbol of social progress and empowerment**.

The use of **sport** as a metaphor for life also broadens the advertisement’s relevance. It implies that the **values found in sports—hard work, unity, perseverance—apply to all aspects of life**, making the message more universal.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This research aimed to analyze the lexical meaning—both **denotative** and **connotative**—found in commercial advertisements on YouTube. The focus was placed on how words in advertisements carry deeper meanings beyond their literal definitions and how these meanings contribute to the persuasive power of the advertisement.

The analysis was conducted on a selected YouTube commercial titled “**Nike - You Can’t Stop Us.**” The findings show that most of the lexical items in the advertisement convey **connotative meanings**. These meanings are not just literal, they are emotionally charged, contextually relevant, and culturally significant. Words and phrases such as “*you can’t stop us*,” “*together*,” and “*strength*” symbolize **unity, perseverance, and empowerment**, rather than merely describing physical action or condition.

The advertisement successfully uses these lexical choices to **build emotional connection, promote brand values, and motivate the audience**. In short, lexical meaning in advertisements plays a crucial role in enhancing the **communicative and persuasive effects** of the message. This aligns with Leech’s and Palmer’s theories on lexical semantics and supports the idea that **language in advertising is both functional and symbolic**.

5.1 Suggestions

Based on the research findings, the following suggestions are proposed:

1. For Future Researchers

Future studies may expand the scope of analysis by including more advertisements from different product categories, countries, or languages. This can provide a broader understanding of how lexical meaning varies across contexts and cultures.

2. For English Language Learners and Educators

Studying lexical meaning in real-life media like advertisements can be an engaging way to understand semantics, especially connotation vs denotation. Teachers can use commercials as **authentic materials** to teach meaning, interpretation, and persuasive language.

3. For Advertisers and Content Creators

Understanding lexical meaning deeply can help in crafting messages that **resonate emotionally** with the audience. Careful word choice can reinforce brand identity and increase the effectiveness of marketing communication.

4. For General Readers and Viewers

Being aware of how language is used in advertisements can make viewers more critical and analytical when consuming media content. It helps them distinguish between literal and implied messages, and understand how brands attempt to influence thought and behavior.

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