

## Utilitarian and Aesthetic Values in the Modern German Society (Through the Example of Print Media Advertisements)

Marina R. Zheltukhina<sup>a</sup>, Nikolay A. Krasavsky<sup>a</sup>, Gennady G. Slyshkin<sup>b</sup>  
and Elena B. Ponomarenko<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Volgograd State Socio-Pedagogical University, RUSSIA; <sup>b</sup>Moscow State University of Railway Engineering of the Emperor Nicholas II, RUSSIA; <sup>c</sup>Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, RUSSIA.

### ABSTRACT

The analysis of advertising print materials placed in German mass media allows revealing the hierarchy of values of modern society, its needs and sociocultural level. Advertisers actively appeal to the concept of "utilitarian values" of society, as they reflect propensity of a contemporary man, first of all, to comfort and moderate money spending. Advertisers' appeal to aesthetic values is determined, on the one hand, by good taste of a part of society, and on the other hand - by prestige of purchased goods or rendered commercial services. In German advertising media texts, the aesthetic value is emphasized, as a rule, when offering expensive goods, which cannot be bought by everybody. It was found out that in German advertising texts the evaluation vocabulary is actively used to effectively influence buyer's consciousness. The analysis of advertisement texts identified two types of goods, whose buyers pursue either utilitarian or aesthetic values. It was found that the more prestigious and expensive the goods, the oftener the evaluating words are used and the more emphasis is put on the aesthetic values of the German society. If the goods are cheap and less prestigious - lexical units that denote utilitarian values are used.

### KEYWORDS

Media text; media discourse; utilitarian values;  
aesthetic values; social needs

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 3 April 2016  
Revised 30 June 2016  
Accepted 7 July 2016

### Introduction

In philology, the priority position is held by text linguistics – a linguistic direction which appeared in the field of intersection of interests, first of all, of rhetoric, hermeneutics, semiotics and pragmatics. The subject of its exploration is a verbal text that can be studied by various approaches, such as formalistic-and-structural, cognitive, linguopragmatic, linguoculturological, sociolinguistic, linguostylistic and others. One of the types of the text is an advertising media

**CORRESPONDENCE** Marina R. Zheltukhina  zzmr@mail.ru

© 2016 Zheltukhina et al. Open Access terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) apply. The license permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, on the condition that users give exact credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if they made any changes.

text, which has attracted attention of many scientists over the last years (Belousova, 2006; Busygina, Zheltukhina, 2015; Kirichenko, 2007; Kochetova, 1999; Nikitina, 1998; Jamieson & Campbell, 1997).

At present a media text can be determined as a certain result of media production, a media product is a message containing information and presented in any kind and genre of mass media (a newspaper or journal article, a television program, a video clip, an advertising message, a movie, a blog, a social network etc.) addressed to mass audience. Media language as a complex of verbal and nonverbal means and methods of expressiveness, which determines the nature of media culture reflecting material and intellectual valuables in the field of mass media is used for creation of media texts (Eisenstein, 2013). An advertising text of the media discourse as a fragment of a newspaper or journal issue, a radio- or television program appears to be a discrete proportion of information which gets into mass information flows continuously circulating in society, connected with mass consciousness and public opinion (Ponomarenko, 2013). An advertisement in mass media can have a focused impact on the addressee, his/her emotions by means of certain words and word combinations which can produce not only emotions, but also be perceived subconsciously as some images (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013). In this article, we turn our attention to the valuation aspect of print media advertising in German linguoculture.

For the purposes of our research let us consider the notion of "print advertising media text". A print advertising media text can be determined as a structured, sense-completed, functionally organized message in print mass media, the addresser of which by means of application of certain communicative strategies and tactics realized by different verbal and nonverbal means, sets the task of psychological impact on the addressee for him/her to buy offered goods or services.

An advertising text possesses, as it was found out by scientists, the certain specificity: 1) convolution: regardless of its area, an advertising text is perceived at a glance and contains the elements, similar to the radicals in reading characters (classifying and individualizing features), 2) complementation: an advertising text complements advertising photos or images, representing an ostensive (pointing) definition, the main component of which is represented by a trademark (pragmonym), 3) signality: a heading signal phrase with a high impact effect is emphasized in an advertising text; this phrase, being highly concentrated, expresses the idea of the advertising text, 4) hierarchy: an advertising text contains first-order information (large font) and second-order information (small font), 5) evaluativity: the advantages of advertised goods are emphasized; at this, functionality, reliability, profitability, universality, originality, unique characteristics and social importance of goods serve as motivating factors, 6) instructivity: the algorithm of the buyer's actions is predetermined and the manufacturer's address is specified in an advertising text (Karasik, 1992).

A print advertising text solves certain communicative problems. The advertiser's (i.e. addresser's) maximum psychological impact on a potential buyer or a client (i.e. addressee) is the most important of them (Gunder, 2013). In this kind of communication, relevancy of a text's language content, acting as a tool of manipulation of the addressee's psychology, is obvious. Therefore, it becomes clear why advertisers pay special attention to the content of the advertising text,

in particular to its verbal components. First of all, they include vocabulary, particularly, the evaluation one, as it performs one of the basic functions – the expressive function.

We are interested in axiological measurement of the German print advertising text, which, fixes the hierarchy of values of modern society (Marzouki, 2015). We consider axiomatic the thesis according to which the features of the national vision of the world, the peoples' mentality are most accurately and brightly expressed in the text – a communicative unit of a natural language. In other words, study of the advertising text as a result of verbal and cogitative activity of a man, belonging to a certain society, and, therefore, acting as a culture bearer, allows the researcher to reveal dominants in this culture or another at a certain stage of its development.

Value is the basic notion of axiology (Arutyunova, 1999; Vorkachev, 2009; Evsyukova, 2002; Karasik, 2014; Slyshkin & Chizh, 2008). In philosophy, value is understood as essence and at the same time the condition of existence of objects. "Value is *what* people's feelings dictate to acknowledge as standing above everything and *what* one can strive for, contemplate, treat with respect, recognition, honor" (A Short Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1994, p. 507). Value is something culturally organized. This cultural organization distinguishes value from natural phenomena.

In linguoaxiology, values of culture are considered as intensional notions as they are determined by the attitude, typical of a certain culture, towards a "thing" (subject, phenomenon, event, concept, cultural norm etc.) (Evsyukova, 2002). According to T. V. Evsyukova, "culture as a semiotic system is a set of natural realia, artifacts and mental facts, such as '*good*', '*evil*', '*truth*', '*conscience*' etc. Axiological attitudes of culture determine vision of the world, a man's attitude towards "things" as well as towards mental facts that compose culture" (Evsyukova, 2002). The category of value is connected with the category of human knowledge. Value is a cognitive category. People learn the world due to language. Language not only reflects reality, but also creates it. Performing the creative function, it is influenced by certain cultural values of society. "Certain objects of material culture, – writes N. F. Alefirenko (2001), – are filled with a special, secondary sense as they are under "pressure" of the whole value-and-semantic organization of this culture that affixes to a corresponding subject the seal of a man's valuation attitude towards demonstrations of socially important actions, moral factors and moral features". Another scientist – E. V. Babaeva (1997) – fairly notes: "Subjects and phenomena of the external and mental world which received the most positive evaluation are characterized as values and later on act as a focus for valuation-and-evaluation activity of a man. On the basis of the made evaluations, a norm – a state associated with a society's positive evaluation and ascribed to the subject of evaluation by its representatives – is formed. An evaluation stereotype – a certain steady reaction (approval, condemnation or indifference) to the same or similar situations – forms as a result of multiple repetition of the same state.

As a rule, cognitive, utilitarian, ethical and aesthetic values are distinguished (Borbotko, 2000). Their classification depends on the evaluator's attitude: objects of reality can be evaluated in terms of their usefulness, functionality, beauty, cogniscibility. In this regard, study of the print advertising

text for the purpose of revealing the nature of values therein is of particular interest.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the hierarchy of values in the modern society and to determine the linguistic mechanisms of influencing these values, based on the material of advertisement texts.

The understanding of the structure of advertisements texts will help to attract more customers, while the hierarchy of values in advertisements texts enables understanding the sociocultural level of the society and describes their main features.

### **Method**

This study used a set of methods that are relevant to the research objectives: systems analysis, dialectic method, conceptual, structural-semiotic and structural-functional analysis of text. These methods enable studying advertisement texts as a holistic conceptual-semiotic system, the content whereof is based on the human needs and the values of Germans.

Advertisements texts were analyzed based on the interdisciplinary approach, which unites a number of various directions of studying this problem. The semiotic, linguistic, and cultural studies approach were crucial to studying advertisement texts.

350 print advertising media texts published in the popular German magazines "Der Spiegel" and "Focus" in 2000-2015 served as the research material.

### **Research Analysis and Results**

Goods / services offered by advertisers to consumers / clients are objects of advertising. The analysis of the German magazines allows us to highlight the most frequent objects of advertising: 1) cars, 2) computers, 3) television sets, musical instruments, 4) means of communication (telephones, Internet), 5) printers, copiers, faxes, 6) cameras, 7) watches, 8) glasses, 9) furniture, 10) refrigerators, 11) tableware, 12) clothing and footwear, 13) perfumery products, 14) medicines, 15) food and drinks, 16) cigarettes, 17) movies, books, magazines, newspapers, 18) banking services, 19) airlines' services, 20) insurance companies' services, 21) travel agencies' services, 22) construction and repair organizations' services, 23) car service.

It was revealed that each object of advertising had appropriate positive characteristics verbally expressed in the print advertising text. Using the principle of frequency, they can be presented in a certain sequence in terms of topicality in relation to one or another object of advertising. In other words, the priority values of the advertised subject/service can be determined on the basis of the number of the used lexical units. In particular, a "typical" car as the object of advertising from advertisers and, probably, buyers' point of view should possess the following high-priority characteristics in the German society: 1) reliability (30), speed (18), 3) safety (14), 4) comfort (12), 5) design (11), 6) engine efficiency (9). The lower-priority characteristics were such as environmentally friendly engine (3), spacious passenger compartment (3). Let's consider an example of advertising a BMW-brand car: „*Beeindrucken würde ihn wohl auch, dass der neue BMW 3er geradezu in der Straße verwurzelt zu sein scheint: Das Fahrwerk ist insgesamt sportlicher und straffer ausgelegt; die Automatische*

*Differenzialbremse sorgt in kritischen Situationen, um Beispiel wenn Laub auf der Straße liegt, für erhöhte Traktion. Doch eines würde den Baum sicher besonders begeistern: der neue BMW 3er verbraucht trotz seiner leistungsstarken 4-Zylinder Valvetronic-Motoren erstaunlich wenig Kraftstoff, was gleichzeitig niedrige Abgaswerte bedeutet. Sie merken, ein Baum hätte Gründe genug, den neuen BMW 3er zu bewundern" (Spiegel Nr. 39/24.09.2001).* In the advertising text the verbs "begeistern" and "bewundern" are used in order to produce readers' positive attitude towards the goods advertized. The technical characteristics of the goods are also frequently used in the text as an argument. So, this media text underlines the reliability of BMW automated braking (automatische Differenzialbremse) that ensures traffic safety. A potential buyer's attention is focused on BMW engine power (leistungsstarke 4-Zylinder Valvetronic-Motore). Fuel efficiency of the car (verbraucht erstaunlich wenig Kraftstoff) and its low environmental impact are specified as well. The advertisers take into account all the requirements of the FRG legislative acts regarding environmental protection.

The analysis of other objects of advertising allows us to choose the following basic priority characteristics listed below in terms of relevance: (about goods) 1) goods quality expressed in durability, practical convenience, easy use; 2) goods reliability and safety; 3) design; 4) originality of manufacturing technique; (about services) 1) economic benefit; 2) quick and efficient work of personnel; 3) professionalism of company employees; 4) honest relationship between personnel and clients.

Positive characteristics, properties, functional capabilities of objects of advertising are often expressed by evaluation words, which can be either rational (*effektiv, wirksam, kraftvoll, der Spaß* etc.) or emotional (*toll, wunderbar, am schönsten, hervorragend* etc.). Let's consider an example of an advertising text of "Garten & Landschaft": "*Jeder wünscht sich einen Ort, an dem er die besten Aussichten auf einen Platz an der Sonne hat. Der eigene Garten ist so ein Ort. Ob Sie von einem Steingarten träumen, sich einen Schwimmteich wünschen oder Ihre Lieblingsecke mir einer neuen Terrasse verschönern wollen – Ihr Landschaftsgärtner liefert die Ideen und übernimmt Ausführung und Pflege, fachgerecht zu einem exzellenten Preis-Leistungs-Verhältnis*" (Spiegel Nr. 39/22.09.2003). In this advertising text, both rational evaluation vocabulary (*die Pflege*) and emotional evaluation vocabulary (die besten, exzellent, verschönern) are used.

The analyzed material shows that German printing advertising media texts usually include combination of rational and emotional evaluation vocabularies. It is remarkable that no essential quantitative predominance of the one group or the other was noticed.

The vast majority of evaluation words used in print advertising texts are adjectives, much less nouns and very few verbs. This fact can be easily explained if we take into account the semantic-pragmatic features of the adjectives characterizing objects (in the broad sense of the word) of reality. The following are referred to the number of the most frequently used evaluation words of print advertising texts: 1) adjectives/adverbs – *gut, günstig, perfekt, schön, der schönste, effektiv/er, der beste, besser, innovativ, ausgezeichnet, fein, edel, attraktiv, ideal*; 2) nouns – *die Faszination, die Spalte, die Innovation, die*

*Eleganz, der Luxus, das Vergnügen, der Spaß, die Freude, der Genuss, die Lust, die Liebe; 3) verbs – sich wundern, faszinieren, erleben, sich freuen, genießen.*

In general we recorded about 100 evaluation lexical units. Their active use in print advertising texts is based on the communicative and practical tasks, the advertisers focus on, - sale, goods sales and appropriate rendering services to clients.

In our opinion, it would be interesting to consider the above-mentioned linguistic facts which helped to form the list of priority properties and characteristics of objects of advertising in the context of nature of their values. The latter can be classified into two big groups – utilitarian and aesthetic. Utilitarian values are expressed, for example, by the lexical units such as *praktisch, kostengünstig, supergünstig, preisgünstig, wirksam, effektiv, kraftvoll, zuverlässig, produktiv* and many others. Aesthetic values, in their turn, are expressed by the following words – *edel, elegant, die Eleganz, extravagant, weise, klug, die Intelligenz, kreativ, klassisch, intelligenter, der Luxus, fürstlich*. In print advertising texts, the number of the words referred to utilitarian values is vastly superior to the number of the words expressing aesthetic values; it is explained by targeting of the print advertising text. An average person who, based on his/her social status, belongs to the middle class, is primarily interested in practical usefulness of goods and, of course, in their cost. If we remember the peculiarities of mentality of the German society which are particularly based on psychological perception of the Germans as extremely thrifty and prudent by other nations, the last criterion is essentially relevant for this society.

Copywriters' appeal to aesthetic values is based on their wish to increase the social status of buyers / clients by using psychological methods. Exclusively pure utility, "not mixed" with aesthetic elements can belittle buyer's / client's self-esteem. Thus, the fact that advertisers take into account the features of psychology of perception of potential buyers / clients motivates to actively use the lexical units, directly or indirectly expressing aesthetic values.

## Discussion

S.V. Ivanova and A.V. Nikolayeva (2011) emphasize the importance of "empty" words in the construction of advertisement texts, i.e. the saturation of the text with emotional adjectives, which doubtlessly play a major role. Furthermore, the analysis of advertisement texts found that evaluative words are used more frequently for goods with higher prestige and cost. The average person is interested in the offered practical goods with a good price-quality ratio. Therefore, the saturation of advertisement texts with evaluative words varies depending on the nature of the goods and the target audience.

During our research we revealed quite a rough correlation between the cost, goods/service prestige and the nature of the value verbalized in the print advertising text through the evaluation vocabulary. So, in particular, expensive and prestigious cars (e.g., Mercedes, Volvo) mainly addressed to the rich segment of the German population are often advertized by using the words correlating with aesthetic elements (*edel, fürstlich* etc.), while cheaper, less prestigious cars (e.g., Volkswagen) to be purchased by the middle and lower

segments of society are advertized, as a rule, by using the vocabulary nominating utilitarian values (*bequem, sparsam*, etc.).

By their nature, the characteristics of the objects of advertising which were found out by us during the linguistic analysis of the print advertising media texts can be classified into utilitarian and aesthetic. In general, the first group appeared to be more differentiated verbally, that is explained by targeting of the advertising media text. An average person is more interested in goods having practical usefulness (appropriate functional capabilities), on the one hand, and in their cost, on the other hand. The last criterion is extremely important for the Germans, if we take into account their thrift as a peculiarity of the nation (Man muss sparen). We revealed a correlation between the cost, goods/service prestige and the nature of the value verbalized in the print advertising text. The more prestigious and expensive the goods, the greater becomes the probability of use of evaluation words, nominating aesthetic values. And, respectively, the cheaper and less prestigious the goods, the more frequent is used the vocabulary, denoting utilitarian values in the German society.

### Conclusion

1. A print advertising media text is a set of super-phrasal unities, semantically and grammatically connected with each other, transferred through a print media channel and implementing the communicative task of the addresser's psychological impact on the addressee of a speech for the purpose of purchasing goods / receiving paid service by the latter.

2. A great number of evaluation rational and emotional words used in German print advertising media texts can be considered as their semantic feature. No essential quantitative predominance of one group of evaluation words or the other in this kind of text was revealed. The vast majority of evaluation words used in print advertising texts are adjectives, much less nouns and very few verbs. This fact is determined by semantic-pragmatic features of adjectives which perform the function of characterization of the world's objects.

3. The study of the contents of the print advertising media texts revealed the system of priorities of German advertisers and consumers. According to the Germans' views, goods should serve their owners for a long time, be convenient in practical use, safe, not expensive, have good design, be original in manufacturing technique. Offered services should be economically available, quickly and politely rendered to people.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

### Notes on contributors

**Marina R. Zheltukhina** is a Doctor of Philology, Professor of Theory of English department, Volgograd State Socio-Pedagogical University, Volgograd, Russia.

**Nikolay A. Krasavsky** is a Doctor of Philology, Professor, Head of Theory of German and Technique of its Teaching department, Volgograd State Socio-Pedagogical University, Volgograd, Russia.



**Gennady G. Slyshkin** is a Doctor of Philology, Professor, Head of Social sciences and professional communication department, Moscow State University of Railway Engineering of the Emperor Nicholas II, Moscow, Russia.

**Elena B. Ponomarenko** is a PhD, Associate Professor of Foreign Language department, Faculty of Philology, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Moscow, Russia.

## References

- Alefirenko, N. F. (2001) Valuation-and-Semantic Nature of Language Knowledge. *Language Personality: Problems of Cognition and Communication. Collection of research works.* Volgograd: College, 3-11.
- Arutyunova, N. D. (1999) *The Man's Language and World.* 2<sup>nd</sup> corrected edition. Moscow: Languages of the Russian culture, 896 p.
- Babaeva, E. V. (1997) *Cultural-and-Language Characteristics of Attitude towards Property (on materials of the German and Russian languages)*: PhD Thesis in philology. Volgograd, 210 p.
- Belousova, N. P. (2006) *The Main Characteristics of Slogan as a Subgenre of the Modern Russian Advertising Discourse*: PhD Abstract in philology. Samara, 16 p.
- Borbotko, V. G. (2000) The Game Principle in the Activity of Language Consciousness. *Ethnocultural Specificity of Language Consciousness. Collection of articles.* Moscow: The Institute of Linguistics of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 40-54
- Busygina, M. V. & Zheltukhina, M. R. (2015) Correlation of the notions "press release", "news", "advertising" in modern media discourse. *Cognitive explorations of language*, 20, 641-653.
- Eisenstein, J. (2013) Phonological factors in social media writing. *Proc. of the Workshop on Language Analysis in Social Media*, 3, 11-19.
- Evsyukova, T. V. (2002) *Linguoculturological Concept of the "Dictionary of Culture"*: ScD Thesis in philosophy. Nalchik, 304 p.
- Gunder, A. (2013) Forming the Text, Performing the Work-Aspects of media, navigation, and linking. *Human IT: Journal for Information Technology Studies as a Human Science*, 5(2-3), 35-53.
- Ivanova, S. V. & Nikolayeva, A. V. (2011) The Role of "Empty" Words in Advertisement Texts (by the Example of English Advertisement Texts). *Political Linguistics*, 4, 34-52.
- Jamieson, K. H. & Campbell, K. K. (1997) The Interplay of Influence. Belmont, Ca: Wadsworth Publishing Company. 349p.
- Karasik, V. I. (1992) Language of Social Status. Moscow, Volgograd: Peremenya. 330p.
- Karasik, V. I. (2014) Language Demonstration of Personality. Volgograd: Paradigma. 450p.
- Kirichenko, N. V. (2007) *Expressive Means of Sounding Advertising Text*: PhD Abstract in philology. Voronezh. 23p.
- Kochetova, L. A. (1999) *Linguocultural Characteristics of the English Advertising Discourse*: PhD Abstract in philology. Volgograd. 19p.
- Marzouki, El. M. (2015) Collaborative media. *New Media & Society*, 17(10), 1756-1757.
- Nikitina, S. V. (1998) *National Specificity of the Text of Industrial Advertising*: PhD Abstract in philology. Voronezh, 20p.
- Ponomarenko, E. B. (2013) Linguistic Manipulation Devices. *GISAP: Philological Sciences*, 1, 62-65.
- Short Encyclopedia of Philosophy. (1994) In E.F. Gubsky (Eds.).. Moscow: Progress. 576p.
- Slyshkin, G. G. & Chizh, N. V. (2008) City as a Sociocultural Value. *City sociology*, 1, 12-20.
- Spiegel, Nr. (2001) Sonderteil zur Internationalen Automobil-Ausstellung. Direct access: <http://www.spiegel.de/thema/iaa/>
- Spiegel, Nr. (2003) Garten & Landschaft. Direct access: <http://www.spiegel.de/thema/iaa/>
- Vorkachev, S. G. (2009). Search for the Truth: the Idea of Justice in the Russian Linguoculture. Volgograd: Paradigma". 190p.
- Wimmer, R. & Dominick, J. (2013) Mass Media Research. Direct access: <https://www.amazon.com/Mass-Media-Research-Roger-Wimmer/dp/1133307337>