SEMANTICS ANALYSIS OF AN ADVERTISEMENT

Alit Ida Setianingsih

Udayana University
Denpasar
2017
Introduction

This paper is entitled 'Semantic Analysis Of An Advertisement', a research in Semiotics study.

A descriptive method of textual analysis is presented as a systematic approach to understand the meaning of an advertising text. The steps are demonstrated in the analysis of a single advertisement. The aspects of terminology that presented here comprise signifier, signified, denotation, ideology, and logonomic system. After that, the analysis of the advertisement is presented by of course referring to the advertisement attached here. In this respect, it is interesting to present its semantics analysis under semiotics study.

I do hope this short paper will give a brief information about a semantic analysis of an advertisement which is concerned on semiotics study (study about sign).
The analysis of an English advertisement which is taken from a magazine entitled 'House Beautiful' - Hearst Magazines-November 1995, Volume 137, Number 11. (just for the sake of comment the title 'House Beautiful' seems grammatically strange).

Before presenting the detailed analysis in relation with the study of social semiotics, it is needed to explain slightly about some notions i.e.: signifier; signified; denotation; connotation; literal meaning; ideology and logotomic system. The explanations are shown as follows:

- **Signifier** refers to the realization and expression related with the sign.
- **Signified** refers to the content which has meaning or something.
- **Denotation** refers to meaning which is referential, objective, and cognitive. In contrast, connotation refers to meaning which is not referential but associational, subjective and affective. Connotation is so much influenced by the speakers/producers, the hearers/readers, and context of situation (under what circumstances). The connotations vary from person to person. Thus denotative meaning is relatively simple to describe, at least as the words used do not refer to abstract notion but to concrete one; while being personal in describing connotative meaning is impossible.
- **Literal meaning** refers to meaning which has one to one correlation with the form.
- **Ideology** refers to a level of social meaning with distinctive function, orientation and content for a social class or group.
- Logonomic system is a set of rules prescribing the conditions for production or reception of meaning. It has something to do with advertisements.

The study of social semiotics offers the promise of a systematic, comprehensive and coherent study of communication phenomena as a whole, not just instances of it. The analysis of an advertisement is one of the ways to comprehend the message conveyed and also as a part of communication study of language used in advertisements.

The following is the analysis of an advertisement:

- The identification of the signifiers found in the advertisement:

  The original picture shows: a pack of cigarettes marked with a brand namely ‘Carlton’ with additional words on it which say: SOFT PACK - CARLION IS LOWEST - TAR 1 mg - NICOTINE 1 mg. The pack of cigarettes is along with its shadow. The shadow seems to be manipulated in the form of an arrow that's beneath the blue glassy ground. There is a statement written on the arrow that is 'U.S. Gov't Test Method confirms of all king soft packs : Carlton is lowest in tar and nicotine'.

  Most of cigarette advertisements are identical with man but not on this advertisement. There shown a part of woman body (a woman’s hand) by which she takes a cigarette.

  Out of the picture, there are some signifiers in words which say: - Carlton is lowest (the eye-chatcher)

  - King: 1 mg, "tar", 0.1 mg, nicotine. Lowest off all brands: Carlton Ultra: less than 0.5 mg. "tar", less than 0.05 mg, nicotine av. per cigarette by FTC method.
- a statement reflects a contradiction exists in the advertisement. It is noted:
  *SURGEON GENERAL’S WARNING: Quitting Smoking Now Greatly Reduces Serious Risks to Your Health*

* The contents (signifieds) related with the realization / expression (signifiers)
  - By looking at the picture of the pack of cigarettes along with its shadow in the form of an arrow that is beneath the blue glassy ground, the content of meaning can be grasped; this is the way of producers to represent the meaning of ‘low’. The arrow implies the cigarettes contain low tar and nicotine. Moreover, it is completed with the exact contents of tar and nicotine. From the description of the contents, the producers want to convince the readers / consumers that their product ‘Carlton’ contains the lowest tar and nicotine of all other brands. What the picture shows is in accordance with what the words say: ‘Carlton is lowest’ (the eye-catcher).
  - The hand that is represented by a woman’s is taking out one cigarette, implicitly contains a meaning that the cigarette is as soft as the woman’s hand and fingers. This part of the picture is related with the words: ‘SOFT PACK’.
  - The long statement written on the arrow contains a meaning that the U.S. Government authorizes the Carlton is lowest in tar and nicotine of all king soft packs. Of course, it is stated after being tested in a laboratory. On the contrary, it is declared a warning which is meant that the Surgeon General keep reminding the readers / consumers to stop smoking as such bad habit can cause serious risks to the smokers’ health. In reality, most of cigarette advertisements entail such warning as we have also seen on TV. So, the text responses to the anti-smoking campaign.

* The denotive meaning by considering the signifiers whose content of meaning has one to one correlation with the form. In the analysis, the statements / sentences are chunked into words – phrase. The details are shown as follows:

  *SURGEON GENERAL’S WARNING*

  surgeon: a doctor whose job is to perform medical operations.
General: the second part of an official title, e.g. chief
warning: telling in advance

Quitting Smoking Now Greatly Reduces Serious Risks to Your Health.

Quitting: to stop doing something (in this case, to stop smoking)
smoking: the practice or habit of smoking tobacco smoke from cigarettes, a pipe, etc.
now: at this moment; at the present
greatly reduces: reduce to a large degree (to make less in degree)
serious: not easy to deal with, causing worry and needing attention; not slight
risks: (a) danger, (a) possibility that something harmful or undesirable may happen

to your health: the readers’/smokers’ health: the state of being well in the body and mind, and free from disease.

SOFT PACK:
soft: pleasantly smooth and delicate to the touch
pack: a number of cigarettes wrapped together, put in a cigarette box
loosely: small in amount

tar: a black substance, thick and sticky when hot and hard when cold, used for making road surfaces, preserving wood, (used as the essence of cigarettes)

nicotine: a poisonous chemical which provides the taste and effect of tobacco

confirm: to give support or certainty to (a fact, belief, statement, etc.) e.g.
by: providing more proof or by stating that something is true or correct
kings: a chief or leader among competitors.

* The derivative meaning, which can be figured out, is only derived from one word, e.g. “King.” The meaning of this word is so much influenced by the context of situation, under what circumstances is the word used. In this case, the word “King”
does not mean to refer to the real king (neither the title of the male ruler of a country nor the most important man or male animal in a group) but it refers to an inanimate (the cigarette) which is considered to be the leader (with metaphorical meaning) among competitors (all other brands of cigarette).

By advertising in such way, ideologically, the advertisement has a significant orientation towards the readers, perhaps the messages encouraging the readers/consumers (who belong to a certain social class or group) to buy the cigarette being promoted. Besides that, the content of the advertisement conveys descriptions that the product is the best of all other brands. However, the production is controlled by the local government's laws.

Based on the concept of lexicographic system, some of its aspects enter into the production, appearance and reception of the advertisement. And the advertisement domain reflects a particular relation of producers and consumers.
Bibliography


