

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SOME NIVEA ADVERTISEMENTS

Nguyen Trong Du¹, Nguyen Thi Phuong^{1*}, Duong Hong Yen²
¹Thai Nguyen University, ²TNU School of Foreign Languages

ABSTRACT

This paper presents parts of the findings of a recent study carried out with three objectives: (1) to analyze the linguistic features of Nivea advertisements which are designed to attract customers; (2) to discover the discourse strategies used in Nivea advertisements to construct the concept of ideal beauty; and (3) to investigate the social implications of Nivea beauty product advertisements. Fairclough's three-dimension model was applied on the data sample of 18 Nivea advertisements downloaded from the website <https://www.nivea.co.uk>. Due to the length restriction, this paper only discusses the obtained results for the first and second objectives about linguistic features and discourse strategies in Nivea advertisements. The research results showed that in terms of lexical devices, Nivea advertisers used both positive and negative vocabulary, scientific terms, foreign or exotic words, second personal and possessive pronouns. Headlines are typically written in short simple sentences and phrases while body copies tend to be longer and more complex with the use of comparison, imperative sentences, active and passive voice, present and future tense. Other linguistic features including the use of such rhetorical devices as repetition and simile contribute to create impression and attraction on viewers. The discourse strategies including negative and positive self-representation, providing scientific proof, puffery, adding appeal to healthy beauty and setting close relationship with customers were applied to build the producers' beauty concepts, deliver it to customers and persuade them to use the products.

Key words: *discourse analysis; Nivea; advertisements; linguistic features; discourse strategies*

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PHÂN TÍCH DIỄN NGÔN MỘT SỐ QUẢNG CÁO CỦA NIVEA

Nguyễn Trọng Du¹, Nguyễn Thị Phương^{1*}, Dương Hồng Yến²
¹Đại học Thái Nguyên, ²Khoa Ngoại ngữ - ĐH Thái Nguyên

TÓM TẮT

Bài báo giới thiệu một phần kết quả của nghiên cứu gần đây được thực hiện với 3 mục tiêu: (1) phân tích các đặc điểm ngôn ngữ của quảng cáo Nivea được thiết kế để thu hút khách hàng; (2) chỉ ra các chiến lược diễn ngôn được sử dụng trong quảng cáo của Nivea để xây dựng khái niệm về vẻ đẹp lý tưởng và (3) tìm hiểu những tác động xã hội của quảng cáo sản phẩm làm đẹp Nivea. Mô hình phân tích diễn ngôn ba chiều của Fairclough được áp dụng để phân tích 18 quảng cáo Nivea được đăng trên trang web <https://www.nivea.co.uk>. Do giới hạn về độ dài, nên bài báo này chỉ trình bày kết quả đạt được của hai vấn đề nghiên cứu đầu tiên. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy về đặc điểm từ vựng, các nhà quảng cáo Nivea đã sử dụng cả từ vựng tích cực và tiêu cực, thuật ngữ khoa học, từ mượn hoặc thuật ngữ, đại từ ngôi thứ hai. Tiêu đề quảng cáo phần lớn được viết dưới dạng câu đơn hoặc cụm từ đơn giản còn nội dung quảng cáo được thiết kế dài và phức tạp hơn với việc sử dụng các hình thức so sánh, câu đề nghị, dạng thức chủ động, bị động và các thì hiện tại, tương lai. Các quảng cáo còn sử dụng các biện pháp tu từ như phép lặp và so sánh để tạo ấn tượng và thu hút sự chú ý của khách hàng. Các chiến lược diễn ngôn bao gồm tự đại diện tiêu cực và tích cực, thổi phồng, cung cấp bằng chứng khoa học, nhấn mạnh về đẹp khỏe mạnh và thiết lập mối quan hệ gần gũi với khách hàng đã được áp dụng để xây dựng hình tượng cái đẹp của nhà sản xuất, truyền tải hình tượng đó cho khách hàng và thuyết phục họ sử dụng sản phẩm.

Từ khóa: *phân tích diễn ngôn; Nivea; quảng cáo; đặc điểm ngôn ngữ; chiến lược diễn ngôn*

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* Corresponding author. Email: phuongnt@tnu.edu.vn

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1. Introduction

Advertising has been a topic for many studies. It is not only to promote branded products, but also to deliver the idea of texts which are intended to create the image of an individual, group or organization [1]. Hence, advertising is not a remote and specialized discourse, but a prominent discourse type in contemporary society [2]. From a discursive point of view, advertisements in both written and spoken forms have the potential to employ social dominance, power abuse or inequality and they can change social practices. Advertisements are complex and interdisciplinary although they are very short. Thus, for ordinary people, especially learners of English as a foreign language, it is very difficult to understand the meaning hidden under advertisers' language. Therefore, the study of advertisements is becoming increasingly important. To find out the message, critical discourse analysis could be an effective method because critical discourse analysis has an interest in concepts like communications patterns in public institutions, media discourse such as reporting, advertisements, and television broadcasting [3]. Critical discourse analysis always concerns about social issues embedded in society and tries to analyze hidden power in it. These advertisements have linguistic power through gender and social hegemony and ideologies [4].

Recently, there have been many studies on advertisements from the critical discourse analysis perspective in the world such as the ones by Tahmasbi & Kalkhajeh [5], Rosul [6], Kaur et al [7], and Nugrawidhanti [8]. However, almost no critical discourse analysis studies on Nivea have been found in the world while Nivea is one of the oldest beauty brands with a history of over 100 years and has been one of the top skin care products for both men and women all over the world. Therefore, the researcher decided to conduct a study with an interest in how *Nivea* advertisements work to promote beauty products in order to attract customers to buy

and use them. The researcher also enjoys the contribution of these advertisements to construct the standard of ideal beauty and convincing customers to believe it.

Moreover, to my best knowledge, in Vietnam there have hardly had any research on analyzing advertisement discourses, so learners of English may encounter difficulties in reading advertisements (i.e those for Nivea products which are familiar with Vietnamese users). Therefore, the study is also expected to be beneficial for learners of English in expanding knowledge about language use in particular context, especially linguistic features and discourse strategies of advertisements.

The study aimed 1) to analyze the linguistic features of Nivea advertisements which are designed to attract customers; 2) to discover the discourse strategies used in Nivea advertisements to construct the concept of ideal beauty; and 3) to investigate the social implications of Nivea beauty product advertisements.

However, due to the restriction of the paper length, this paper only presents the findings for the first and second issue. The discussion of the final one should be in another article.

2. Methodology

2.1. Data source

Nivea brand has been widely distributed in most of countries in the world. In each country, it has its own brand website with the language of that country. Vietnam is not an exception. All Vietnamese people can access to the range of NIVEA products on its Vietnamese web page. However, within the scope of the study, advertisements on the brand website which uses English language <https://www.nivea.co.uk> [9] were used as the data source.

Nivea brand has various types of skin care products for both men and women. In this study, the analysis of all advertisements is impossible and unnecessary. Therefore, the researcher chose advertisements of some most popular products as data samples of the study based on the remarks and reviews of customers

on the website <https://www.nivea.co.uk>. Accordingly, those getting the most remarks and good reviews of customers were chosen. As a result, 18 advertisements of men, women and even children’s skincare were selected as data of the research.

2.2. Data analysis method

The advertisements after being copied from the website were analyzed according to the critical discourse analysis framework of Fairclough (2001) (*figure 1*) which includes three dimensions.

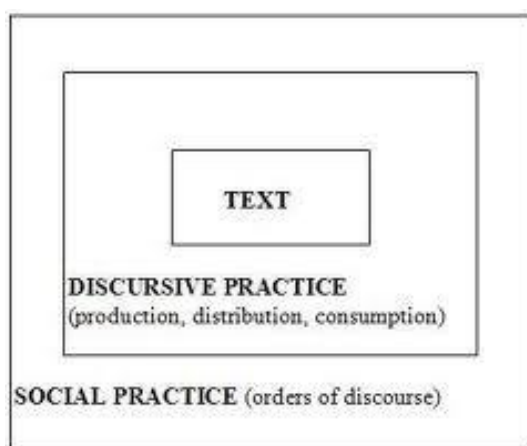


Figure 1. Fairclough (2001) ’s three-dimensional model [10]

The first dimension is text analysis which is comprised with both the form of the text and the meaning. Fairclough [11] remarks this level as a very complex process because texts are debatable and can be interpreted in various ways. He added that text analysis has four main features, ‘vocabulary’, ‘grammar’, ‘cohesion’, and ‘text structure’. In this research study, the linguistic features in terms of lexical, syntactic and rhetorical devices are explored.

The second dimension is discursive practice which is done by using questions like “who are the producers?” and “what are their objectives?” [12]. Fairclough [11] also believes that the text description process in the first dimension of Critical Discourse Analysis can convey certain meanings in the second dimension. Therefore, in this study, the discourse strategies that Nivea advertisers use to attract and persuade the viewers were

discussed based on the text analysis of the first dimension.

The final dimension is social practice which could be described as “power behind discourse” because it contains “the socio-historical conditions that govern the processes of production and reception” [13]. The analysis of discourse in socio cultural perspective brings out the relation among language, power and ideology. How discourse takes part in shaping the thoughts of people and form the ideology and then the struggle of ideologies give the participant power through language use [14]. In this study, it means interpreting the socio-cultural norms or standard of the ideal beauty or the social implications revealed through the advertisement discourses. However, as mentioned in the introduction, this dimension is not presented in the Findings and discussion of this article due to the restriction of page numbers.

3. Findings and discussion

3.1. Linguistic features in Nivea advertisements

Language plays important roles in advertising. On magazines, newspapers and printed catalogs or those on the brand website, people will see the message in written advertisements which often use features of spoken language in order to be able to achieve their effects [1].

At this level of analysis, the linguistic features such as vocabulary, syntax and rhetorical devices employed in the data sample of Nivea advertisements are discussed.

3.1.1. Lexical devices

According to Nugrawidhanti [8], the use of lexical devices is important in advertisements to intensify the persuasion. Most advertisements try to create a positive impression through the extensive use of adjectives or adverbs, nouns, verbs which “gives emphasis on the best qualities of the advertised product which intensifies emotional appeal and creates more convincing message” (p.33).

Adjectives are considered the most powerful among lexical devices to convey positive or negative meanings in advertising. Positive adjectives are used in beauty product advertisements to highlight the products' desirable qualities and emphasize characteristics of ideal beauty. These adjectives usually evoke positive emotion, fantasy, dreams, and desires. On the contrary, negative adjectives can make the readers feel negative emotions about problems prior to using the product or as the consequences of not using the product [7], [8], [15].

In the advertisements of Nivea products, many positive and negative words and phrases (especially adjectives) are used.

For example:

Positive vocabulary: energising, powerful, anti-aging, fresh and energised looking, revitalizing, fast, highly effective, active, deep cleansing, perfect complexion, natural beauty, weightless, instantly and deeply, noticeably smooth, light, creamy, intensive moisturising, easy, fast absorbing, rich, softer, precious...

Negative vocabulary: tired, dull skin, sun-induced, wrinkle, skin aging, sunburn, uv-induced skin damage, sun exposure, sun-induced allergies, sweat and bacteria, black residue...

The findings also show a number of scientific terminologies, foreign or exotic words which are mostly connected with the ingredients of the products in NIVEA advertisements.

For example: *anti-oxidants, SPF15, UVA/UVB, Q10, Vitamin C; New improved formula, Moisture Serum, upper layer, epidermis, Almond Oil; Aloe Vera, residues chlorine, UV rays; Crème, Eucerit®, dermatologically approved; Aloe Vera...*

These words can make the advertisements sound more modern, sophisticated, trustworthy and attractive. By using such words, the advertisement makers hope to impress the consumers with an image of professionalism and advancement in technology [7], [8]. In addition, using exotic,

foreign or literary words which sounds superior, prestigious and imaginative is one of the persuasion technologies in advertising [8].

Another lexical feature of Nivea advertisements is the use of second personal and possessive pronouns "you" and "your". Kaur et al [7] and Fairclough [11] suppose that this technique can efficiently handle people in public communication thanks to synthetic personalization, a tendency to give the impression of treating each of the people in a mass audience as an individual. By using the personal and possessive pronoun "you" and "your", the advertisers give impression that the readers are highly appreciated and establish personal engagement as the readers are addressed directly. The use of personal pronouns establishes a close relationship between the advertisers and the readers. It indicates as that advertiser and company are making sincere and honest promises [15]. It helps create a friendly atmosphere to persuade the customers because they may easily accept a product if a good friend recommended them. Hence, advertisements that seem to talk with friends, bring the readers closer [7]. In the data of this study, the advertisers use "you" and "your" frequently, in 12 out of 18 (67%) selected advertisements. The following quote is an example.

- NIVEA Daily Essentials 1 Minute Urban Detox Mask allows **you** to exfoliate dead skin cells and deep-cleanse **your** skin. A simple skin detox that takes just 1 minute and can easily become part of **your** daily skin care routine. Refine **your** skin's natural beauty and reduce environmental stressors on skin.

To increase the effect of attracting customers, Nivea advertisers also use numbers in 56% (10 out of 18) advertisements. Most of them are numbers of time to emphasize the effective duration and the fast application of the products. Accordingly, the users can see the effectiveness of the products after just "1 application" or they can only need "1 minute" to apply the products. However, they are able to experience the benefit during 24 or 48 hours.

- *A simple skin detox that takes just 1 minute and can easily become part of your daily skin care routine.*
- *Provides 24h intensive moisture.*
- *The rich and creamy formula intensively nourishes for 48h to noticeably improve the roughness of your very dry skin - after just 1 application.*

Besides, the numbers are used to determine the capability of sunlight resistance such as *SPF20*, *SPF15* and *SPF50+*. SPF (Sun Protection Factor) is defined as the number indicating how much a skincare product can protect skin from UVB rays, the kind of radiation that causes sunburn, damages skin, and can contribute to skin cancer. According to experts, SPF of 15 or above is recommended [16]. Therefore, the use of these numbers can improve the trust of the customers to the products.

In addition, the belief of the users in the products seems to raise when the advertisers emphasize the natural origin of the product ingredients by using exact numbers like the following instances:

- ***NIVEA Pure & Natural Moisturising Day Cream for Normal/Combination Skin** is formulated with ingredients that are 95% of natural origin....*
- *Formula infused with the NIVEA Deep Moisture Serum and 2x Almond Oil than the previous formula*

3.1.2. Syntactic features of the text components

+ Headlines

The headline is the most important part of written advertisements because it can attract the readers' attention and make them curious of what follows. Headline is usually written in short, simple words to appeal only to prime prospects but it should provide sufficient information about the product because some readers only read the headline. An effective headline consists of primary product benefits, the brand name and an attractive idea to keep the readers' concentration.

In term of syntactic structure, headline can be a simple sentence with enough components of subject, verbs and objects. For instance, the headline "NIVEA OFFER CARING, TRUSTED SKINCARE PRODUCTS" is used is used with five products, namely *Vital Soja Anti-Age Night Cream*, *Q10 Plus C Anti-Wrinkle + Energy Day Cream*, *Pure & Natural Moisturising Day Cream Normal/Combination*, *Nivea Men Sensitive Shower Gel* and *Nivea Men Energy Shower Gel*. In addition to giving the customers enough information of the brand and type of products, with the word "caring, trusted", the advertisers create a positive image of their products in the minds of their customers at the beginning.

Many of the headlines which are composed of phrases or groups of words are also found in the data of the study. Even though the headlines only consist of phrases, the message can still be delivered to the readers because they contain the most appealing features of the products.

For example:

- *Skincare Specially Formulated For City Living*
 - *A Fast, Highly Effective Detox Mask For Your Face*
 - *48h Intensive Moisturising Care*
 - *Refreshing And Caring Shower Gel*
- Moreover, Nivea producers use catchy headlines in forms of imperative sentences or rhetorical questions to persuade readers to find out more about the products.
- *Want To Feel Clean? Choose **Deep Anti-Perspirant Deodorant Spray***
 - *Men, Give Your Face Optimal Protection And Care*

Such questions and imperative sentences create a close relationship with readers/recipients and serve as the sincere recommendations from friends [15]. Imperatives are commonly used in the advertisements to persuade readers to take certain actions [7], [8]. Therefore, they make viewers desire to buy these products.

+ *Body copies*

The sentences in Nivea advertisements are mostly simple and declarative to provide enough information of the products to the viewers. This finding is consistent to those of [7], [8].

About verb tenses, present tense is the most common tense used in the data. According to Nugrawidhanti [8], the present tense indicates that everything being said is a general truth, the action is happening right now in the present. Therefore, it helps to show benefits of the products being advertised; the advertisement becomes more persuasive.

Future tense is also used in the advertisements. However, it is found only in a few sentences of **Sunshine Love Shower Gel** product “*This caring shower gel, with the unique scent of NIVEA Sun will remind you of a day at the beach! The uplifting sunny fragrance will lighten your mood, while the refreshing formula with Aloe Vera richly lathers to gently cleanse and care for your skin, effectively removing residues of suncream, saltwater and chlorine*”. Future tense is usually used to suggest the future benefits of using the product and to describe future events. It also articulates the promise of the product to the users [8].

The use of comparative sentences is another syntactic feature of *Nivea* beauty advertisements to mention the desired benefits of the product and indicate the better quality of the product than others. For instance:

- *Instantly transform your dry skin into noticeably smoother and softer skin for 48h.*
- *Skin is noticeably firmer*
- *Formula infused with the NIVEA Deep Moisture Serum and 2x Almond Oil than the previous formula*

In addition, most of the sentences in the discourse are active sentences. However, passive voice is also used in the advertisements as shown below:

- *It's specialy formulated to work over night.*
- *The skin is regenerated to provide a smooth complexion in the morning.*
- *The appearance of wrinkles and lines are visibly reduced*

- *Skin contours are improved*
- *Skin is replenished with nourishing moisture*
- *This iconic product is enriched with Eucerit®*

Passive voice is known very useful when the writer need to emphasize the effects of an action, rather than its cause or its actor [17], [18]. Therefore, with the use of passive voice, Nivea advertisers aim to highlight the high quality of their products that have special formula with natural origin and can make best effects on their users.

3.1.3. *Rhetorical devices*

The dominant rhetorical device used in Nivea advertisements is repetition. According to Nugrawidhanti [8] and Vaičenoienė [19], repetition helps to deliver impression to the audience through emphasis on key words and ideas. The data analysis reveals that the most common kinds of repetition used in the data of the study repetition of keywords and synonymy. For instance, in the advertisement of *Urban Skin Detox +48H Moisture Boost Night Gel Cream*, the key words are repeated several times (“overnight”, “healthy” and “the next morning”: 3 times; “detox”/ “detoxifies”: 5 times; “refresh” and its synonym “invigorates”: 6 times; “skin”/ “complexion”: 10 times). They aim to make sure that the readers catch the idea and promise of the product which claim to be able to make people’s skin become healthy just after applying the product overnight.

The last rhetorical device found in the *Nivea* advertisements is simile. Simile is an expression which compares one thing with another using the words ‘as’ or ‘like’. This simile makes the advertisement livelier and more interesting [8]. This technique is used in the advertisement of **Deep Anti-Perspirant Deodorant Spray**: *Nivea Men Deep Anti-perspirant protects the skin from sweat and bacteria for a long-lasting dryness and a clean skin feel just like after the shower*. The advertiser compares the feeling of the customers after using the product with the feeling after shower. This attractive comparison can make viewers feel interested and want to try the product.

3.2. Discourse strategies used in Nivea advertisements

According to Fairclough [20], for the mass media discourse such as advertising in which the participants are separated in time and place, there is one-sidedness of this type of discourse where producers exercise power over consumers. Sutton [21, p. 68] suggests that advertisement, to some extent, will reflect some personal beliefs and values of the advertiser while it is designed to influence the viewers. The advertiser often uses several strategies in the advertisements to attract customers as well as deliver the idea of beauty.

The first strategy is positive self-representation and compliment. The advertiser charms the readers by mentioning positive and negative phrases and using catchy headlines like those listed in the above part that create positive self-representation and images and make the advertisements more attractive. By drawing positive images in the readers' mind, the advertiser stimulates the readers' desire and persuades them to buy the product [8].

The second strategy is providing scientific evidence or clinical test proof. According to Lane et al [22], it is essential for beauty product advertisements to provide scientific proof. By mentioning scientific proof, the advertiser can remove the consumers' doubt. This strategy is frequently used by Nivea advertisers via linguistic devices: the repetition of the statement *dermatologically approved*; the use of scientific terms in all selected advertisements; the use of exact percentage of natural origin, SPF or time of effect duration. Therefore, they can give impression to the readers that the product is advanced, safe and trustful. Thus, they convince consumers to believe in their promise of beautiful skin through the latest technological advances [7], [8], [20].

Another strategy is puffery which is defined as the process of making broad exaggerated or boastful statements about a product or service [23]. It is when the advertiser mentions somehow hyperbolic statements to

grab attention of the readers or to make the product more attractive [8]. Puffery appears in all of the data. For example, Nivea advertise a night cream which can be able to make skin look "healthy, radiant and smooth" after one night and can keep skin moisture for 48 hours. It is considered a puffery because there is no way a cream can make people beautiful in such a short time and can keep skin humidity in such a long period. Other statements like "after just 1 application", "precious", "Instantly transform your dry skin into noticeably smoother and softer skin", "Immediately protects against sun exposure"... are also devices of puffery strategy in the advertisements. Those unrealistic representations and claims attract the readers to buy the product.

The advertisers also use the strategy of adding appeal to healthy beauty. This strategy goes deeper into customers' psychological aspect [8]. The advertisers try to attract the readers' attention through personal statements about the attempt to make customers believe in the desire to be beautiful and healthy-looking. Therefore, such words as "energising", "natural" and "healthy" are repeated several times in almost all of the research data. Besides, natural ingredients are also included in the advertisements to increase the effect of the strategy.

The last strategy used in Nivea advertisements is setting close relationship with customers by using second personal and possessive pronouns and headlines in forms of questions and imperatives. The advertisers make the customers feel like they are given sincere recommendations from friends. Therefore, the effect of persuasion is improved.

4. Conclusion

In short, the researcher applied Fairclough's three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis to analyze 18 Nivea advertisements which were hung on the Nivea main brand website [9]. After conducting analysis and discussion, the researcher has found the answers to the research questions. The first research issue is about linguistic features used

in *Nivea* advertisements. The linguistic features can be classified into lexical devices, syntactic features and rhetorical devices. The lexical devices found in the data are positive and negative adjectives, scientific terms, and foreign or exotic words, the use of the second personal and possessive pronouns. In addition, the syntactic features of headlines and body copies of the data are also analyzed. Headlines are typically written in short simple sentences and phrases while body copies tend to be formulated in long complex sentences to provide more information. There are also the use of comparison, imperative sentences, passive voice, present and future tense. Furthermore, the use of such rhetorical devices as repetition and simile contribute to create impression on viewers and attract them to buy the products.

As for the second research issue related to the discourse strategies used in *Nivea* advertisements to convince customers and construct the idea of beauty, the researcher found discourse strategies namely creating negative and positive self-representation, providing scientific proof, puffery, adding appeal to healthy beauty and setting close relationship with customers.

Due to the restricted length set by the Journal, the last issue about social implications of *Nivea* advertisements is not discussed in this paper, instead it will be presented in another one.

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