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**LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF ADVERTISEMENTS ON ROAD  
SAFETY EQUIPMENT IN ENGLISH**

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. RATIONALE

Together with the rapid development of the business society, advertising has become a crucial part in trading and played an integral part in popularizing products worldwide. The main purpose of advertising is to sell products or services. In order to reach that purpose, most advertisements make good use of language, which is an important tool in advertising. As Vestergaard, T. & Schroder, K. [34] state, “*Advertising takes many forms, but in most of them language is of crucial importance*”. Thus, much attention has been paid to language in advertising in order to result in a fascinating advertisement.

In order to introduce and market their products, manufacturers have to provide clear and specific information for customers as much as they can. Hence, they have to take into great consideration how their advertisements are written and presented. The more attractive and persuasive their advertisements are, the more likely customers are to make decisions to purchase their products.

To the smart customers, before choosing the best products, they have a tendency to carefully read the products’ information. Moreover, since some important things directly influence their safety, they would tend to seek for more details of the products on the mass media such as newspapers, magazines, TV or websites before doing the purchase.

Nowadays, road safety has become an increasingly growing public concern since it is closely related to traffic safety. In order to protect ourselves from road accidents, we must equip ourselves with the safest equipment. As a matter of fact, the need for road safety equipment which includes specially designed items to protect people - especially pedestrians, motorcyclists, cyclists, drivers and passengers in transport - from accidents has been increasing rapidly.

There are various kinds of road safety equipment which can help prevent and protect people from accidents. In this thesis, due to their popularity and necessity, the eight essential kinds of road safety equipment namely *seat belts*, *child safety seats*, *helmets*, *safety vest*, *safety glasses*, *safety gloves*, *safety shoes* and *motor/car kits* are restricted. These kinds of equipment, especially helmets, are commonly used in our daily lives.

Due to the importance of road safety equipment in transport, advertisements on road safety equipment have attracted much of our attention. To seek the information for road safety equipment, customers can look up on newspapers, magazines, televisions or on the Internet. Nowadays, however, searching on the Internet for information as well as advertisements is becoming more and more widespread. In addition to this trend, online shopping has been increasingly popular in the world as well as in Vietnam. Therefore, advertisements on road safety equipment in this thesis are selected from the Internet from prestigious websites in the United Kingdom and the United States of America

For the above reasons, “**Linguistic Features of Advertisements on Road Safety Equipment in English**” has been chosen as the topic of this thesis with a strong aspiration to help English language students with comprehension and production of the advertising language. Additionally, this study will probably bring students an overview of the language of *advertisements on road safety equipment in English* (ARSEs) as well as teachers of English with a number of linguistic features of ARSEs.

## **1.2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

### **1.2.1. Aims of the Study**

The aim of this thesis is to identify and describe the nature of ARSEs in order to find out their linguistic features in terms of syntactic features, lexical choices and cohesive devices.

Hence, the study may be of some help to learners of English and those who are interested in the language features of ARSEs, so that they could improve their English reading and writing skills related to ARSEs.

### **1.2.2. Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the research are:

- To identify and clarify the linguistic features of ARSEs in terms of their syntactic features, lexical choices and cohesive devices.
- To suggest some implications for teachers and learners of English and those who are interested in the field of ARSEs.

### 1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study is to answer the following questions:

1. What are the syntactic features of ARSEs?
2. What are the lexical choices used in ARSEs?
3. What are the cohesive devices used in ARSEs?

### 1.4. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

#### 1.4.1. Definition of “Advertisement”

Oxford Advanced Learners’ Dictionary [27] and Oxford Learner’s Dictionary of Academic English [28] define “*advertisement*” as “*a notice, picture or film telling people about a product, job or service*”.

In Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English [49], “*advertisement*” is defined “*a picture, set of words, or a short film, which is intended to persuade people to buy a product or use a service*”.

From the above definitions, “*advertisement*” in this thesis is recognized as an arrangement of pictures and words put in a public place or in a newspaper, on the Internet, etc. It introduces people to a product or equipment and is intended to convince people to buy that product or equipment.

An advertisement may consist of words, pictures and even sound. However, in this thesis, we primarily focus on words or on the written forms of ARSEs. Some pictures in this thesis are included for illustrative purposes only.

### **1.4.2. Definition of “Road Safety Equipment”**

Collins English Dictionary [48] defines “*road safety*” as “*the avoidance of danger on the road*”. Hence, in this thesis, we consider “*road safety equipment*” as “*a set of specially designed items necessary for protecting people from road traffic accidents*”.

### **1.4.3. Definition of “Advertisements on Road Safety Equipment”**

From the above definitions, we can define advertisements on road safety equipment as follows: advertisements on road safety equipment are the ones that introduce to customers specially designed items necessary for protecting people from road traffic accidents.

All in all, advertisements on road safety equipment in this thesis are online advertisements in the field of road safety equipment selected from prestigious websites of companies in the United Kingdom and the United States. They provide detailed information on the equipment or the product with a view to influencing the audience as well as persuading them to purchase the equipment or the product.

## **1.5. SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

This thesis is a study of the linguistic features of ARSEs from official websites of the United Kingdom and the United States of America. To the best of my knowledge, these two countries have taken great care to road accidents as well as road safety equipment.

Due to the constraint of time and resources, the thesis just focuses on the written forms of online advertisements of eight essential kinds of road safety equipment namely *seat belts, child safety seats, helmets, safety vest, safety glasses, safety gloves, safety shoes* and *motor or car kits*.

## **1.6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

## **1.7. ORGANIZATION OF STUDY**

This study consists of five main chapters as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Background

Chapter 3: Methodology

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

#### 2.1. PREVIOUS RELATED STUDIES

Along with the rapid development of advertisement, the studies of linguistic features of advertisements have been carried out by many well-known linguists in the world as well as in Vietnam. Some famous books that can be mentioned here are *Contemporary Advertising* (1982) by Arens, W.F. [2], *Advertising* (1984) by Bolen, W.H [4], *The Discourse of Advertising* (1992) by Cook, G. [8], *English in Advertising* (1996) by Leech, G. [20] and *The Language of Advertising* (1998) by Sells, P. and Gonzalez, S. [31].

In Vietnam, advertising language has been approached and examined in a number of studies such as “*Về ngôn ngữ trong quảng cáo*” (1993) by Trần Đình Nguyên and Nguyễn Đức Toàn [44], “*Về lập luận trong quảng cáo*” (1999) by Mai Xuân Huy [42] and “*Đôi nét về quảng cáo ở Việt Nam*” (2000) by Võ Thanh Hương [43]. These works provide basic theoretical knowledge of advertising.

Besides, there have been doctoral dissertations dealing with advertising language, for instance, “*Các đặc điểm của ngôn ngữ quảng cáo dưới ánh sáng của lý thuyết giao tiếp*” (Features of Advertising Language in the Light of Communicative Theory) (2001) by Mai Xuân Huy [41] and “*A Discourse Analysis of Travel Advertisements in English and Vietnamese*” (2005) by Tôn Nữ Mỹ Nhật [32].

This thesis is closely related not only to advertising but also to discourse analysis, which can be characterized as the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which it is used. It studies how contexts and cultural influences affect the language in use.

In addition to the works mentioned above, in Vietnam, there have been master theses related to the topic such as “*A Discourse Analysis of English and Vietnamese Advertisements for Beauty Care Products*” (2011) by Hồ Vi Nữ Diệu Minh [16], “*A Discourse Analysis of the Linguistic Features of the Advertisements of Food and Drink in English versus Vietnamese*” (2011) by Nguyễn Thị Cẩm Hà [24], “*A Discourse Analysis of Advertisements in terms of Persuasion Strategies in English and Vietnamese*” (2012) by Lê Thị Hoài An [21], “*An Investigation into Cohesive Devices used in Health Care Advertisements on American Television*” (2013) by Trương Văn Tuấn [33], “*A Study of Linguistic Features of Advertisements for Vehicles in English and Vietnamese*” (2013) by Lương Anh [23] and “*A Discourse Analysis of English Texts Introducing Sportswear Products*” (2014) by Nguyễn Thị Thùy Ngân [25].

## **2.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **2.2.1. Syntax and Syntactic Features**

*a. Phrases*

*b. Clauses*

*c. Sentences*

### **2.2.2. Cohesion and Coherence**

*a. Cohesion*

*b. Coherence*

### **2.2.3. Features of Advertisements**

## **2.3. SUMMARY**

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN**

For the purpose of making an investigation into the linguistic features of ARSEs in terms of their syntactic features, lexical choices and cohesive devices, both qualitative and quantitative approaches were adopted in the study.

On one hand, the qualitative approach was used in describing and analyzing data to find out the distinctive features of ARSEs in terms of their syntactic features, lexical choices and cohesive devices.

On the other hand, the quantitative approach was used for presenting in terms of frequencies of occurrence of syntactic features, lexical choices and cohesive devices of ARSEs.

Thanks to both qualitative and quantitative research designs, the researcher could describe, analyze, and then draw conclusions in order to reach the goals already set.

#### **3.2. RESEARCH METHODS**

The aim of the study is to identify and clarify the nature of ARSEs in order to find out their linguistic features in terms of syntactic features, lexical choices and cohesive devices. In order to achieve this aim, we combined different research methods as follows:

The descriptive method was used to give a detailed description of linguistic features of ARSEs.

The analytic method was used to classify and justify a certain feature or characteristic.

The inductive method was helpful in drawing out the generalizations from the findings and making conclusions.

### **3.3. DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLES**

ARSEs are a complex type of discourse with various forms, contents, lengths and linguistic features.

The samples were chosen with the following criteria:

- The samples must be advertisements on road safety equipment.

- The sources of the samples must be the official websites in the United States and the United Kingdom.

- The samples are from 100 to 300 words in length.

The length of the samples collected was chosen based on the reality of observation. At first, 150 samples with different kinds of length randomly were collected. The majority of the samples is from 100 to 300 words. Therefore, 112 ARSEs from 100 to 300 words from prestigious websites in the United States and the United Kingdom were selected.

### **3.4. DATA COLLECTION**

### **3.5. DATA ANALYSIS**

The data selected were mainly analyzed in terms of their syntactic features, lexical choices and cohesive devices.

Below are specific tasks:

- For syntactic features, we examined sentence structures frequently used in ARSEs.

- For lexical choices, we dealt with the choices of the lexical items frequently used in ARSEs.

- For cohesive devices, we investigated the distinctive devices in ARSEs such as reference and repetition.

### **3.6. RESEARCH PROCEDURE**

### **3.7. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY**

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1. SYNTACTIC FEATURES USED IN ARSEs

Here is the distribution of the passive voice, relative clauses, imperative sentences and conditional sentences in ARSEs.

*Table 4.1. Distribution of Passive Voice, Relative Clauses, Imperative Sentences and Conditional Sentences in ARSEs*

<b>Syntactic Structures</b>	<b>Occurrence</b>	<b>Rate</b>
Relative Clauses	175	20.3%
Conditional Sentences	89	10.3%
Passive Voice	473	54.8%
Imperative Sentences	126	14.6%
Total	863	100%

Table 4.1. shows that the passive voice takes up the highest percentage in ARSEs with 54.8%, relative clauses account for 20.3% and imperative sentences and conditional sentences are the lowest with 14.6% and 10.3% respectively. Here are a number of reasons for this trend:

First of all, the passive voice is the most frequent because it makes ARSEs more objective and persuasive. The second reason is that relative clauses help the advertisements concise and succinct. Last but not least, imperative sentences and conditional sentences play important roles in urging customer to purchase the equipment.

#### 4.1.1. Passive voice in ARSEs

*Table 4.2. Distribution of types of passive voice in ARSEs*

Type of passive voice	Occurrence	Rate
Normal P.V.	387	81.8%
P.V. with modal verbs	52	11%
Negative P.V.	34	7.2%
Total	473	100%

As shown in Table 4. the use of the normal passive voice takes the largest proposition (81.8%) in ARSEs. Although the passive voice with modal verbs and negative P.V. takes the smaller proportions, 11% and 7.2% respectively, they also show their importance and necessity in writing ARSEs and help realize the objective of the ARSEs.

In short, the passive voice in ARSEs is used to emphasize the equipment's benefits as well as how well they are made and to give recommendations to customers.

#### 4.1.2. Relative clauses

*Table 4.3. Frequency of Relative Clauses in ARSEs*

Type of relative clauses	Occurrence	Rate
Non-restrictive R.C.	5	2.9%
Restrictive R.C.	170	97.1%
Total	175	100%

As seen in Table 4.3, Restrictive Relative Clauses are preferably used in ARSEs, accounting for 97.3%. This trend is understandable because the information conveyed by these relative clauses is needed to specify what is being referred to. Here are some examples:

***Restrictive Relative Clauses***

(4.12) *This Disney Minnie Mouse Toddler Helmet features True Fit technology **that** self-adjusts for an ideal fit.* [157]

(4.13) *This vest is made with reflective material **which** enhances your safety at night and in low visibility situations, creating a bright image by returning light back to the light source; for example, vehicle headlights.* [91]

***Non-Restrictive Relative Clauses:***

(4.14) *Ideal for those who can't otherwise buckle their seat belts, **which may include some plus-sized people**, police officers with bulky utility belts, passengers in non-emergency medical transportation vehicles, people with limited mobility or range of motion and others.* [54]

Importantly, modifying **-ing** and **-ed** participle clauses are found popular in ARSEs. For example:

(4.15) ***Featuring*** *both first-aid and automotive emergency items, these practical all-in-one kits can help protect you in the event of an automobile breakdown or personal injury.* [55]

(4.16) ***Highlighted*** *by a better sealing eyeport, a new chin curtain and a smoother operating flip down sun shield, the Revolver*

*EVO is not only more comfortable but substantially quieter as well.*

[124]

Modifying **-ing** and **-ed** participle clauses are the reductive relative clauses in which –ed modification is linked with the passive voice and –ing modification with the active one.

The results also suggest that relative clauses are essential in the advertising language because they help to arouse the reader's attention, proved by the high frequency in ARSEs.

#### 4.1.3. Imperative Sentences

Quirk, R. et al defines *imperative* as *sentences which normally have no overt grammatical subject, and whose verb has the basic form* [29. p.803]. In their opinion, the most common type of the imperative is the subjectless 2<sup>nd</sup> imperative. Two main forms of imperative are affirmative and negative imperative. The following are their forms:

Affirmative imperative: **V (Base form)**

Negative imperative: **Do not + V (Base form)**

The following table shows the distribution of imperative sentences with different purposes in ARSEs.

*Table 4.5. Distribution of Imperative Sentences in ARSEs*

Imperative Sentences	Occurrence	Rate
Affirmative	316	85.9%
Negative	52	14.1%
Total	368	100%

It can be easily seen that the affirmative imperative sentences with a high percentage (85.9%) dominate the negative ones.

One of the best ways to increase equipment's consumption is to urge customer's immediately action. In example (4.22) and (4.23), the verbs *get* and *try* are instances of this action. They appear to urge customers to buy the equipment as soon as possible. Additionally, *get* and *try* denote the meaning of doing the purchase voluntarily, not paying money to buy the equipment. Hence, readers can consider these imperative sentences as recommendations.

In example (4.27), the negative imperative sentence is used to stress the warning and make customers feel safe when reading this.

#### 4.1.4. Conditional sentences

Three groups of C.S. in ARSEs are identified:

**Group 1:** persuading customers to buy their equipment by a number of sensible reasons. Here are some examples:

(4.35) *If you are in need of a sturdy helmet for the great outdoors, the VFX-W is one of the best.* [137]

(4.36) *If you're ready to step up your trail-riding, the Stoker is made for you.* [127]

**Group 2:** giving customers instructions for using the road safety equipment. Below are some examples:

(4.40) *If you intend to wear over a bulky jacket; you will require at least one or two sizes larger than your regular size.* [91]

(4.41) *Only use in front seat if there is no active air bag.*

**Group 3:** raising questions, making customers feel reasonable to buy the equipment:

(4.42) *If an accident or personal injury were to occur during your trip, would you be ready to deal with it?*

[55]

As can be seen from above, the unreal conditional sentences are only used in group 3 with the aim to convince customers to buy the equipment by raising some unexpected situations in traffic.

The table below shows the diversity of conditional sentences in ARSEs:

*Table 4.6. Diversity of Conditional Sentences in ARSEs*

<b>Conditional sentences</b>	<b>Occurrence</b>	<b>Rate</b>
Group 1 (persuading customers with sensible reasons )	58	65.2%
Group 2 (giving instruction)	23	25.8%
Group 3 (raising questions)	8	9%
Total	89	100%

As shown in Table 4.6, we can easily see that conditional sentences used to persuade customers buy the equipment in ARSEs is the most popular (65.2%). The suitable reasons aim to make readers believe in the equipment and make readers feel they are smart customers when buying the equipment advertized. On the contrary, the unreal conditional sentences are used the least (9%) in ARSEs. By raising some unexpected situations in traffic, advertisers

are trying to convince customers to buy the equipment in order to prevent bad things in traffic. However, this is not a good method in persuasion because readers may feel stressed or doubtful about the equipment at the thought that bad things may happen to them. That is the reason why unreal conditional sentences are not commonly used in ARSEs.

In sum, conditional sentences can be used in different ways in ARSEs with the ultimate goal of advertising – to persuade customers to buy the equipment.

## **4.2. LEXICAL CHOICES IN ARSEs**

### **4.2.1. Weasel Words**

### **4.2.2. Evaluative Adjectives**

The following table will show the distribution of evaluative adjectives in ARSEs.

*Table 4.7. Evaluative Adjectives in ARSEs*

Type	Occurrence	Rate
Positive	370	96.4%
Negative	14	3.6%
Total	384	100%

Table 4.7 shows that the use of positive evaluative adjectives in ARSEs takes the highest percentage (96.4%) with 370 adjectives, which is outnumbered with negative evaluative adjectives (3.6%) with 14 adjectives.

The following table shows the forms of evaluative adjectives in ARSEs

*Table 4.8. Forms of Evaluative Adjectives in ARSEs*

Adjectives	Occurrence	Rate
Base-form adjectives	527	92.1%
Comparative adjectives	32	5.6%
Superlative adjectives	13	2.3%
Total	572	100%

As showed in Table 4.8, advertisers have the tendency of using the base form of evaluating adjectives in ARSEs (92.1%). The use of comparative and superlative ones is rather low (5.6% and 2.3% respectively). One interesting thing is that instead of being used to discredit or unfairly attack other products or equipment, most of comparative and superlative adjectives in ARSEs are used to indicate the excellent quality of the equipment. As mentioned above, advertisers tend to avoid making specific comparisons between their equipment and others by naming or referring to their rivals. For example, instead of saying “X is lighter than Y”, a helmet advertiser would like to say “X is lighter”.

(4.59) *If you feel like you've got too much on your head when you're riding, try a **lighter** helmet.* [126]

### 4.2.3. Verbs Denoting Commitment in ARSEs

The tendency in using lexical choices can be shown in the following table:

*Table 4.9. Lexical Choices in ARSEs*

Types of lexical choices	Occurrence	Rate
Weasel words	463	34%
Evaluative adjectives	572	42%
Verbs denoting commitment	328	24%
Total	1363	100%

Table 4.9 shows that lexical choices are used in high occurrence in all three types of lexical choices. Evaluative adjectives are the most frequent with 463 words accounting for 42%. Weasel words and verbs denoting commitment take up the lower percentage with 34% and 24% respectively. All these three types of lexical choices help ARSEs more appealing and attractive and play an important role in persuading customers to buy the equipment.

## 4.3. COHESIVE DEVICES USED IN ARSEs

### 4.3.1. Grammatical Cohesive Devices in ARSEs

*a. Reference*

*b. Substitution in ARSEs*

*c. Ellipsis*

*d. Conjunctions*

### 4.3.2. Lexical cohesive devices in ARSEs

*a. Repetition in ARSEs*

*b. Synonymy*

## 4.4. SUMMARY

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter presents the summary of finding from the data analysis and implications to the English teaching and learning in comprehending and designing the advertisements on road safety equipment in English.

#### 5.1. CONCLUSIONS

The result of the analysis of samples of advertisements on road safety equipment in English enables these concluding remarks.

In terms of syntactic features, this thesis deals with the distinctive ones as follows: *passive voice*, *relative clauses*, *imperative sentences* and *conditional clauses*. Among them, passive voice occupies the most percentage. The noticeable point is that the use of passive voice is popular in ARSEs. Passive voice is used in ARSEs to emphasize the equipment's benefits as well as how well they are made and to give recommendations to customers. Additionally, relative clauses and imperative sentences are commonly used in ARSEs. Relative clause may be one of a good means to arouse the reader's attention, proved by the high frequency in ARSEs and conditional sentences can be used in different ways to persuade customers to do the purchase.

With regards to the lexical choices, it is one that attracts more attention to readers with the use verbs denoting commitment. The first criteria which customers choose an ARSE is the safety and the verbs denoting commitment bring safe feeling to them. Similarly, the

use of weasel words and evaluating adjectives in ARSEs makes advertisements more appealing and makes a deep impression on readers and persuade them to buy the equipment.

As regards the cohesive devices, the study shows the use of grammatical and lexical devices used in ARSEs. One of the successful cohesive devices is reference which is very common in ARSEs with high frequency. The use of references, especially personal references makes the language in ARSEs sounds warm and friendly, helps to narrow the gap between the advertiser and the reader, and makes the advertisements more appealing. Besides, there are other cohesive devices such as ellipsis, conjunctions, repetition, etc. which play important roles in making ARSEs more persuasive.

## **5.2. IMPLICATIONS**

## **5.3. LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Due to the shortage of time, reference material as well as limited linguistic knowledge, the study has got certain restrictions. Firstly, the study can only examine some certain characteristics of ARSEs in terms of their syntactic features, lexical choice and cohesive devices, so it has not reached yet the expected depth as it should. Secondly, all collected ARSEs are only taken from websites in the United States and United Kingdom, not from other media.

Below are some suggestions for further research:

1. A Contrastive Analysis of Linguistic Features of Advertisements on Road Safety Equipment in English and Vietnamese.

2. An Investigation into Pragmatic Features of Advertisements on Road Safety Equipment in English and in Vietnamese.