

Structural and Semantic Features of the Brand Language: a Case Study of Coffee Brands

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This paper focuses on the study of structural and semantic features of the brand language from the standpoint of a multimodal approach. Brand communication is an oral or written exchange of information about the brand through the brand language for disclosing ideas and expressing the semantic universality of brand communication. The multimodal approach is considered the most effective tool for studying the brand language, as it is not homogeneous but is a combination of different semiotic resources: verbal, visual, audial, and sensory. The study is based on a case of 550 coffee brands.

Keywords: brand language, mode, polysemiotic block, verbal elements, nonverbal elements, communicative situation.

The brand language is a system of signs, symbols, and means of expression, which function in different communicative situations like natural language and other forms of communication, exerting a pragmatic influence on the recipients of brand information. From a multimodal perspective, the elements of the brand language are combined into verbal, visual, audial, and sensory modes. Vocabulary and style of the verbal mode are implemented in the nominative, attractive, axiological, narrative, and descriptive polysemiotic units.

The study showed that a semantic coherent of all the brand language elements is the brand name, which represents the nominative polysemiotic unit. The brand name is a compulsory element of the brand language that reflects the linguistic style of a brand. The peculiarity of coffee brand names is that they are a relatively mobile lexical layer: there are stable traditional brands and new modern coffee brands appear regularly.

Given the structure of coffee brand names, they can be divided into single-component (4,3%) (*Fairland, Javesca, Napalm*) and multi-component (95,7 %) (*Jo coffee, Orange County coffee roasters*). There are groups of names inherent in coffee brands with different markers of the coffee industry. Descriptive (36%) names are marked by belonging to the coffee industry (*49th Parallel coffee roasters, Addington coffee co-op*). Explicit names (90%) correlate with a product denominated in the lexeme “coffee” (*Costa coffee, Taylor's coffee*) (80.5%) or contain lexemes of foreign origin - Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Indonesian - *Cafe Altura, Caffè Nero, Coava, Kopi Luwak Direct* (5%). Geographical names (5.5%) are marked with coffee origin (*Java Planet organic coffee roasters, Port of Mokha coffee*). Implicit names (11%), which indicate an indirect correlation to the product, contain symbolic or metaphorical markers that are part of the semantic field of “coffee” (*Fresh cup of hope, Bean Addiction, Peaberrys coffee roasters, Baristas*). Metaphorical historical (1.8%) names contain markers indicating the coffee history - (*Black Gold coffee roasters, Devil's Brew coffee company, Kaldi's coffee roasting co., Grumpy Goat coffee company; Cuppa-Joe-coffee*). Neutral names are not associated with a specific field of coffee production (13%)

(*Brown Bear, Higher Ground, Red Diamond, Neo*, etc). Out of context, such names may cause erroneous associations with other products (*Bulletproof, Cageless bird, Napalm, Wing, and wire*).

In terms of lexical composition, there are proper names (30.5%), which are divided into ones containing names of the company founders (*Lavazza, Tchibo, Illy, Folgers, Batdorf & Bronson coffee roasters*), or names that symbolically associated with certain brands (*Gobena coffee, Kuma coffee*) (20.5%), and locative names (*Brooklyn Roasting Company, Seattle's Best Coffee*) (10%). It was found that 7.8% of coffee brand names are of foreign languages, mostly Spanish (*Caza trail*), Italian (*Ara Azurro*), and Portuguese (*Onibus*), or hybrids - a combination of English and another language (*Cafeciteaux coffee roasters, Camino coffee roasters*). Abbreviations are rare (0.5%) (*JBC (Johnson Brothers Coffee) coffee roasters, MJB (Max J. Brandenstein) coffee, PT's (Polzin and Taylor) coffee roasting co., GFC (Great fucking coffee)*), and blending as a word-formation tool is used in 2.5% of brand names (*Nescafe = Nestle + Café*).

The pragmatic function of coffee brand names is revealed in various ways: 1.2% of names contain references to anthroponyms (*Balzac's coffee roasters, Churchill coffee company, David Lynch signature cup coffee*), 1% of suggestive names contain assumptions, hints about the specifics of the company (*Coffee of the cross, Roasting Rabbi coffee, Mommee coffee, 10 speed coffee*).

The visual tools of name representation are the choice of fonts and colors, which together reveal the semantics of the name and the style of the brand. Mostly these are verbal-visual logos of brands, where the illustrative element serves as a means of their identification.

The attractive unit of the brand language contains such elements as the tagline and slogan. Analysis of the body of coffee brands shows that the tagline is an optional element of the brand's language, contained in the language of 43.63% of brands. Taglines with two (*Always fresh*) to nine components (*Have it your way if your way is fast*) have been identified. Three-component taglines form the largest groups (*We know coffee*).

Studied taglines of coffee brands are divided into descriptive (50%) - describe the product or brand (*Small batches. Good vibes*), imperative (18%) - contain motivation to action (*Choose. Brew. Enjoy.*), Superlative (14%) - position a brand as the best in its category (*The world's rarest coffee*), provocative (11%) - give food for thought, often in the form of a question (*What's that smell?*), and specific (7%) - reveal the category of business (*Drink coffee. Save animals*).

The most common phonetic tools for forming taglines are rhyme (*Put some shuffle in your hustle*), rhythm (*Skillfully roasted. Artfully blended*), alliteration (*Right roast. Right taste*), assonance (*Escape the daily grind*), and consonance (*Taste it. Feel it*). Stylistic methods of forming taglines are metaphor (*Happiness is brewing*), hyperbole (*We eat coffee for breakfast*), and pun (*Not just a cup, but a just cup*).

Unlike the tagline, the slogan is used in the brand language more often and is one of the main means of attracting the attention of the audience. Thus, slogans contain stylistically loaded words and phrases with a strong emotional connotation (*Passion, perfectly poured; The heavenly coffee; Your cup of inspiration; Espresso yourself*).

The mission statement (axiological unit) is an emotionally hyperbolic text with such stylistic aspects as follows: 1) appeal to individuals or groups of people using the nouns *customers, growers, community*; 2) positive representation of the brand through the use of nouns with value implications *values, culture, environment, sustainability*; 3) creating a hyperbolization of the mission statement through the use of such superlative combinations as *overwhelming roast, unique and exclusive blends*; 4) the use of imperative verbs for the emphases of the brand; 5) emphasizing the personal approach by using the pronoun *one* and the “*coffee*” aphorism *at a time*; 6) the use of the imperative mood of verbs and predicative combinations that characterize productive discursive processes, such as *inspire, be dedicated to, do one’s best*; 7) the use of the determinants *we, us, our* as a tool to motivate the target audience by engaging in their community and identifying consumers as members of the community; 8) synergy of all verbal elements to preserve the style and specificity of the brand language.

The narrative polysemiotic unit of coffee brand language is storytelling – a marketing technique of transmitting meanings through emotionally charged stories. The types of coffee brand stories traditional (44%) - contain a chronology of events, a detailed description of the creation of the brand, locations, and information about its founders; modern (36%) - dynamic, their description is aimed at conveying the concept and differences of a particular brand from others; artistic (11%) - a creative type of storytelling, stories not about the brand itself, but about a certain environment where the brand is an element; personified (3%) - the most emotional, about a certain personality; specialized (1%) - focus on a specific group of consumers informed about the specifics of the brand; legend stories (1%) - create an atmosphere of mystery that attracts attention, drives curiosity and promotes memorization; short stories (4%) – contain quotes of famous people about coffee, name, and history of the brand.

A typical feature of storytelling is the use of deictic elements - personal and possessive pronouns *I, my, we, our* creating an emotional connection between sender and receiver of the story. The core of the story are predicates (*believe, invest, welcome*) forming the line of narrative actions.

The descriptive polysemiotic unit of the brand language is represented by descriptive texts, containing information about the characteristics of the product. A multimodal ensemble of the descriptive unit of coffee brand language consists of different modes: visual – image (color, the shape of coffee beans); sense-perception – taste, aroma, and texture of the product; verbal – verbalization of the above visual and sensory characteristics of the coffee.

Descriptive texts being nonhomogeneous verbal-visual contain the name of the coffee, weight, price, advertising text, coffee descriptors, and visual presentation of the product (picture). Coffee descriptors are quite necessary elements of descriptive texts of coffee brands, as coffee is a product that is chosen by consumers according to its organoleptic properties.

Depending on the characteristics of coffee, the descriptors have been specified: tastes and aromas; the degree of coffee beans roast; market segment; the origin of the coffee; certification and type of production; the coffee composition; type of coffee beans; the form of coffee as a product.

The language of coffee brands works in communicative situations, such as advertising, website, packaging, social media, and merchandise. Polysemiotic units of the coffee brand language implement their linguistic and pragmatic potential while maintaining an identical verbal-visual style.

Thus, the integrated language of each brand preserves its authenticity – similarity and unity of style for all communicative situations, consistent repetition of the same words and images. The recursive interaction of verbal and nonverbal elements of the brand language is the foundation for its recognizability.

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