An Analysis of Interpersonal Meaning of an English Advertisement

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This paper adopts Halliday’s systemic functional grammar as the theoretical framework to make an analysis of interpersonal meaning based on an English advertisement from the perspective of mood, modality, and appraisal. In this way, it attempts to find out how interpersonal meaning is realized in this advertisement and how the advertising purpose is reached. Findings reveal that this advertisement contains a lot of personal resources to persuade readers to accept what is advertised. It presents advertisers’ views which exact impacts on readers’ attitudes and behaviors. Interrogative mood is frequently used and modal words are abundant. In terms of appraisal, high emotional values are employed. These resources together contribute to achieving the advertisement’s goal and realizing interpersonal meaning.

Keywords: systemic-functional grammar, advertisement, interpersonal meaning

Text (An Advertisement Published by the Department of Health in 1989)

(1) Do the financial rewards match the emotional ones?
(2) Emotionally, nursing is one of the most satisfying force of professions.
(3) Imagine how rewarding it is to nurse a stroke victim toward independence.
(4) Or to watch a critically ill patient go into intensive care and come out of it in a stable condition.
(5) Or being recognised and thanked by former patients.
(6) Of course these sorts of experiences are worth a great deal.
(7) But you can’t live off experiences any more than you can live off fresh air.
(8) So what sort of money can you expect as a nurse?
(9) A nurse’s salary is far from being the pittance of popular imagination.
(10) The very least a newly qualified nurse can earn is ___ or ___ in Inner London.
(11) (Those figures and the ones that follow exclude unsocial hours payment.)
(12) But the above salary is just, the first rung on the pay ladder.
(13) The pay structure in nursing is designed to reward the clinical skills and responsibilities of individual posts.

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In other words, it’s no longer necessary for a nurse to leave the patient’s bedside in order to earn a higher salary.
(15) Even better, each step-up or grade gets an automatic increment every year for the first four years.
(16) But what does it all mean in real terms (or rather real money)?
(17) Well, more than three out of four nurses are currently in one of the higher grades.
(18) They earn up to ___or___ in Inner London.
(19) And what’s the money like if you go to become a Ward Sister or (the make equivalent) a Charge Nurse?
(20) They can earn as much as ___or___ in Inner London.
(21) Not as bad as you thought, is it?
(22) Of course, you’re unlikely to be attracted to nursing because of the money.
(23) But there’s no reason in the world why you shouldn’t be.
(24) What did you do at work today?

Introduction

Advertisements feature as negotiating with readers and persuading them to be align with advertisers’ views, in which interpersonal function serves as a driver and plays an important role. According to systematic functional language, there are three basic metafunctions, namely, ideational function, interpersonal function, and textual function (Halliday, 2014, pp. 84-85). Among them, interpersonal function means that people make use of language to interact with others and to establish interpersonal relationships. In this process, communicators express their views and exact impacts on others’ attitudes and behavior. As Geoff Thompson put it,

The interpersonal meanings relate to the fact that the clause is interrogative but functions as a kind of command, that it expresses the writer’s assessment of probabilities and her attitude, and that it explicitly signals the writer’s negotiation with the reader. (Thompson, 2014, p. 46)

When it comes to the realization of interpersonal meanings, Geoff Thompson pointed out that “interpersonal meanings are expressed by the intonation contour; by the ‘Mood’ element; and by expressions of modality that may recur throughout the clause” (Thompson, 2014, p. 387). He also pointed out that “appraisal is a central part of the meaning of any text and that any analysis of the interpersonal meanings of a text must take it into account” (Thompson, 2014, p. 80). However, there are relatively few researches exploring advertisements with interpersonal meaning from the perspective of mood, modality, and appraisal. Based on that, this paper will discuss the advertisement from mood, modality, and appraisal perspectives.

Literature Review

In recent years, more and more scholars have explored advertisements from the interpersonal meaning perspective. They conducted relevant studies from different aspects and by employing different methods. Yang Xiuye and Gao Wencheng (2020) discussed the realization of interpersonal meaning in the discourse of both English and Chinese environmental protection public service advertising from mood and modality perspective. They pointed out that the persuasiveness of environmental protection public service advertisements has something to do with the application of mood and modality system. Enyao Li (2019) analyzed the interpersonal meaning embodied in Chinese public service advertisements from three perspectives: mood, modality, and
person, discussing how interpersonal meaning is realized in Chinese public service advertisements and how the advertisements’ aim is attained. Hidayat Didin Nuruddin, A. Abrizal, and A. Alex (2019) explored the interpersonal meaning of Indonesian television advertisements through qualitatively using case study to check how different semiotic and modes such as music, sound, and image work together to build the interpersonal meaning. It mainly discussed the interpersonal meaning in speech and music, interpersonal meaning in movement and interpersonal meaning in image and color. Zhao Bingqing and Hu Yan (2019) investigated the interpersonal meaning of recruitment advertisements from the perspective of systemic functional grammar and how it is realized through mood and modality system. The paper finds that one function of recruitment advertisement is to establish a good relationship between recruiter and the potential applicants by the resource of interpersonal meaning.

**Mood and Interpersonal Meaning**

According to Geoff Thompson, mood plays a special role in carrying out the interpersonal functions of the clause. The choice of mood has something to do with interpersonal meanings. In conversation, for example, we might find declarative mood, exclamatory mood, imperative mood, and interrogative mood (Thompson, 2014, pp. 41-53). Geoff Thompson also pointed out,

> Interpersonal meanings are embodied (a) in the person system, both as pronouns (e.g. she, you) and as possessive determiners (e.g. her, your); (b) in forms of assessment serving as post-Deictic (e.g. probability possible and evidentiality alleged); (c) in the attitudinal type of Epithet; Probability in particular can be signalled by a combination of modal operators (e.g. “must”, “will”) and Mood Adjuncts (e.g. “necessarily”, “willingly”). (Thompson, 2014, p. 72)

Having read through the whole text, one can find it quite easy to notice the aim is to advertise that nursing is quite rewarding financially beyond its emotional rewards, in order to persuade those potential readers who are already nurses or may be interested in assuming the nursing profession. Since it is an advert, interpersonal meanings are quite imperative.

Interrogative questions are harnessed to relate more closely with readers, like “So what sort of money can you expect as a nurse?” (8); “And what’s the money like if you go to become a Ward Sister or (the make equivalent) a Charge Nurse?” (19); “Not as bad as you thought, is it?” (21); “What did you do at work today?” (24); etc. All these interrogative questions intend to engage readers to think about their expectation of nursing rewards and hence realize interactive effect. On top of that, the author also uses imperative mood, such as “Imagine how rewarding it is to nurse a stroke victim toward independence” to invite readers to put themselves into this conversation and follow the instruction, helping realize interpersonal meaning. In general, this text places much weight in involving readers in it and persuading readers to consider nurse as a occupation as a way to promote the realization of interpersonal function.

According to Geoff Thompson, subject and finite realize mood choices. They have a vital role in carrying out the interpersonal functions of the clause as exchange in English (Thompson, 2014, p. 51). In this text, the author employs some personal sources when negotiating reader relations, including personal pronouns subject “you” and “they”, which implies the speaker’s attempt to engage readers into this conversation. Such personalised, inclusive, and directive language is really contributing to better realizing interpersonal meaning. Through making use of “you” and “they”, the advertiser reaches interaction with those who are potentially thinking about becoming a nurse and persuade them to do to consider the occupation, so as to achieve interpersonal function.
Modality and Interpersonal Meaning

In addition to what have been mentioned above, the author also employs modality to realize interpersonal meaning. Like Geoff Thompson (2014, p. 70) said, “Modality can thus be seen as constructing a kind of interpersonal ‘aura’ of the speaker’s attitude around the proposition”. On the one hand, the author makes use of modals of obligation in explicit authorial directives, like “But there’s no reason in the world why you shouldn’t be” (21). Here the obligation marker “shouldn’t” is used to sharpen the request and imply that nurses are entitled to consider financial rewards for their work.

Beyond that, modulation “can’t” (7) is also harnessed, “But you can’t live off experiences any more than you can live off fresh air”. Here negation presents a voice connected to a potential opposing one and hence two voices are involved. More evidence is presented in “you’re unlikely to...” (22), which reveals the fact that it is almost impossible for a nurse to ignore financial rewards. That employs the fact-like statement to strengthen the validity and realize interpersonal meaning.

On the other hand, modality is also harnessed to bring extra voices into the text. In the text modalities like “can” (8) and “shouldn’t” (21) are also leveraged, which reveals the addresser’s personal attitude and tries to involve readers to the conversation. More evidence is showcased in “So what sort of money can you expect as a nurse?”. Compared with “must” or “ought to”, “can” shows permission and can be seen as the lowest degree of pressure, opening the possibility for the readers to do the action and decision. It is indirectly contributive to reaching interpersonal function.

Further evidence is presented by a modal adjunct “of course” mood adjunct to show awareness of what his readers might already be thinking and present the hetergloss advantages, like “I am aware that you might have thought of this, and I want to show that I have thought of it as well”. Such strategies are really helpful for enlisting the support of the readers and further realize interpersonal communication.

The interpersonal resources like “Of course, you’re unlikely to...”, “Of course these sorts of experiences are worth a great deal...” employed in order to anticipate and steer readers’ responses. These expressions show that the addresser carefully takes the addressee’s opinions into consideration and hence enables the target readers to echo with and relate to the author’s perspectives. Beyond that, such informal conversation is more likely to make readers to position themselves in the presented situation and function as interactive strategies to involve readers in the conversation, which potentially contributes to the persuasive effect and achieves a better promotion by making use of interpersonal function.

Appraisal and Interpersonal Meaning

As Geoff Thompson put it, “it is important to note that appraisal is a central part of the meaning of any text and that any analysis of the interpersonal meanings of a text must take it into account (Thompson, 2014, p. 80). Since interpersonal meaning cannot be separated from appraisal or evaluation, it is significant to include it interpersonal meaning analysis. As Martin and Rose (2003, p. 17) put it, “appraisal is concerned with evaluation—the kinds of attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of the feelings involved and the ways in which values are sourced and readers aligned”. The evaluation in the text centers upon the validity of the argument that the financial rewards of nursing match the emotional ones. There are some instances of inscribed appraisal, for example, in (9) “A nurse’s salary is far from being the pittance of popular imagination.” and in (15) “Even better...”. They are overtly telling addressees how promising it is to be a nurse. Beyond that,
invoked appraisal is also harnessed, like in (12) “But the above salary is just the first rung on the pay ladder.” Although it has not directly showed how rewarding it is, reading in the context, readers still can feel the implicit connotation—nursing is really paid off. That way, readers are persuaded to take up the occupation and hence interpersonal function is reached.

On top of that, the author tends to ascribe more extreme viewpoints and thus more highly graded attitudinal values, leaving little room for readers to question. Instead of providing for the possibility and room with those who hold to other positions, the author mostly relies on a high degree of extreme points in positions and strongly encourages the reader to align him-/herself. For example, in (7) “But you can’t live off…”, in (21) “Not as bad as…”, in (22) “you’re unlikely to be…”, in (23) “there is no reason…”, all of these clearly and firmly disclaim other alternative positions and leave little room for readers to discuss or argue. Such high level of extreme propositions construes a more explicit and forceful orientation to the reader and more directly appeals for agreement. Besides, even though in (6) and (22) “of course” are presented which seemingly implies that the author considers readers’ positions, such signals actually function as concession. That is, the writer accepts the proposition, but we know that a “but” will follow, and the writer will argue that the proposition will not have the consequences that might be expected, not to mention that a lot of countering markers “but” are used, like in (7), (12), (23).

Although the author tends to use personalised and explicit resources, there are still some subjectless forms which provide more high probability values. For example, in (9), (10), (11), (12), (13), (14), (15), statements are employed and they are more like monogloss. However, these impersonal or subjectless forms feature a number of fact-alike statements about the salary of nurses, which means confidence about validity. Besides, in “it’s no longer necessary for a nurse to leave the patient’s bedside in order to earn a higher salary”, here “it is no longer necessary” implies that the author expresses the point of view in a way that seems this is a quality of the event itself rather than the subjective point of view; hence objectivization is achieved. All these are strategically in order to soften more extreme propositions, and thus convince readers of their validity.

On top of that, the whole text uses present tense which strengthens that the proposition is real and is valid for the present time and actual situation. Besides, some graduation terms can also demonstrate the persuasive effects, like “as much as”, “a great deal”, “three out of four”, “far from”, etc. All of these are upscaling forces and make the text more forceful and powerful.

Having discussed the whole text, now returning to the very beginning and the end, we may find the two questions put forward by the author quite enlightening, at the first “Do the financial rewards match the emotional ones?” and in the end “What did you do at work today?”. They are to provoke readers to think them over. The first interrogative question is expressed in a way that makes it clear that the expected response is “yes”. In the following part, the author elaborates how financially rewarding is to be a nurse, using a lot of specific evidences like “they can earn as much as…”, “they earn up to…”, and some convincing numbers like “three out of four nurses are…”. A tag question is also leveraged, “Not as bad as you thought, is it?”, which implies that nursing is also promising when it comes to tangible benefits. Therefore, having read though the whole text, addressees will find it quite obvious that the financial rewards do match the emotional ones.

In the end, the author stimulates readers to ponder over “what did you do at work today”, which seems to be a relatively open question for different readers may have gone through different experiences and the answer to this question is indicative of the responders’ commitment of their work. The addressees may be seemingly expected to provide information that the questioner does not know. However, since it is positioned in the final
part and readers have followed the author’s mind all the way though the final ending, it may be quite possible that they are expected to construct the potentially intended statement: maybe think about nursing.

**Conclusion**

To put it in a nutshell, the author employs a number of forceful resources when negotiating reader relations, with more forcefully persuasive or even adversarial pieces. Whether it is the deliberate employment of personal pronouns, interrogative questions, subjectless and monogloss statements or heterogloss, present tense, modality, inscribed and evoked appraisal, etc., all these resources not only contribute to the advert text being forceful and persuasive, but also address the readers powerfully, pressuring them to align the author’s proposition. By choosing an interactive way to proceed the text and making use of personal resources, the advertisement achieves its aim to persuade readers to agree with the advertiser and accept what is advertised, hence prompting the realization of interpersonal meaning.

**References**


### Appendix A: Attitudinal Analysis

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### Appendix B: Graduation Analysis

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