A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF GENDERED MESSAGES IN A DIET ADVERTISEMENT FOR WOMEN *

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ABSTRACT: This work provides a combined analysis of linguistics and visual structures of a piece of advertising promoting a weight management drug which follows a leaflet format. To meet this purpose, I based my analysis mainly on the theoretical framework proposed by Halliday (1985; 1994; 2004) and Kress and van Leeuven (1996) for their interest in the functional meaning of language and visual modes. A semiotic-linguistic analysis shows how gendered messages of fit empowerment in promotional discourse can paradoxically highlight a social pressure played against a female body. The theoretical apparatus helps to scrutinize the dynamic interplay of different semiotic modes, constantly taken by advertising, so as to emphasize the tension between female physical empowerment and dictations of gendered body norms. Even a partial analysis of the whole campaign indicates how language and images are used to turn female body insecurity into a profitable commodity. This work is part of my PhD. research in progress on a multimodal analysis of the Brazilian version advertising campaign.

KEY-WORDS: multimodal analysis; advertising; gender; female body.

RESUMO: Este trabalho propõe uma análise das estruturas lingüísticas e visuais de parte de uma campanha publicitária a qual promove um medicamento para controle de peso sob o formato de um "leaflet". Com a finalidade de alcançar esse objetivo, a análise baseia-se em pressupostos teóricos propostos por Halliday (1985; 1994; 2004) e Kress e van Leeuven (1996) devido ao interesse em comum dos pesquisadores em desvendar o significado funcional que permeia as modalidades verbais e visuais. A análise lingüística-semiótica demonstra como a retórica de cuidado ao corpo e gênero, contida em um discurso promocional, pode, paradoxalmente, ressaltar pressões sociais exercidas contra o corpo feminino. O aparato teórico contribui para a investigação da dinâmica existente entre diferentes modalidades semióticas frequentemente utilizadas em propaganda a fim de ressaltar a tensão firmada entre poder proveniente da conquista de um corpo feminino "ideal" e a ditadura imposta por normas relativas a gênero. A análise parcial de parte de uma campanha publicitária indica como linguagem e imagens são manipuladas para transformar **Proceedings**



inseguranças femininas em relação ao corpo em um negócio rentável. Este estudo compõe parte de minha tese de doutorado, em andamento, sobre a análise multimodal da versão brasileira de uma campanha publicitária de um medicamento para perda de peso.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: análise multimodal; propaganda; gênero; corpo feminino.

1. Introduction

As a prominent discourse¹ type in late modernity, advertising can inform us about our own society and our own psychology by reflecting transformations of language and discourse (Cook, 1992; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2002). The status of discourse type suggests that it follows norms, conventions and relations within different levels of social structure as much as it helps to keep the same norms, conventions and relations including our multiple social identities (gender, social class, age, ethnicity etc.). In the process of transforming language of objects into language of people, advertisements present condensed forms of meaning which are able to mould and reflect social interaction.

In general, advertisements are an inevitable part in individual's life. Their ubiquitous and tenacity qualities allow them to create independent realities that are taken as real, especially to their target's audiences. Consequently, they invoke a false association that people are identified with what they consume, instead of what they produce (Williamson, 1978: 13). Obviously, the general public is partially aware that ads do not represent real life, that advertisers manipulate reality in the service of selling products. However, a careful reading of contemporary advertisements reveals, for instance, persistent manipulations of problems that psychology and the popular media have taken as dilemmas of the "contemporary woman".

According to Bordo (2003) ideas of self-containment and control have become a common trope in advertisements for products directed at female consumers. "The rhetoric of ads addressed to women is interestingly contrasted to the one of mastery and control directed at male consumer. Here, the message is almost always one of mastery and control over *others* rather than the self (Bordo 2003, 105).

¹ The concept of discourse takes into account Fairclough's own explanation, that is, 'language use as a form of social practice', 'a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning' (Fairclough, 1992: 63-64).



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Generations raised in the empire of images promoted by mass media are more likely to join into the hegemony of the fat-free body. Fairclough (2003: 8) refers to the long-term effects of texts such as advertisements. "Prolonged experience of advertising and other commercial texts contributes to shaping people's identities as 'consumers' or their gender-identities". In this sense, pharmaceuticals companies have invested huge amounts of money on direct-to consumer advertising (DTCA) of prescribed drugs in the mass media. Most of their marketing has been traditionally directed at doctors, via promotional materials. Today, doctors still represent their primary goal of advertising, but DTCA has popped up in mainstream media as a marketing strategy that is more challenging than advertising directly to doctors. The rhetoric of this kind of ads seems to rely on emotive language communicating different powerful emotional factors linked to doctors and consumers gender.

Although these pharmaceutical companies claim for their interest on public health, DTCA often promotes 'lifestyle drugs' (Raven 2004) rather than drugs information about the causes of disorders or nonpharmaceutical treatment. The marketing strategies used especially when advertising lifestyle drugs are based on gender messages that dictate regulatory frames for female and male appearance. However, in mass media, women are still portrayed in terms of their bodies much more than men are (Crawford and Unger 2000: 33). In movies, for instance, "no female can achieve the status of romantic or sexual ideal without the appropriate body. That body, if we use television commercials as a gauge, has gotten steadily learner since the mid 1970s" (Bordo 2003: 154). The point here is not to deny the benefits of diet, exercise and other ways of body management, but to promote the recognition and analysis of contradictions in one example of cultural popular discourse that claims to aid the female body. These contradictions seem to be in the service of gender normalization by employing the rhetoric of personal freedom and empowerment and, indeed, turning women's bodies, pursuing these ideals, into distracted, depressed and physical ill beings.

In order to verify the pressure on the female physical appearance played by mainstream media, this paper draws on an example of DTCA that claims for public awareness of an specific condition, weight management, and its possible solution through a high-profile drug, encouraging women to consult their doctor to get informed about the drug efficiency. The ad, following a leaflet format, occurs in the form of unbranded advertisement in which the weight loss drug Xenical is not mentioned by name but is easily recognized by the public due to



indications to the Roche company name and pill-shaped logo, besides web addresses. In its DTCA promotional campaign in Brazil, mainstream media are used (advertisements - both print and web editions - particularly cable television) to raise public awareness about weight loss options by asking what "you" (female consumers) would do with "a few pound less". In this article, I undertake a semiotic-linguistic analysis of a piece of advertising which has been displayed in doctor's office for patients to pick up. The ad belongs to a series specially targeted at the Brazilian female consumers. A combined analysis of linguistics and visual structures is based mainly on the work of Halliday (1985; 1994; 2004) and Kress and van Leeuven (1996) for their interest in the functional meaning of language and visual modes.

This paper begins by introducing some observations concerning the culture of contemporary body-management which reflects anxieties of the social body. Then, the theoretical support chosen provides meaningful tools for micro and macro analysis of the normalizing role of diet by analyzing a sample of popular representation and its gender message. In the conclusion, the implications of the analysis are considered emphasizing the process through which cultural meaning is crystallized, encoded and transmitted by language and images.

2 Managing Desire and A System of Desirable Commodities

All we experience as meaningful are appearances. Such idea prompts an industry of body alteration that goes beyond the cosmetics or fitness industry. Mainstream media helps to crystallize the idea that the body, like malleable plastic, may be shaped to the meanings of individuals' choice. It relies on a discourse that encourages consumers to imagine possibilities closing their eyes to limits and consequences.

Since the seventeenth century, science has been responsible for the study of the body and its disorders (Bordo 2003). More recently, consumers are increasingly seeing chemical solutions being proposed, by mainstream media, as solutions to cultural and behavioral problems that interfere in their physical appearances. Bordo (2003:67) stresses out the contradictions of the scientific views towards individuals' bodies:

In the medical model, the body of the subject is the passive tablet on which disorder is inscribed. There is an attempt to embody certain values, to create a body that will speak for the self in a meaningful and powerful way. Slenderness is so



compelling in the contemporary context that it suggests multiple significances which go beyond technical and professional expertise.

The overemphasis on individuals' physical appearance played by media images of self-containment and self-mastery and reality produces bodies habituated to self-monitoring and self-normalization. Despite of meaningful social changes, sexualization and objectivation of the female body still represent marketing strategies. Ads are able to reflect complex historical developments; however, when dealing with gender messages, they rely on just reformulated stereotypical views into which women are judged by more exacting physical and sexual standards.

Admittedly, women are more bombarded with advertisements and commercials for weight-loss products and programs aiming at teaching them how to control their weight. In an attempt to disguise sexualization and objectivation of the female body, advertisers have taken the rhetoric of feminism. Such strategy has helped them advance and justify the industries in body alteration through ads that sell ideas of empowerment and the fiction that the required time, money, and technologies are available to all (Bordo 2003: xxvi).

"No body can escape either the imprint of culture or its gendered meanings" (Bordo 2003: 212). Women's appetite and body size have been shaped by ethnic, national, historical, class, age and other factors. Slenderness overdetermines a contemporary ideal of female attractiveness in westernized standards. Most of women who can afford to be eating well are dieting —and hungry—almost all the time. Dieters live in a state of constant denial and women are taught, mainly through ads, that their relation to food is decisive in their quest for an adequate self (Bordo 2003: 103).

The rules governing the construction of contemporary femininity are advertised mainly through bodily discourse. Images that dictate what clothes, body shape, movements and behavior are adequate. A control for female appetite may represent the most important rule for meeting the contradictory demands of the contemporary ideology of femininity: on the one hand, specific cultural practices and meanings tell women that slenderness projects masculine language and values of self-control, determination, mastery in the professional field through men's wear look, for instance, and, on the other hand, the discipline of shaping and



decorating the female body guarantees them the pleasure of being a desirable object.

Preoccupation with fat, diet and slenderness may function as one of the most relevant normalizing forces of our century. The physical body may reproduce vulnerabilities and anxieties of the social body (Bordo 2003: 186). And in this sense, the analysis of popular representations, such as the example chosen, has shown that women are subject to technologies of diet and body management more profoundly than men.

3. Overview of the Theoretical Approaches

This work takes into account principles of critical discourse analysis (henceforth, CDA) and systemic functional linguistics (henceforth, SFL) for their concern with linguistic choices. For both areas, the linguistics choices made are not only the speaker's or writer's choice (Fairclough 1995); they represent options that have been built inside our minds through our history shaped by the daily influence of other people and circumstances. This bi-directional link between language use and social practice is a fundamental principle for CDA and SFL. From both perspectives, a text is a product of changes in the social life and its discourse cannot be taken for granted. It has to be analyzed according to the choices made in the process of meaning-making.

In SFL, three headings are used to interpret the social context of situation, the environment in which the text unfolds: field –what is going on- tenor —who are taking part- mode — what is that the participants are expecting the language to do for them, channel (spoken or written) and rhetorical mode (persuasive, expository, didactic) are also included. Thus, language is seen as a modeling system, "enabling human beings to make a mental picture of reality, to make sense of what goes on around them and inside them" (Halliday 1994, p.106). SFL attempts to explain linguistic structures and phenomena by referring to the functions that language serves in the life of the individual (psychological viewpoint) and the functions that language serves in the life of the community (sociological viewpoint). Hallidayan functional grammar considers the clause as the basic unit of analysis. A clause represents a combination of three functions into which field is expressed through the ideational (clause as representations), tenor is expressed through the interpersonal (clause as exchange), and mode is expressed through the textual (clause as message).



These three functional conceptualizations of meaning inspired Kress and van Leeuwen's three areas of visual representation: first, representational structures involve ideational meanings – the nature of events, objects and participants, circumstances of the visual image. Second, the interactive meanings in image are analysed in order to establish the interpersonal relationship between the viewer and the represented participants. The distribution of information value characterizes the compositional meanings. The adaptation of systemic functional grammar to the visual dimension of texts becomes possible mainly because, as mentioned before, Halliday's conceptualization considers texts taking into account their context, as a mode of social action (Halliday, 1984 as cited in Iedema 2003: 31). multimodal perspective, "language in use does not occur on its own", and "it is integrated with and heavily dependent on other forms of meaning making" (Iedema 2003: 40). The multimodal concern relies on the multi-semiotic complexity of a construct or a practice.

The theoretical support chosen provides meaningful tools for micro and macro analysis of textual and contextual issues that help to establish and maintain social power.

4. Context of Situation

Discourse and its resultant texts can only be understood taking into account the context into which they are embedded. This section draws upon the concepts that serve to interpret the social context of the ad mentioning the weight management drug Xenical. The multi-modal text chosen, a leaflet addressed to women, calls the attention for being an example of DTCA which is part of a pharmaceutics campaign announcing a pharmaceutics product, manufactured by the Swiss company, Roche that suggests medical endorsement. In relation to its mode, one may realize that it is written and intends to persuade people to buy something. The visual and discursive constructions are transmitted under a leaflet form which aims at its easy distribution.

A Mexican advertising company, Teran, a branch of TBWA group, is in control of the campaign which is simultaneously broadcasted through different modes: TV, hoarding signs as well as web and printed media in whole Latin America. The Brazilian advertising campaign suffered some modifications in comparison to its Latin version. In the nation-wide campaign, for instance, all actresses are local. Patria Publicidade, a Brazilian advertising agency, is in charge of textual and visual adaptations that supposedly attend national marketing expectations. The



Brazilian division of Roche Laboratory counts on R\$20 million p.a. for marketing investments. The massive investments on advertising are consequences of a plummet of 17, 7% in 2003 around the world, according to Bloomberg assessment [http://www.valoronline.com.br >, consulted September 20, 2004].

In Brazil, the advertised product represents the second best selling medication of Roche with an income of R\$ 60 million in 2002. According to Roche lab director, Ferreira Júnior, their main intention is to stimulate women, between 30-50 years old, from higher classes (classes A e B) to look for medical advice and, in this way, take over at least one third of medical prescriptions; "Esperamos que um terço das receita prescritas venham para nós" says Ferreira Júnior [www.valoronline.com.br/ valoreconomico/materia.asp?id=1982375, consulted September 20, 2004].

According to some detailed information about the sample chosen in addition to its reproduction at the end of this section, one may easily observe a number of strategies used to reproduce and reinforce disciplinary technologies addressed to the female body. The campaign is based on a social trend which associates modern medicine and aesthetics which, consequently, naturalize dieting disciplines. In all samples of advertisements of such campaign, only women play tenor. The field can be interpreted as an advertisement of product for weight loss; however, the theoretical analysis contribute to detect a networking of other texts expressed through the ad revealing an emotional appealing product that would allow women to improve social relations. It encourages women to look for their doctor who comprises an intermediary participation, as a gatekeeper to patients' access to the drug. It is a curious fact which turns the figure of the doctor into a mediator between the consumer and the product.





O que você faria com alguns quilos a menos?



Figure 1







Figure 3

5. Data Analysis

Here the language analysis relies on how writers, in this case, advertisers, make use of language in order to interact with consumers. As written medium, visual communication is also coded. For this reason, some visual features of its structure concerning participants will simultaneously be discussed in light of the interactional function of visual grammar proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen, as mentioned in section 3. Under the interpersonal function, "what someone says may look like demanding" or "giving information or demanding goods and services" ... "the most usual way of giving information is a statement, the most usual way of demanding information is a question and the most usual way of demanding goods and services is a command or order. There is, however, no usual way of giving goods and services" (Butt 1998, p.64). The exploration of the interpersonal function reveals the



kind of exchange taking place which characterizes MOOD (subject + finite). The subject-finite relationship represents "a sign of the interaction taking place in the discourse by establishing the message as statement, question, command" (Butt 1998, p.71) Following the order of statements presented in the ad, the examples chosen refer to the simulated interaction between interactive participants: the producer (advertiser) and the viewer (consumer) and a final "advice" which involves a collaborator, the doctor, in the process of product consumption. In light of critical discourse analysis, types of exchange will also be analyzed.

One may verify that the advertisement begins with a question demanding information from its audience. The question demands specific information from its audience characterizing interrogative mood. This kind of speech function suggests, according to Fairclough (2003), a 'knowledge exchange'. The appropriate metalanguage presented by SFG is used.

O que	você	faria	com alguns quilos a menos
Complement	Subject	Predicator	Adjunct
WH-			
	Mood;	interroga	
	(demand)		
Residue			Residue

Figure 4.1 – Example of interrogative MOOD

The visual communication accompanying the demand of information presents a *represented participant*, an adult white woman in her forties following contemporary normalizations determined by her class and age expressed through her hair, accessory and outfit, who occupies more than a half of the front cover of the leaflet (fig. 1). The participant addresses the viewer directly with a smile which characterizes a demand picture asking the viewer to enter into a relation of social affinity with her. As seen in fig. 1, only the woman's head and shoulders are shown. It refers to a close-up shot inviting the viewer to establish a relationship with the participant which you should identify with.

Specific information given simulates the participant's answers or information about the product in the declarative MOOD into which the Subject precedes the Finite:



Eu	faria	as pazes	com o espelho
Subject	Predicator	complement	adjunct
Mood: declarative (offer)		Residue	

Figure 4.2 – Example of declarative MOOD

(Eu)	(faria)	(as pazes)	com o guarda-
			roupa
Subject	Predicator	predicator	adjunct
Mood; declarative (offer)		Residue	

Figure 4.3 – Example of declarative MOOD

(eu)	(tiraria)	férias	na praia e
			sem canga
Subject	Predicator	complement	adjunct
Mood: declarative (offer)		Residue	

Figure 4.4 –Example of declarative MOOD

(eu)	faria	Um	desfile	de
		linger	lingerie	
Subject	Predicator	compl	complement	
Mood: declarative (offer)		Resid	Residue	

Figure 4.5 – Example of declarative MOOD

It is noteworthy that in Figure 2 all statements are hypothetical emphasizing what is called 'irrealis' statements (Fairclough 2003: 109). The answers to the question that characterize information exchange are all inserted into a speech balloon. As the participant offers information, the visual representation also implies an offer addressing the viewer indirectly. The represented participant is offering herself for scrutiny and contemplation through a medium long shot into which her body is shown in full. The other statements offer information about the product ('realis' statements) interpolated with some 'irrealis statements suggesting hypothesis or prediction "você pode participar do programa Xenicare", "você terá à disposição (...)" (fig. 3), "você receberá livretos com informações e dicas (...)" (fig.3) and evaluation "Sentir-se bem com você mesma é a melhor motivação (...)", "Acesso a trocas inteligentes de



alimentos (...)" (fig. 3). The concept of exchange proposed by Fairclough (2003) implies the idea that all texts are oriented to dialogue, all lexicogrammatical choices involved considers at least one kind of imaginary reader.

At the very end of the advertisement, there is an example which apparently gives a piece of advice namely "Fale com seu médico", but, in an oblique way, demands goods and services from the consumer. Such strategy can be identified due to the fact that only the doctor can prescribe or provide reliable information about the product. The action invoked by the imperative mood is more connected to idea that the ability to control and manage weight depends on the medical professional expertise.

		Converse	com seu médico
No Subject	No finite	Predicator	Complement
Mood: imperative		Residue	

Figure 4.6 – Example of imperative MOOD.

Taking this examination into account, it is possible to observe that the producer intends to give the impression that the interactants alternate power as if they were in a real conversation. The advertiser demands information, the woman gives information, the advertiser gives information, the advertiser gives advice and demands goods and services. This strategic action (Fairclough, 2003) is revealed in terms of exchange types and speech functions in clauses. On one level, the ad seems to be oriented to information exchange, to give information about a product rather than to its primary purpose of activity exchange, 'selling' a pharmaceutics product including medical practices. Bearing in mind the implications involving dieting disciplines, advertisers, here, try to soften the promotional message by suggesting possible gratifications, in case the consumers accept the challenge of regulating their desire. The woman in her forties, who represents the type of audiences to be addressed, has the chance to answer the question presented in a thought bubble. The participant is connected to her thought through a special kind of vector, in this case, an explicit line that indicates the kind of process represented in the visual image (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1997). The vector characterizes a mental process with the participant playing the senser. This observation implies another visual metafunction, representational. However, such projective structure emphasizes a way of domination of the participant's mind. She is not only visually represented, but her thoughts are also explored. Her answers mirror a need for social acceptance emphasizing stereotypical actions associated **Proceedings**



to the female gender: women's chronical interest for shopping, their pursuit for social approval, their interest on clothes, and their interest on keeping a romantic relationship. All this information is presented in a hypothetical way through past conditional verbs like *faria* or *tiraria*, which denotes signs of the speaker's opinion, also known as modality. The modal verbs express the speaker's commitments to truth. In case of knowledge exchange presented, one may observe that the advertiser elicits woman's commitment to truth through a modalized question while she commits herself by giving modalized answer. The modality here is epistemic with the speech functions of statement and question. The hypothetical modality (What would you) is used to make the question tentative, as if the advertiser "was hypothesizing about asking the question rather than actually asking it" (Fairclough 2003: 169). It also emphasizes a strategic action that aims at making the promotional message less explicit.

In SFL, the Finite, in these clauses, is a Modal Finite which expresses probability. It is noteworthy that the analysis of such sentences expressing opinion emphasizes that women's weight is crucial for achieving the status of romantic and sexual ideal. The hypothetical modality presented, explicitly or not, in the statements addressed to her suggests that she is not happy with her actual appearance; she cannot wear the clothes that she wants to, she cannot expose her body the way she wants to, she cannot improve her sexual life all because of her own weight. The undesirable features are implicit in her commitment to truth. As an intentional representative participant, the images are used to attract a category of female consumers who see overweight the reason for their unsatisfactory social outcome. It does not matter if they are really overweight. Actually, the representative participant cannot be included in a group who needs medical intervention.

In this corpus, the discourse includes imaginaries (Chiapello and Fairclough 2002:195) – verbal representations of how the women's body might, could or should be in contrast to what they should avoid which is visually represented by a thin woman. The analysis shows the contradictory relations embedded in the marketing for female consumers. The rhetoric of personal freedom and empowerment may lead to female body alterations that are in the service of gender normalization depressing, repressing and suppressing women's social mobility.



6. Conclusion

The occurrence of advertisement and its effects on social life cannot be overlooked. Both modern society and advertising have been facing important changes that have influenced every aspect of their interaction in terms of the type of audience, type of information and the media through which advertisements are transmitted (Leiss, Kline & Jhally, 1997). This analysis shows that language and image are socially shaped as well as they can be used to shape the ways women are managing their hungers Thus, social events like ads are able to disseminate social practices including messages that teach women to please visually through the practices of the body.

In their pursuit for new audiences, advertisers may propose knower-initiated knowledge exchange through hypothetical modality with a more primary purpose in view - activity exchange. The textual and contextual analysis reveal a strategic action concerning the meaning making of promotional messages which are able to interfere in the way people perform their gender. Without a doubt, media discourse sees the body as a site of gender normalization which, in this case, aims at convincing women that being attractive is decisive for social acceptance. Therefore, discursive and visual constructions encourage women to imagine the possibilities of deconstructing the body, of living a process of constant self-denial.

The way female gender is built, maintained and reinforced by discourses and visual images even in one sample of printed advertisement can say a lot about the social thinking concerning gender. The analysis of lexicogrammatical features seen from critical discursive and systemic functional perspectives have helped to understand, expose and social inequalities which go beyond gender roles. Additionally, a multimodal perspective has contributed to the analysis of the kind of signification and communication established through visual images to the viewers.

Despite major changes concerning the position of women in society, CDA offers possible ways to identify, in a macro level, forms of discursive gender domination and normalization that judge and discipline through media and publishing industry, for instance. In its micro level, the examination exposes the way that lexicogrammatical and visual choices are designed to convince women to re-shape the material development of their bodies.



The investigation of constitutive elements belonging to a discursive visual practice discloses an attempt to create gendering advertisement that attracts female attention and consequently determines the audience's mind control. Moreover, the way that the ad is presented in the real world is not just an effect of linguistic structures and social practices; it results from networks of social practices based on renewed dominant ideologies concerning the female gender.

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