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**A Study of Tense Variation in Advertisements****Key words: advertisements, tenses, persuasion****Inst.Hind Tahseen Hameed****University of Diyala /College of Education for humanities****hindtahseen.en@gmail.com****Inst.May Tahseen Hameed****University of Diyala /College of Education for humanities****maytahseen14@gmail.com****Abstract**

Advertisements have become gradually popular. People are exposed to a great number of advertising messages everyday. The aim of advertisements is to persuade consumers to think in a determined textual manner and act in order to promote sales of particular products, goods and services. Advertisements use a range of manipulative language devices in order to catch attention, convey messages and persuade the consumer. The paper aims at analyzing and describing English tense system used in advertising. It tries to find out whether tense as a linguistic syntactic device contributes in the persuasion goal of advertising. Therefore, the paper examines which types of tense are frequently used along with the functions they fulfill. The data in this study is 334 advertisements; these were taken from various English international magazines. The data collection was analyzed from a syntactic point of view. The findings show that the present simple tense is the most frequent type used in advertisements under study, while the past simple tense is the least frequent one, while there are other tense forms that have never been used. Furthermore, the results of analysis show that there seems to be a relationship between tense choice and functions of advertising, i.e., between the basic meanings and uses of tense choice and the persuasive functions. The importance of employing syntactic devices like tenses in creating an effective language helps to convey advertising intended messages. The study helps clarify relations between verb form and persuasion functions.

**Introduction**

Advertising is an inevitable part of people's everyday life, they meet advertisements everywhere, and it seems to occupy an important role in their lives. Advertising is very important for many commodity who suppliers rely on them to improve their sales (Matoqed, 2016). Thus, an evaluation of English advertising along with figuring out the way it creates its texts are needed.

Advertisements use certain strategies to create their desired effect. Whatever strategies they use; language is the main carrier of the advertised messages. Therefore, these messages should be designed to draw attention of the targeted

people, promote desire, and drive to action. The aim of advertisements is not only inform about products and services but also to have persuasive effect. As Krista (2004) stated “a good advertisement does more than explain and inform, It also persuades.” Advertisements are described as an obvious form of persuasion, since the purpose of most advertisements is to get the consumer to buy something and target specific audience to act or think textually determined way in order to increase sales of particular commodities and services. Advertising use of language –both image and words –has to be matched with its purpose and audience; otherwise, the advertisement will lack impact and effectiveness (Breuer & Naphine, 2008). In order to catch the attention, deliver the message and persuade the consumer, advertising uses a range of manipulative language device. One of these devices is linguistic devices and these include both lexical and syntactical means that are used for creating advertising texts. A relationship exists between the function of any discourse genre and the basic meanings and usage of these linguistic devices. As Lackstorm et al. (1970, 1973) stated that the grammatical choices are decided by persuasive consideration. In their study, they showed that the choice of verb tense depends on the rhetorical functions in certain genres. Lackstorm et al. (1970, 1973), Martinez (1996), Malcom (1983), Taylor (2001), Hanania & Akhtar (1985) among many others conducted studies providing important perception of the interdependence of grammatical form and rhetorical functions of certain discourse genres.

On the syntactic level, advertising manipulates different parts of speech in order to make its messages more persuasive. The focus is on some of the aspects of adjectival, adverbial, verbal, and noun usage.

The study focuses on the syntactic and grammatical level of advertisements. It investigates tense system in some chosen samples taken from British and American well-known magazines.

### **Problem and Significance of the Study**

The present study focused on verbal usage in advertising texts. Many researchers have studied advertisements from different angles. However; it is rare to look into advertisement from the study of its tense system, tense choice and using tenses as a device in this type of discourse. The study tries to examine and analyze variations in verb tense across persuasive functions of advertising discourse. Additionally, this study tries to find out which type of tense is the most frequently used and if there are tenses which are never used in the advertising data under study. By doing so, it attempts to throw light upon the question of whether tense choice is dependent on persuasive functions of advertising.

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## Language and Advertising

Many linguists like Leech (1972) and Cook (1996) tended to analyze the language of advertising to show the role language plays in giving information and persuade people. Therefore, language of advertising serves the aim of attracting, persuading, and convincing the audience. According to these linguists and many others, advertising language can be defined by its four basic functions: attention, interest, desire, and action (Sahaf, 2019). Each of these functions has consequences on the language used to achieve these aims and makes the advertisement successful and more effective.

Advertising belongs to the domain of persuasion, therefore, according to Leech (1972, p25) it has been characterized as a “loaded language”; the aim of loaded language is to change the will, opinions, or attitudes of its audience. In the case of advertisement, it has a very particular material aim – changing the mental disposition to reach the desired kind of behavior – buying a particular kind of product (Leech, 1972). Therefore, loaded language is used as a persuasive technique with emotional and directive intent; also it is related to the rhetorical functions. Additionally, Ufot (2017, p.252) states that advertisement “in its power of persuasion, it is foregrounded by its restricted variety of orthography, lexis and grammar.”

Other characteristics of advertising language is that it belongs to block language. Leech (1972, pp90-3) defines block language as “the restricted variety of grammar called the disjunctive mode.”. From the syntactic point of view, the sentences which are used are composed only of words needed to convey messages. This method saves space and makes the advertisement concise, yet highly informative. In order to achieve the emphatic persuasive effect and make the audience’s understanding of advertising message easier, linguistic syntactic means along with simple and minor sentences are used.

## Tense

The present study focuses only on tense system used in advertising data as a linguistic syntactic device. It is believed that the use of tenses in advertising in relation to the persuasive functions is worth more concern. In a study conducted by Malcom (1985) where she examined the rules, which govern tense usage in scientific articles, she found out that each tense category correlated with basic meaning for that tense category (one that is defined in terms of the situation referred to) and specific uses ascribed to that tense category in general English. This and other studies denote that there is statistical correlation between tense choice and rhetorical functions in particular professional contexts, such as scientific, technical, humanistic, economic, and business discourse.

Tense is a linguistic concept or category of verb related to time: it denotes the form taken by the verb to locate the situation referred in time (Comrie, 1985; Declerck, 2006). The continuum of time can be generally divided into three

levels: present, past and future (Quirk,1985; Gramely & Pätzold,2002). In reference to time, tense is interpreted on grammatical, lexical and referential levels. Tense also serves not only time relations, but also other goals such as subject matter and other rhetorical functions in various genres, since functions influence grammar choices according to the studies that have been mentioned.

### **Data Collection**

The data in this study were taken from commercial advertisements in magazines. The data consist of three thousand and thirty-four advertisements from different well-known international magazines written in English like “Time”, “The Economist”, “Woman’s Health”, “Men’s Health”, “British Vogue”, “Vogue USA”, “Food & Home”, “Marie Claire”, “Bon Appetite”, “Elle”, and “The Week”. These magazines are from different 2019-2020 editions. The advertisements were randomly chosen and they correspond to different subject matter and belong to various disciplines such as make-up, food, companies, cars, business, fashion, etc.

### **Data Analysis**

The study applied descriptive quantitative and qualitative research method. The research method was done by identifying and categorizing tense into types according to their forms and structures. The study aims to identify which type of tenses is used and the frequency of tenses found in advertisements sample. The percentage was analyzed to get the frequencies of each tense type. The number of tenses were counted and tabulated. Furthermore, the relationship between tense choice and the persuasive functions of advertising were examined.

The data found in the 334 advertisements under study consisted of 1164 tenses. Only finite verb phrases were included in the analysis, while non-finite verbs were all excluded from the analysis. Active and passive voice sentences were only included and they treated equally relying on the main target, i.e., whether they are one of the twelve verb tenses. Affirmative, negative and interrogative sentences were equally treated. The tenses were analyzed on syntactic and referential (tense in reference to time) levels and according to their grammatical forms and structure and their usage and meanings (semantic level) in the advertisements texts under study. The tense of each verb was identified as being one of the twelve tense categories. Accordingly, present simple, past simple, future simple, classified the finite verbs, present, past, future perfective, progressive aspects, and present, past, future perfective progressive tenses. Only be and have, and do are included both as auxiliary and lexical verbs, primary auxiliary verbs were excluded except the future auxiliary ‘will’.

The frequency of tenses was tabulated and was decided by adding all the numbers together. These procedures were used to determine the frequency of each tense category in order to find out which most frequent tense(s) types are

more beneficial in the advertising. To achieve this an attempt was done to correlate the tense with the persuasive function of advertisement.

### Results and Discussions

The whole analysis of the verb tenses is displayed in table (1). The number of occurrences and percentage of the twelve verb tenses are organized according to most used in the 334 advertisements under study. Seven tense out of the twelve verb tenses were never used at all in the advertisement samples.

**Table (1):** The table provides the number of occurrences and percentages of the five-verb tense elected from the 1164 tenses. Seven verb tenses are never used in the data sample.

Verb tense	Time of occurrence	Percentage
Present simple	919	78.95%
Future simple	98	8.41%
Present perfect	65	5.58
Present progressive	50	4.29%
Past simple	32	2.74%
Present perfect progressive	0	0%
Past perfect	0	0%
Future perfect	0	0%
Past progressive	0	0%
Future progressive	0	0%
Past perfect progressive	0	0%
Future perfect progressive	0	0%
Total	1164	100%

Of these twelve targeted linguistic forms, the present simple tense was the prevailing tense and represented the highest percentage, 78.8% with an occurrence of 919 times. The reason behind this dominance could be of the multiple usages that the present simple has. According to Quirk et al. (1985) and Comrie (1985) in English, the present tense is the most general and unmarked category, therefore it has several usages:

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The present simple tense is used for commenting on immediately accompanying actions and demonstrations, characterization of habitual actions, narration of historical present, reporting and expressing emotional and mental state, or giving explanations individual acts involved. It is also used for referring to facts and general truths, situations or actions that happens at the present moment. In reference to time, the present simple is not just used to refer to the present time but also it is used to refer to the future time.

In relation to the use and meanings of this tense with the informative and pervasive functions of advertisements, advertising for example tries to present the characteristics of its products and services as they are general truths and facts. The advertisement tries to use the logical appeals to persuade to use factual knowledge to convince the audience via facts and statistics. These facts and statistics help to persuade the audience that they should buy a particular product or to choose particular services. Sometimes advertising makes connection to community: commitment and benefit to society in order to persuade, so they talk about habitual actions they take in the present, it is also visualizing present and future prospects, it refers to positive predication, implies promises and confidence of good results. It manipulates the emotive appeal so it focuses on the perception of the audience's feelings like appreciation, etc. that happens at the moment of speaking. All the afore mentioned meanings and usages contribute to the basic goal of advertising that is to persuade.

The following excerpts were taken from the advertisement data:

**Excerpt1**

Nestlé's makes the very best chocolates.

**Excerpt2**

Laughing out loud with friends always beats an LOL by yourself. Mintos

**Excerpt3**

We appreciate you being our guest on Tropical Cruise Line.

**Excerpt4**

Within 3 or 4 days, skin feels & looks different ...

The second most frequent verb tense as shown in the data was future simple. It occurred 98 times, which represented 8.4% of the verbs of the whole data. This tense has various usages. Future tense is used to characterize and depict positive predictions, express intention, make promises, convey certainty for future. It can be said that the future tense is used in the data because it is usually used to promise the readers what actions, benefits will take place in the future if consumers get the product or the service and what are the results that they will have from using that product or service. In that way the future is used by advertisers to give promise to the readers to reassure them and to enhance the

credibility of the products and services. One of the persuasive function of advertising is to present their audience with a possible future; the company for example, shows that it is credible and trustworthy. A persuasion technique, one of the most productive arguments includes the future tense, the language of choices and decisions.

The following excerpts were taken from the advertisements data:

#### **Excerpt5**

We'll get your home ready for guests

#### **Excerpt6**

Better hearing will positively impact your life. You will find yourself being more social.

#### **Excerpt7**

That's why we'll never give up on discovering the next medical breakthrough, while continuing to support patients here and now.

#### **Excerpt8**

Within 12 days, your dry skin problem will be a thing of the past.

Regarding the present perfect, the results showed interesting outcome. The present perfect tense came out as the third most common verb tense. It occurred 65 times which represented 5.58%. present perfect usage needs some extra detailed explanations as it has different usages and meanings. Firstly, present perfect is the intermediate tense, on referential and lexical level it deals with the continuity relevance of a previous past situation to the present moment, and this is the current relevance use of the present perfect (Murcia & Freeman, 1999; Malcom, 1987). Secondly, is the resultative use of present perfect which reports that an action happened in the past and the results are of current present interests (Gramely & Pätzold, 2002, p.117). This means that the result of the action is more important than the action itself and that the action is still ongoing at the present time. Thirdly, the present perfect has an explanatory or illustrative use since it is used to explain a state of affairs of the thing that is being talked about. That is the activity, event, or the state which is described, explained, or given reason for the thing being as it is at the time of speech (Declerck, 2015). Murcia & Freeman (1999, p .64) stated that the present perfect can be used also to refer to a very recently completed action, that is the present perfect is used for situations that hold today, functioning to denote recent past situations (Murica & Freeman, 1983; Comrie 1985:85).

To relate all these uses and meanings of the present perfect with the advertising functions, it could be said that advertisements use present perfect to establish a background for their products, also to create a sense of finished actions, to high light a result of achievements, or talk and describe an experience after using a

particular product or getting certain services or offering which companies may present to their clients, so they make use of the ideas of current relevance and the 'continuation-to-the-present-moment', that is the duration of the event reaches up to the point of speech, are important as well as the completion of the action. Additionally, the fact that present perfect is somehow closely related to the time, in which the sentence is uttered, to the present, this makes this type of tense form manipulated by advertisements. They use this tense to build a bridge between the past and the present of how the product for example has been developed over time, what improvements have been made, or to talk about certain negative experience before using the product all these and many can be manipulated by the use of the present perfect and therefore it can be regarded as a good persuasive technique.

### Excerpt9

The manager of the TMC RUX UK core fund has delivered throughout the markets ups and downs.

### Excerpt10

IPhone11. You've never seen anything like it. It has never seen anything like you.

### Excerpt11

All Stars have been worn by every U.S. Olympic Team since 1936.

### Excerpt12

...are the most trusted names. Over the past years, we've introduced one innovation after another to help you to win the fight against plaque and prevent gum disease. From the ground – breaking Oral B.

The present progressive tense occurred 50 times and represented 4.2%, becoming the fourth most common tense after the present perfect. The present progressive has different uses. It is used for reporting events, showing intensity, highlighting emotions, expressing subjunctive involvement, giving certain emotional coloring to a sentence, and expressing habituality (Binnick, 1991). In reference to time, the present progressive conveys the meaning of temporariness and incompleteness of an on-going activity or process; it focusses on a change(s) of state and it portrays the action in progress at the time of utterance or at a specific time. When it is used with verbs of emotion, desire, and attitude, the states to which they refer are presented as events in the sense that their progressive forms convey the dynamism of actions or processes, so by suggesting that something is going on, they convey change. Additionally, this tense can refer to future, it refers to a near future happening and anticipated in the present, a present plan, intention, or program.



In the case of advertisements, for example, present progressive is a common way of referring to actions occurring at the moment of speaking like commenting on a printed image. The immediate feature of the progressive gives more strength to the predication about the commodity. Sentences with the present progressive are therefore, more intense, emotional, and vivid. Thus, with emotions like love, hate, and so on, the progressive expresses the strength and force of these states. Progressive stative verbs like these are often found with different kinds of modifiers to additionally emphasize the immediacy and intensity of the situation and this is another technique for persuasion; it deals with emotive function of persuasion. Since progressive conveys temporary behavior by focusing on the behavior as a change, audience needs to know and see the kind of changes that the advertised products or services undergo. The future use of this tense helps to show intention, fix plans and programs in the near future. All the above-mentioned uses of present progressive make advertisements use this tense in its texts to achieve persuasion.

**Excerpt13**

We re challenging the way the clothing industry operates.

**Excerpt14**

BT are giving you more ways to watch the final than ever before.

**Excerpt15**

Everyone is enjoying it.

**Excerpt16**

McDonald's. I'm lovin' it.

Past tense usage appears to be limited (2.7%) within an occurrence of 32 times in the data. In this way it is contrasted with the present tense. According to Gramely & Pätzold (2002, p14) past tense forms depict the feeling of distance that refers to temporal continuum. In reference to time, the past tense is used to report completed actions/events that happened in the past. Past tense also refers to past condition. In advertisement, past tense usually helps to describe the situation that was true when the advertised product was not used and which is mostly negative. It may be also used to give an overview about certain situations or conditions in the past. However, it is not a very powerful device for persuasion like the present tense and this may be the reason why it was not used very much in the data.

**Excerpt17**

If you answered yes to any of these questions call us.

**Excerpt18**

Battery power made by Stihl.

**Excerpt19**

We created the Vari Desk to improve the way people work, and today; Vari is so much than desks. We have a full collection of office furniture accessories to create flexible workplace for....

**Excerpt 20**

It didn't sit patiently. In a ABRRAEL for 8 years to be chased with a beer.

The results also showed that each of the following verb tenses were never used in the data: past perfect, future perfect, past progressive, future progressive, present perfect progressive, past perfect progressive, future perfect progressive with a percentage of 0 % (zero) occurrence of times.

The results revealed that advertisements under study use only five verb tenses out of twelve tenses. These are the present simple, the future simple, the present perfect, the present progressive and the past tense. Regarding the most commonly used tense, it was the simple present form in order to fulfill the customer's desire for the present state of the product and its implication of universality and timelessness) and the future simple with auxiliary 'will' that is often used in advertising, because it evokes the impression of 'promise'. Therefore, the tense choice has an interdependence relation with the persuasive function of advertising. This leads to the conclusion that the language features of a persuasive text are often (but not always) written in simple present tense.

**Conclusions**

This study examined the tense system that used advertisements and which one is the most commonly used .The results showed that advertising exploited the present simple (78.95%)which represented the highest percentage in the 1164 tense corpus followed by the future simple (8.4%),the third most common is the present perfect (5.58),fourth is the present progressive (4.2%) and the fifth tense used is the past simple(2.7%).The rest of the verb tenses that were never used are: past perfect, future perfect, past progressive, future progressive, present perfect progressive, past perfect progressive, future perfect progressive. A persuasive text is written 'now', therefore, most of the verbs are written using present tense.

The results of the study support the argument that there is a correlation between tense choice and discourse function in general and the persuasive functions of advertisements in particular. The present study shows that the relationship between tenses and the persuasive functions of advertising can be elucidated by the essential meanings of the tense and by its temporal factors. The results of the analysis also show that there seems to be a relationship between tense choice and tense basic meanings and usages and this in return serves the persuasive functions. This relationship reflects the equal and separable significance of the uses and the basic meanings of tenses and persuasive functions. Both functions and major meanings and uses are affected

by the tense choice. As the study revealed these verb tenses were used because they serve as a linguistic syntactic device for persuasion. Each one contributes by its usage and meanings to the text of advertisements.

### دراسة تنوع صيغ الأفعال في الإعلانات

#### الكلمات المفتاحية: الإعلان، الأفعال، صيغ الأفعال

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#### الملخص

اصبح الناس مطلعين على العديد من الرسائل الاعلانية بالتزامن مع تزايد شعبية الاعلانات تدريجيا . الهدف من الاعلانات هو إقناع المستهلك للتصرف والتفكير في سلوك وفعل مقرر مكتوب في نص وذلك لتحفيز مبيعات المنتجات والسلع وخدمات اخرى معينة. توظف الاعلانات مجموعة من الادوات اللغوية لجذب الانتباه ،ايضا تقوم بنقل رسائل لاقناع المستهلكين.

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى تحليل ووصف نظام الازمنة في اللغة الانكليزية المستعملة في الاعلانات .وتحاول ايجاد ما اذا كانت الازمنة كأدوات لغوية نحوية تساهم في هدف الاقناع الموجودة في الاعلانات.لهذا فأن الدراسة تبحث قي ايا من هذه الازمنة هو الاكثر شيوعا مع الوظائف التي تحققها هذه الازمنة.استندت البيانات الدراسة على ٣٣٤ اعلان تم اخذها من مختلف المجالات العالمية المكتوبة باللغة الانكليزية .وقد تم تحليل تلك البيانات من زاوية نحوية.اظهرت النتائج بأن الزمن المضارع البسيط الاكثر شيوعا ، في حين الزمن الماضي البسيط هو الاقل شيوعا ،في ذات الوقت كان هناك ازمنة لم تستخدم مطلقا.كما اظهرت نتائج التحليل وجود علاقة بين اختيار صية الزمن وبين وظيفة الاعلان أي بين المعنى الاصلي واستخدامات اختيار صيغة الزمن و الوظيفة الاقناعية . أن اهمية توظيف ادوات نحوية مثل الافعال وازمنتها من اجل خلق لغة مؤثرة يساعد في نقل الرسائل المرجوة من الاعلانات.كما وساهمت الدراسة في توضيح العلاقة بين صيغة الفعل و الوظائف الاقناعية.

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