

**TED ANKARA COLLEGE FOUNDATION HIGH SCHOOL**

**INTERNATIONAL BACCALURATE PROGRAMME**

**A2 ENGLISH EXTENDED ESSAY**

**“LANGUAGE OF POLITICS AND COMMERCIALS”**

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**Word Count:** 3409

**Research Topic:** Comparison and contraction of the language of politics and the language of commercials.

**Abstract:**

The theme in this essay is the languages used in commercials and politics. Throughout the essay, they are described and their differences and similarities are stated. Although people are not aware of it, they are affected very much by language. People can orient others easily according to which words they choose to use and how they use it.

In commercials, companies use both visual and written language in order to attract the consumer's attention to certain products, to demonstrate their characteristics and to show people how good the product is. Numerous different ways are used in the planning of a commercial but the aim is always the same: to benefit and become well-known to benefit more. Similar to commercials, the aim of the language of politics is also to effect people. The more they make the public trust them, the more power they gain so it can be said that the aim of the politicians is also to benefit more in a way.

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Language is the most important tool in our lives, even though we are not really aware of this. Our unawareness comes from the fact that we get used to it very much – it is like a part of ourselves. Language is a way of expressing thoughts, with the translation of notions into words and being an act of understanding. Language creates our thoughts, consequently our logic and way of thinking. Of course, language is fatal no matter what kind it is while such a thing as communication would be impossible without languages. However, it is not used just to communicate in today's world but to create, hide, destroy and affect reality. This process is usually done indirectly; by effecting people without taking their attention too much.

In 1921, Report of the Departmental Committee on the Teaching of English in England stated *"What a man cannot state he does not perfectly know, and conversely the inability to put his thoughts into words sets a boundary to his thought... English is not merely the medium of our thought; it is the very stuff and process of it."* (Leech, G. 1966). Taking this true statement into consideration, we can say that if we change the process, which is the language – spoken, written, visual etc., the results of this process, which are the images appealed in people's minds also changes. I think this pretty much explains how people can be affected by language.

In this essay of mine, my aim is to analyze, compare and contrast the languages used in commercials/advertisements and in politics. The reason that I have chosen these is that in both areas, the aim is to convince people in some way. In commercials and advertisements companies try to persuade the consumers to buy their products and in politics, politicians try to convince public to believe in their thoughts. If we consider the thoughts and plans of politicians as their 'products', we can even say that the aim of commercials and politics are almost the same. However, the way they use that persuasive language and effect people in either good or bad way is very different than each other.

Different definitions for the word 'commercial' can be made. From the point of view of the consumers, it is transmitting the sufficient and true information about the goods that are produced for the consumers and from the marketing aspect, it is informing people about the goods and services by the help of communication tools'. These communication tools can be enumerated as televisions, radios, newspapers, magazines, posters, catalogs etc..

Commercials have become a very important mass communication tool in today's world. They enter our lives via various media and effect us more than we think. In a commercial text, people find plenty of information about the latest products, prices, services, fashion etc.. Commercials also have positive effects on a country's developing civilisation level while they always target the best and encourage people to try these. They also reflect a country's culture as well by containing examples from that country's modern art and science and reflecting the tastes of the members of the society.

When analysed, it is seen that commercial texts, as communication tools, have some important properties. The message in a commercial has one direction – from the producer to the consumer. It is aimed at groups instead of a single person. Both visual and linguistic elements are used while transmitting the message. They only contain the vital information about its products and they are prepared to convince people.

In a commercial, the text writer uses language and visual tools but the real message is mostly given to the consumers by written or spoken language. Visual language and music is just used to expand that message and make it more attractive and arouse more interest. Visual language is a set of images by which concepts can be communicated. People can 'verbalize' their thoughts, just as they can 'visualize' them. In commercials, thoughts are visualized in a way that they can attract people's attention on them and make people see the product or read further details in that commercial. That is usually achieved by using very bright or contrasting

colors, using an interesting, funny or beautiful figure as the main element of the commercial. One of the most important things in the commercials is the presence of the absence. For example, in most Nokia commercials, there is no written language used but that doesn't mean that the commercial is ineffective. On the contrary, it tells the buyer that the company is so confident of itself – as it is the best – that it doesn't need any explanations or other written stuff to convince anybody; their products is self – explanatory.<sup>1</sup>

One of the most important features of the visual language is its multilayered and ambiguous meaning. Depending on many factors such as social environment, social status, origin and the past experience of the consumer, he/she will interpret the message that is given by the visual language in a particular way. Therefore, there are no clear and certain messages which can be understood in the same way by everyone. The advertisers solve this problem by advertising the same product in various ways depending on the country, culture and beliefs of the target group.

Elements of the visual medium in advertisement can be presented in a variety of ways. For instance a small object can be enlarged to fill the whole page or shrunk; it can be fragmented or repeated, transformed (Hariman,R. 1998). Allegorical coding is common in visual language and women's magazines are good examples of such ubiquity. In cosmetic commercials, the use of allegories of beauty, femininity, fragility, success and happiness is extremely popular. The choice of allegory in an advertisement of a product is mainly determined by the focus on a particular target group. For example in the Loreal advertisement,<sup>2</sup> the main figure is a beautiful and successful – as she is a celebrity – woman who is supposed to own her beauty to Loreal. Such visual tools make the consumers trust the

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1 See Appendix 1

2 See Appendix 2

producers while they think that if the celebrities use that product, they also should. However, if it was a perfume advertisement for men, a handsome man who is known to be successful would be present in the advertisement. Also advertisers choose the visual tools according to social assumptions and ideas. Advertisements of cosmetic always show a picture of a slim, smooth skinned woman whose body and face show perfect proportion and harmony as this is how female beauty is perceived in today's world.

In commercials, whose aim is to effect the consumers subconsciously, different psychological motives are used. The most commonly, with visual language, companies try to make a narcissistic approach on the buyers. This is mostly done by using a pretty woman or a handsome man figure. By this way, consumers would like to buy that product to be as good as the 'perfect woman' or 'perfect man' in the commercial. It is mostly seen in the cosmetic commercials<sup>3</sup>, where there is a beautiful woman or a handsome man as the main figure while a more remarkable effect can be done if the product is directly related with the beauty or attractiveness of the buyers. Also emphasizing some words also help the commercial to be effective. In a Coca-Cola commercial the word 'taste' is written twice the size of the rest of the text, which makes the consumer remember that word.<sup>4</sup> So when they think of Coca-Cola, they would also think of "taste" and would want to buy it.

Although the visual language is very important, the core of the message of the commercial is mostly given by the written language. In commercials, usually informal language is used as the purpose of the companies is to sell their products to public and no one would want to buy anything from a company which seems very arrogant, pedantic and superior to the rest of the society. One of the best examples on this issue is the commercial of

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3 See Appendix 3

4 See Appendix 4

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Toyota.<sup>5</sup> In this commercial, the company voluntarily made a mistake in the spelling of 'every day' and they have written it as 'everyday'. 'Everyday' is an adjective, meaning encountered or used typically or routinely; however 'every day' literally has the same meaning as 'each day' and they are not interchangeable. The reason they made such a mistake is to show the society that the Toyota Company is not superior but also a normal member of the society, so that it can also make mistakes. Advertisers also pay attention to relate the language of a commercial or an advertisement contain with the social and cultural values of the target group. For example, the car company "Fiat" made a car in late 70s in Turkey within the name of *Mirafiori* but this name meant nothing to Turkish people so the car company started to produce the same car under the name of *Murat 131*. Although this new name did not mean anything special, since it was familiar to Turkish people and meant something to them, *Murat 131* sold much more than the old *Mirafiori*.

The language of commercials and advertisements should be chosen very carefully. Factors such as the consumer's psychology, the media and the visual tools used in the commercial all effect the language of a commercial. To be more clear, psychological motives such as sex, health, prestige and economy; and social factors related to the consumer such as age, gender, social status and education must be taken into consideration while deciding on the language of a commercial. However, problems of translating between languages can be a source of great amusement. Apparently, an American chicken merchant got in trouble when his advertising campaign featured a picture of him with a chicken. The macho slogan was supposed to say, '*It takes a tough man to make a tender chicken.*' but when translated into Spanish it came out as, '*It takes a sexually aroused man to be affectionate with a chicken.*' This example show that meaning is not straightforward but can be interpreted differently,

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5 See Appendix 5



depending on social and cultural values. So it can be said that advertisers should be very careful while translating an advertisement into other languages.

As commercials' and advertisements' aim is to convince consumers to buy a product as quickly as possible, its language should be easy to read and remember and at the same time it should be dynamic, attractive and persuasive. For this reason if a commercial cannot be understood clearly from linguistic or visual ways or if it has a boring structure, it would obstruct the sale from the beginning. Companies apply different techniques including using pronouns such as 'you' and 'we', names of the brands, repeated words and phrases, adjectives and dynamic actions in order to avoid the commercial to be boring and unattractive. Most famous brands have a simple slogan – for example in Nike's case it is “*just do it*”<sup>6</sup>- and when the buyers see it, they know that it is a good brand, which makes good products because it is easy for the consumers to remember that simple slogan. Also language of the commercials differ according to which group they are addressed to. For example national motives such as the national flag may be used to attract the interest of an elder group of people.<sup>7</sup> However, in order to attract the teenagers attention, a more slang language would be preferred like “Rock the Vote”<sup>8</sup> advertisement that is prepared for the elections in the United States.

The most used sentence types in commercials are statement and imperative sentences. The most typical example to this is “*X is good* (statement sentence) / *Therefore buy X* (imperative sentence)” kind of patterns.<sup>9</sup> By this way the consumer is, in a way, conditioned to buy that product. Whenever he/she has to choose among different brands, the consumer

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6 See Appendix 7

7 See Appendix 8

8 See Appendix 9

9 See Appendix 10

subconsciously buys the brand, in whose commercial he/she is 'ordered' to buy that. Sentences that question the buyer are also a part of the commercial texts but they are used less frequently than the others. These are used in order to add a more dramatic effect to persuade the consumer or to make the consumer to pay attention to the rest of the commercial as the answer to that question lies within the remaining part of it. For example in an advertisement, the question “Must children die and mothers plead in vain?” is asked and its solution, which is buying fewer Christmas gifts, is suggested at the very end of the advertisement.<sup>10</sup>

The success of a commercial can only be understood when the whole context is considered. In other words, language and visual tools cannot have a communication value unless they complete each other. This is especially very important in TV commercials, in which a synthesis of language and visual tools are used. The visual tools in these commercials do not only advertise the product to the consumers but at the same time very important for its being eye-catching and arouse the consumer's interest to the commercial. At the same time different features and utilities of the product and messages that increase the power of the commercial can only be given to the consumers via language. And the preparation and improvement of that language is connected with the cultural, social and economic conditions of the country that commercial is shown. A very good example to this issue is the Peugeot commercial which goes like: “*Four wheeled blue jean..., Peugeot 205*”. In this commercial a car is thought as a pair of blue jean and by this way it's being sportive and comfortable is emphasized. The starting point of this commercial is the fact that everyone knows how comfortable blue jeans are. However this commercial would not mean anything at all if it is used in a society in which no one knows or wears blue jeans. Also the Defacto commercial, which is published recently, says “*Jean is the baggy trousers of America... Against the so-*

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10 See Appendix 11

*called comfort of America: Mediterranean DeFacto.*” is meant to be successful by sharing the common public rivalry against America. By this way the consumer would think that DeFacto thinks just like they do and buy their products. However, if this commercial was published in the USA, people would be absolutely displeased with it and probably boycott DeFacto.

Another way to attract public interest to a product is to give the product a charming and rather an interesting name. The most appropriate example to this is the alteration of 'French fries' and 'French toasts' into 'freedom fries' and 'freedom toasts' in the cafeteria menus in United States after the refusal of France to support the U.S position on Iraq.<sup>11</sup> This action may look small but it represents the strong national displeasure towards France and this common reaction yields people to unite with the food companies and buy their 'freedom fries' and 'freedom toasts'. This is also a good example how the language of commercials and politics may work together and how related they are with each other.

Like commercials, the aim of politics is also to effect and convince people but the language used by politicians is very different than the language used by advertisers. Firstly, in politics language is far more formal than it is in commercials and advertisements. Secondly, politicians mostly use language in the process of hiding, creating, destroying and effecting reality in order to change it in a way that public would be pleased with it. When they present the new, crooked reality to public, people would trust the politicians and what they say. So it can be said that in politics, language is used to achieve power, while the more the politicians win public's confidence, the more power they gain. Once they achieve trust and power, they would control almost everything by language. This is presented in a magnificent way in the novel *Animal Farm* by George Orwell by changing the 'seven commandments' into the one which is “*All animals are equal but some are more equal than the others*” (Orwell, 114).

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11 See Appendix 6

To distort the truth, politicians use different words – usually long and gentle – in place of the ones that arouse negative thoughts and feelings in public. By this way, they make public see the truth from a different point of view without telling any lies. Although there are no words for this in dictionaries, in his novel *Nineteen Eighty-four*, George Orwell invented the term “doublespeak” to describe the way that governments – but we might also include advertisers – tell impudent lies as if they were the truth (Orwell, 10). We are very familiar with this kind of usage of language nowadays. The expressions originally appeared in the *Guardian* in London while covering the Gulf War are perfect examples to “doublespeaking”:

*We have army, navy and air force, reporting guidelines and press briefings; they have a war machine, censorship and propaganda.. We suppress neutralize and dig in; they destroy, kill and cover.. We launch first strikes pro-emptively; they launch sneak missile attacks without provocation. Our missiles are causing collateral damage; their missiles are killing innocent civilians. Our planes suffer from a high rate of attrition and fail to return from missions; their planes are shot out of the sky and zapped..* In these expressions, public is informed as if attacking Iraq was a totally right decision and the army of Iraq is being terminated easily.

In politics, it is very important for politicians to show public that they are also a part of the society. In other words, politicians should adapt the language they use to the cultural and social values of their target group. Also they should not use any words or phrases that may be interpreted as a function of discrimination. In 1992 Ross Perrot, who was seeking the office of President of the United States, was criticized for a remark made during his speech at the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) convention. He was sympathizing with the bad conditions of African Americans during tough economic times: “*Now, hold on there! Hold on one Texas minute! Now, hold on! Hold on! You people don't quit, now do you? Now, is this the way we're gonna play the game here? Are you guys*

*gonna keep asking me these asinine questions until you see some dirty pictures? Is that what you want, huh? Is that what you require? Alright. Now, let's have it your way...*"(Saturday Night Transcripts) However in his speech, he referred to his audience as "you people", which was loudly disapproved by some members of the audience and considered insensitive. The reason for that is by using the phrase "you people", he discriminated them from himself and the rest of the society. Nothing may have happened if his audiences were white people but as they were African Americans, who are fed up with discrimination, Perot's choice of language resulted in his failure in elections.

Language of politics contains some elements that are very effective in persuading public and winning their confidence. One of those elements is carefully crafted generalities that promise something for everyone and offend no one. Another is the liberal use of emotional and patriotic words and phrases like God, prayer, liberty and freedom without any real relation to a devotion to these concepts. This would make such references sound honest.

To sum up, language of politics and commercials are used for company's or individuals personal benefits. Language used in commercials and advertisements is a special part of language and prepared in a very attentive way, considering the social, economic and cultural values of the target group, according to the commercials' purposes. Some people think that language used in commercials and advertisements prevents the consumers to see reality and try to sell dreams to them. On the contrary, some think that this language do not force people to buy things but give the consumers beneficial information in a humorous and appealing way. However in politics, politicians are more likely to use language to cover the reality and present it to the public just as they would like it to be in order to persuade public and achieve their thrust. And once they manage to do this, they gain more power and they can control the public more easily.

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**Appendices:**

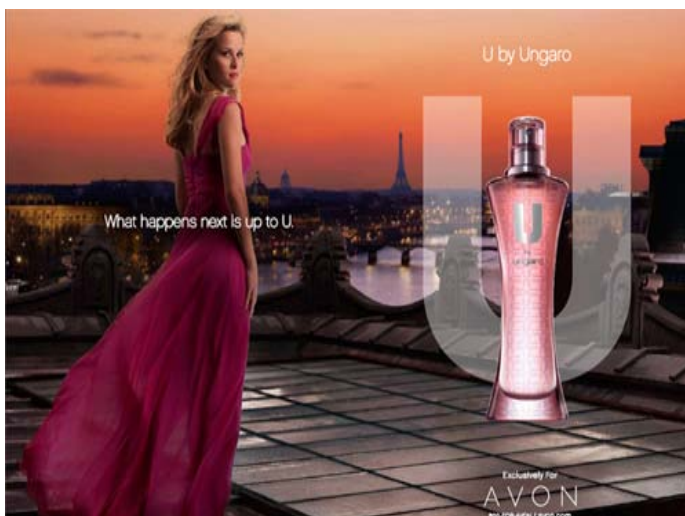
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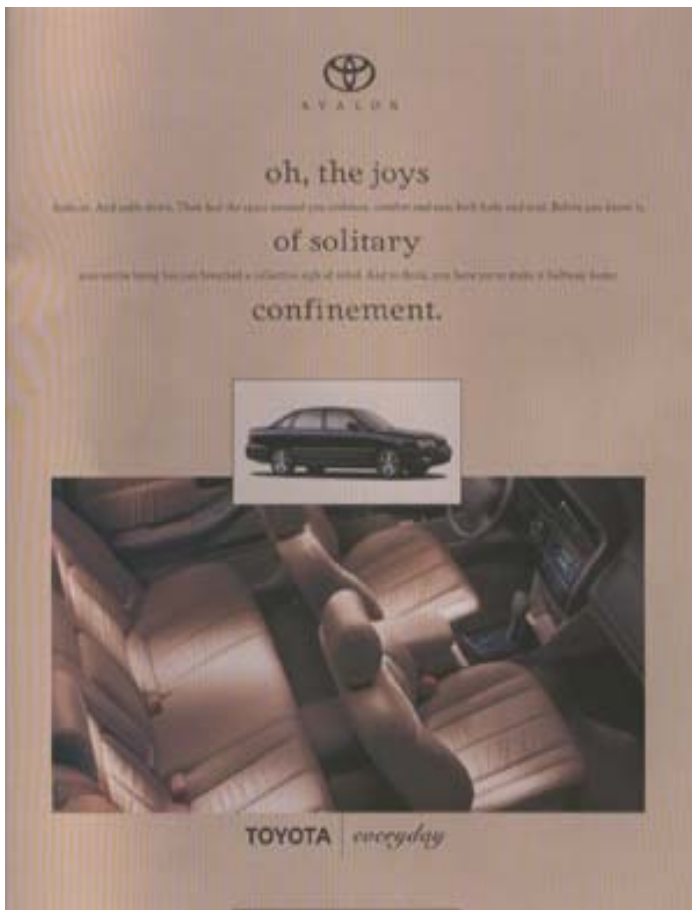
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