

Ondřej Dufek

National Museum, Prague, Czechia

Promoting consumption: The language and discourse of advertising in socialist Czechoslovakia

advertising, socialism, consumption

After the 1948 Czechoslovak coup d'état, the transformation of social, political and economic context influenced naturally the frames of language use. A good example is advertising – previous market setting was replaced by planned economy (and the term *reklama* ‘advertising’ by *socialistická propagace* ‘socialist promotion’; see e.g. Šebesta 1990: 4-5). Thus, it can be hypothesized that this twist is mirrored also in topics/values conveyed by the texts, since the message producers were no longer in a competitive relationship regarding individual consumers. Furthermore, the regime was concerned with promoting collectivity as being superior over individual needs satisfaction according to the official state ideology.

The aim of the paper is to find out whether and how this social change manifests itself in language and discourse. A set of over 600 receipts’ (bills’) back sides devoted to advertising from socialist Czechoslovakia (a part of the Czech National Museum collections) is analyzed. To check the findings based on this data set, some other advertising genres such as posters are partially used.

The data set is explored through combination of purely linguistic analysis on the one hand and discourse analysis on the other hand. The former notices linguistic means used to shape the message such as grammatical mood, prevalently nominal or verbal character of the utterance, other forms of expression like rhyming (e.g. Cook 2001: 126-128) etc. The latter focuses on topics and values conveyed by the ads and relates them to the sociopolitical context of socialist Czechoslovakia, namely declaratively non-competitive economic setting and planned economy as the frame of advertising.

The analysis highlights the most prominent ways of advertising text composition and the key features characteristic for. It also captures the diachronic aspect of socialist advertising language, showing some differences between early and late Czechoslovak socialist advertising. On the level of discourse and values, it demonstrates that despite some differences, Czechoslovakia in the second half of the 20th century was no exemption in promoting consumption (cf. Beasley & Danesi 2002: 149-151) as a basis of economic system and also as a way of living.

References:

Beasley, R. & Danesi, M. (2002): *Persuasive Signs. The semiotics of Advertising*. Berlin – New York, Mouton de Gruyter.

Cook, G. (2001): *The Discourse of Advertising*. London – New York: Routledge.

Šebesta, K. (1990): *Reklamní texty. Jejich funkce a výstavba*. Praha: [s. n.].

Words: 339