

The Use of Advertisements and Adbusters in the Course of Business English



Karine Mkhitarian

There are many theoretical and practical reasons to combine media literacy with the course of Business English as it fills the gap between the culture of business and students' skills in business communication and analytical thinking. It is of great pedagogical importance for students to know how advertisements are formed, decoded, analyzed and evaluated.

While planning a Business English course, it is important to take into account not only the content and functional peculiarities of selected texts, but also age-related and psychological features of students, their professional needs as well as the scope of their interests. While selecting professional texts

it is very important to take into consideration inter and intra-disciplinary ties, because a foreign language is not only a means of communication with native and native-like speakers and receiving relevant professional and public information, but also a means of developing professional competence. For instance, learning English helps students orient in critical, creative and other similar situations, as well as make relevant decisions.

Advertisement texts can play an important role in teaching Business English, as they are directly related to the business sphere and reflect on the main characteristics of Business English. Through ads student-economists get to know and acquire psychological, socio-cultural, professional peculiarities of occupations concerned with the sphere of business.

Ads are of great importance in the lives of people. Goods and services are advertised on mass media, advertisement billboards, the Internet, e-mail, etc. As is known, advertisements are aimed at attracting the attention of people of certain age, status and needs to sell certain goods or render certain services. At the same time, the aim of advertisers is to persuade people to **buy, give or vote** for their specific product or service. The important thing is that advertisements do not usually contain accurate information about the products or services advertised, because of the rough competitiveness in which advertisers are forced to work.

The target group for the advertisers is a certain group of people who are classified by their age, sex, race or even social class. Research has shown that people tend to remember the advertisement if the object being advertised is unique, if the advertisement itself is extraordinary or if it is of personal significance.

The advertisement language must also be taken into consideration in the process of planning a business course. The language of advertisers mainly represents colloquial (informal) set-expressions, which are simple and full of metaphors, as well as speech patterns which are typical of stereotype thinking. According to Thorne it is important to remember that the primary function of advertisements is to persuade people and its sub-

ordinate function is to provide information (Thorne 1997:88).

As to the functions of ads, there are various types of advertisements, which make use of the same techniques but cause different feedback from the assumed audience. As is mentioned above, an ad must be persuasive if it is based on the principle of **selling approach**, the aim of which is to persuade the consumer to go and buy that particular product. Advertisements must also be informative. The constructional base for advertisements may be either the product or the audience or its influence. Advertisers must use their variants in texts combined with striking images or emotional references.

The knowledge of the content and functional characteristics of ads helps students not only to read and understand English advertisements but also create them. Ads are efficiently used in a Business English course, which is based on the process-genre approach in which students not only plan and revise texts but also meet certain rhetorical and structural requirements based on the audience. In addition, students become more keenly aware of the role of their target audience, they learn how to modify language to communicate through various media (Badger, White 2000:153-160).

Advertisers use various advertising techniques for various mass media; however, there are a number of features which are common to both oral and written advertisements. First, it is always necessary to introduce the advertiser (logo, slogan, brand, differentiating colors or images), the target audience (age, sex, social class) and the advertisement function (e.g.: *buy this, generously give this, join us*, etc.). Thus, the main goal of advertisements is to attract customers by providing high-quality goods and services. People in the sphere of business must be able to create advertisements taking into account the combination of its slogan, image, text and logo. Armenian students have to overcome grammar, lexical and stylistic interference connected with the language of ads. It is important to state that it is difficult to overcome socio-cultural interference typical of Business English such as business-economic realias, terms and notions characteristic of English-speaking countries.

From the pragmatic point of view, it is important for students to learn the non-verbal means of communication common for English-speaking business communities: gestures, manners, mimicry. As is known, in stock markets brokers communicate generally using body language. Without knowing this language stock exchange operators, stock brokers, dealers cannot advertise their “goods” or present exchange prices. Even stock jobbers have their own professional body language to advertise.

In advertisements of various products and brands, advertisers take into account not only inter-cultural, but also intra-cultural, professional stereotypes, with the account that their target audience may have associations with the advertised product or service. It is not a secret that cultural realias are of great significance to foreign language learners from the point of view of acquiring professional stereotypes and “irrelevant vocabulary”. It is important to study not only cultural realias in general, but also business-economic realias in particular.

It is worth noting that teaching a foreign language by means of advertisements presupposes knowledge of how to work with **self-advertisements** and **adbusters**. Self-advertisement is widely spread and known among students and specialists of various

spheres as “resume”, which is translated from French as speech, article or other brief writing, short summary, report or conclusion (Andreeva 1997:233). In this context resume is a short autobiography with the description of professional experience and skills. While preparing a resume one must briefly and clearly describe his/her qualifications which are required to occupy the given vacancy or position. According to Gorshkov, when one provides information on oneself, it is necessary that he/she preserves such communicative features of speech as accuracy, chronology, validity, clarity and fluency (Gorshkov 1996:96).

As to adbusters, it is a form of media that looks like an advertisement but actually opposes the values and assumptions presented by a corporation through its advertising campaigns.¹ With the help of advertisements it is possible to sell not only products, but also ideas. By creating adbusters on the basis of suggested advertisements, students develop their critical thinking. In order to transform an advertisement into an adbuster, students must have relevant professional, practical and linguistic knowledge. Without the above-mentioned knowledge it is impossible to disclose the hidden message of the advertisement, describe codes and conventions used in it, determine the purpose and assumptions of the advertisement, as well as its possible consequences (Media Education Foundation 2005:36).

The analysis of hidden messages ensures efficiency of the above mentioned course. Active cooperation between teachers and students becomes important, as it requires brain storming, when they try to underline the central idea of the advertisement. It is also important that students take critical approach to the central and hidden messages of the advertisement.

Advertisement splitting is an important technique of learning a professional sublanguage through advertisements (Media Education Foundation 2005:53); and for this, students must possess relevant analytical skills and abilities. When students disclose central ideas and messages of the advertisement as well as the consequences (as a result of using the advertised product), which were untold of, they can determine which idea they are going to oppose in the adbuster. For example, they can study the side effects of smoking on health or the side effects of cars on the environment.

It is important that students write their comments at the end of the class. It is very helpful when the teacher prepares special worksheets which are envisaged for certain groups of students. According to Mendonca, it is necessary to develop and use new technologies and strategies with which it will be possible to evaluate the level of a second language acquisition through advertisement texts (Mendonca, Johnson 1994).

As Truscott mentioned “Since it has been suggested that written feedback in the form of explicit language error correction may not be effective and, in fact, may have a negative effect on a student’s accuracy, it may be most helpful to supply most comments on structure and writing” (Truscott 2007:255-272).

The created adbuster is presented in the final stage of the course, during which students must do the following within 10-15 minutes:

- briefly present and describe their original advertisement,
- present their paragraphs,

- present and describe their adbuster,
- answer the questions of their classmates.

In conclusion, the use of advertisements and adbusters is an effective method of teaching Business English. Future business-related people, for example economists, financial advisers and businessmen understand clearly well that most available advertisements come from Western countries, the USA in particular. It is important to develop skills and abilities of analyzing inter-cultural and intra-cultural sub-texts not only for the creation of advertisements and adbusters, but also for the ongoing development of a professional sublanguage. On the one hand, while creating and analyzing advertisements in English, students create a basis for the development of their professional and practical knowledge. On the other hand, as this activity is rather problematic, goal-oriented, and is based on students' knowledge and professional requirements and interests, it makes the business English learning process more intensive and efficient. Here we deal with the efficient use of the principle of inter and intra-disciplinary ties.

While preparing the business course, the language of advertisements becomes highly important. The language of advertisers mainly consists of colloquial patterns full of metaphors. At the same time, it is very important to take into account professional, geographical and intercultural knowledge of future businessmen. As advertisement texts are short, full of hidden messages and codes, they reflect linguo-stylistic, cultural, psychological, professional knowledge and skills of advertisement creators.

It is obvious that in order to understand any idea, hidden message, appeal or order reflected in the advertisement or the adbuster, students must have clear ideas about the countries which create the advertisements/adbusters, their people, morals, stereotypes, cultural, economic, psychological, mental realities and realias. It is impossible to understand and disclose the essence of the advertisement/adbuster only with the help of linguistic knowledge.

Due to the globalization processes, students of English as a second language need more than simple language instruction. Foreign language learners merge into this socio-cultural situation much easier. They acquire cultural, business situations and realias more efficiently in creating advertisements, resumes and adbusters. One of the important pre-conditions of using ads and adbusters for teaching/learning purposes is the practical orientation of Business English.

Notes:

1. See <http://adbusters.org/spoofads/index.php>

References:

1. Andreeva, N.N., Arapova, N.S. et. àl. (1997) *Slovar inostrannykh slov: aktualnaya leksika, tolkovaniye, etimologiya*. M.: Citadel.

2. Badger, R., White, G.A. (2000) *Process Genre Approach to Teaching Writing*. // ELT Journal/OUP, 54 (2).
3. Bartels, N. (2003) *Written Peer Response in L2 Writing*. // English Teaching Forum 41 (1).
4. Gorshkov, A.I. (1996) *Russkaya slovesnost: ot slova k slovesnosti: uchebnoe posobie dlya uchashchikhsya 10-11 klassov obsheobrazovatelnykh uchrezhdeniy*. M.: Prosveshcheniye.
5. Media Education Foundation. (2005) *Deconstructing an Advertisement*. (www.mediaed.org/handouts/pdfs/DeconstructinganAd.pdf.)
6. Mendonca, C.O., Johnson, K.E. (1994) *Peer Review Negotiations: Revision Activities in ESL Writing Instructions*. // TESOL Quarterly, 28 (4).
7. Thorne, S. (1997) *Mastering Advanced English Language*. New York: PALGRAVE.
8. Truscott, J. (2007) *The Effect of Error Correction on Learners' Ability to Write Accurately*. // Journal of Second Language Writing, 16 (4).

Գովազդների և հակագովազդների կիրառման առանձնահատկությունները գործարար անգլերենի դասընթացում

Գովազդների և հակագովազդների կիրառումն արդյունավետ միջոց է գործարար անգլերենի դասավանդման ժամանակ, քանի որ այն ենթադրում է լեզվի և միջմշակութային իրավիճակների վերլուծության ունակություն, որն էլ անհրաժեշտ նախապայման է ուսումնասիրվող լեզվով գովազդներ և հակագովազդներ ստեղծելու համար: Հարկ է նշել, որ օտար լեզվի դասավանդման արդյունավետությունը նախ և առաջ ապահովվում է այն ժամանակ, երբ հաշվի են առնվում միջառարկայական կապերը, այսինքն՝ այն կապերը, որոնք գոյություն ունեն ուսումնասիրվող օտար լեզվի և այդ ուսանողի մասնագիտական բնագավառի միջև: Գործարար ոլորտի ապագա մասնագետները պետք է տիրապետեն գովազդի, հակագովազդի լեզվաբանական, ոճաբանական և հոգեբանական առանձնահատկություններին: Մեթոդաբանական տեսանկյունից նրանք պետք է կարողանան ստեղծել գովազդներ, հակագովազդներ և ինքնակենսագրականներ (ռեզյումե)՝ կիրառելով հաղորդակցական տարբեր ձևեր ու մեթոդներ: