

## The symbolic power of radio advertising: A case study of Polish radio commercials

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*And I decided that I needed less, not more.*

The Residents “Commercial album”

This study uncovers some aspects of interrelation of radio advertising with the linguistic resources of a speech community. If compared to a large amount of scholarly attention devoted to the study of visual aspect of advertising (TV, newspapers or hoardings, e.g. Eco 1991 [1996]; Amouzadeh – Tavangar 2004; Cook 1992), the study of the language of radio advertising seems to be nonexistent. As Lacey (2000: 279) observes, the absence of literature in media studies that pays any sustained attention to listening is frustrating.

The data was recorded from some of the Polish largest commercial broadcasting networks: *RMF FM*, *Radio Zet*, *Radio Złote Przeboje*, *Eska* and *Radio Planeta*, from 20th November 2006 to 20th December 2006. The first stage of corpus compilation yielded three 90- minute tapes of commercials. The second stage consisted in transcribing the recordings into one Word document. In this way, a database of 310 different items of ads was obtained, which was analyzed using content analysis (analyzing the content of particular ads as structure, e.g. Holsti 1969; Hall 1997). To problematize the issue, Bourdieu’s theory of ‘habitus’ and ‘market’ (e.g. Bourdieu 1981, 1990) was transposed. According to Bourdieu, social classes are groups of peoples that occupy similar positions in society. The set of dispositions which incline people to act and react in a particular way is called *habitus*. These dispositions are structured because they reflect the social conditions within which they were acquired. Accordingly, the term ‘market’ would be conceived of as a special field, a structured space of positions “in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by the distribution of different kinds of resources or capital” (Bourdieu 1991: 14).

For example, ads are parasitic on gender assignment to inanimate nouns in Polish, leading to anthropomorphization of commodities, which could be called marketing by grammatical relations.

Gloss: [a female Gypsy’s voice] ‘Come, deary, I’ll tell you your fortune. My dear, you seek satisfaction. And you will find him(it). He(it) is close, he(it) is big, and has all the necessary experience, and his (its) name begins with M. Follow the X, look for the flyers, there you will find satisfaction. X: we sell satisfaction.

In this example the he/it double entendres: in Polish *zadowolenie* ‘satisfaction’ is neuter and (Pol.) *go* translates as ‘him’. Furthermore, (Pol.) *sklep* ‘store’ is masculine. *Ty jego znajdziesz* ‘you will find him’ is the antropomorphised stage: *jego* refers here to a man.

The main research questions were as follows:

- (1) It is obvious that ads are parasitic on cultural resources (cf. Cook 1992). What are particular areas of implosions of commercial register into cultural resources and what are the linguistic means to effectuate them?
- (2) What are most common manipulation techniques and are they different from TV advertising?
- (3) Which commercial areas are the most competitive in radio advertising and is there a societal reflex in the buying habits?

The database was also subcategorized according to the commodity type and statistical calculations were performed. The figures that resulted inform how much variation there is within each of the commercial subfields.

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