

CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This study aims to analyse home advertisements in a local newspaper (The Star) using a genre based approach. The research attempts to discover if there is a structure to these advertisements, and if there is, to identify it and analyse the possible reasons for it.

This chapter describes the purpose of the study, as well as its rationale and significance. The background is described in some detail to ensure that the readers understand the significance of the research findings.

1.2 Background of the Study

1.2.1 Malaysia's Development Plans

It is the aim of the government to make Malaysia a fully developed nation in every sense of the word : socio economically, spiritually, technologically and politically. The government envisions that by the year 2020, Malaysia will become a united nation with a confident Malaysian society, which is infused by strong moral and ethical values who will be living in a democratic society, liberal and tolerant, caring, economically just and equitable, progressive and prosperous and in full possession of an economy that is competitive, dynamic, robust, resilient and socially just.

In order to achieve the above objectives, the Second Outline Perspective Plan (OPP2) covering the period 1991-2000, was formulated based on the National Development Policy (NDP). The NDP itself built upon the achievement of the OPP1 (1971-1990) to accelerate the process of eradicating poverty and restructuring society so as to correct social and economic imbalances. On the whole these plans and policies provide a definite framework for achieving several socio-economic objectives by the first 2 decades of the twenty first century. All sections of the Malaysian economy have been harnessed to achieve "Vision 2020", including the housing industry.

1.2.2 The Housing Industry

According to the OPP2, the housing policy in Malaysia is designed to ensure that Malaysians, have greater access to adequate and affordable shelter facilities (Malaysia Yearbook, 1995). The Ministry of Housing and Local Government has been entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring that this policy is followed. It is also the objective of the Housing Ministry to ensure that all strata of Malaysian society, including those in the lower income group, have decent homes.

The main constraint in providing these facilities has been the lack of funds. According to the Housing Ministry, to overcome this, the government has made it compulsory for developers to provide a certain percentage of low-cost homes in some of their projects. (subjected to the location).

Profit margins in low-cost homes are quite low and to compensate for this low profit margin, developers go into the building of luxury and country homes which brings in a higher profit margin. However, not everyone can afford to buy such homes. Property developers, therefore are increasingly banking on their advertising companies to inform the public of these homes, in their attempts to reach the target markets, and increase their profit margins. As for terrace homes, the demand exceeds supply. Thus advertisements of such homes serve to inform the public in more details of the features that are offered.

1.2.3 The Role of the Advertising Industry in Home Advertisements

Advertising deals with the publicising of goods especially to increase sales and boost profit margins. It serves to inform the public what goods are available in the market, and also highlights traits of these goods that can attract potential customers.

With regards to property development, the advertising industry has been co-opted by the housing developers to help them make the necessary sale of property.

With the exception of low cost homes (where prices are fixed), the developers are allowed to place competitive prices on their “products”, and to tout these in the open market. Potential house buyers thus have to be “attracted” or “invited” to have the choice of buying any property that they deem is “attractive”. It is the job of the advertising industry to service their clients (in particular housing developers) by attracting the potential buyers. Most of the advertisements are targeted at the rising group of middle class Malaysians who are high income earners.

To introduce these expensive homes to the high income earners, every effort has to be made to come up with attractive,

creative and informative advertisements. Advertisers have to be more aggressive and innovative in such attempts.

Language is one of the main tools used by the advertising industry to achieve their own goals and thus the language in communication has helped them use this tool more effectively.

1.2.4 English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

ESP is English Language used for specific functions in a discourse community. It developed in response to the needs and demands of a particular community which is to learn language in a more efficient manner by concentrating on aspects of language that were most relevant to their purpose.

In Malaysia, ESP is now becoming more popular as a “tool of Human Resource Development”. Human Resource Development (which is based on the creation of a productive and disciplined labour force), in turn, is used as a major strategy in the economic development of the country. To be productive, Malaysians have to keep up with foreign technologies and advancement in the field of science and technology as well as research and development. Since English is the major tool of access to knowledge in Human Resource development, ESP has become

an indispensable discipline in the country today. However, it must be noted that ESP is not restricted just to science and technology. It is also moving into other areas of human activity that are an integral part of a fast developing nation. A good example is the advertising industry.

Researchers and practitioners of ESP are thus going into the domain of their learners to identify their special needs. This has led to the "genre analysis" approach which was developed by Swales (1981; 1985). Genre analysis attempts to identify, describe and make obvious these moves so that students of ESP are able to learn the language in tandem with the necessary moves. Genre analysis also tells us what tasks the student needs to perform and about the nature of the tasks.

In this study, the discourse community is that of the copywriters of home advertisements. There is a need to study the moves in particular communicative events within this community, to understand why copywriters of this genre write the way they do and what are the moves that advertisers use to achieve their communicative purpose which is to boost the sales of homes.

This study is motivated by the need to investigate the reasons behind the communicative events of home advertisements.

1.3 The Purpose and Scope of the Study

The purpose of this research is to study the moves in home advertisements using a genre-based approach. It attempts to discover if there is a structure to home advertisements and if there is, to come up with a description of this structure.

Since genre analysis is descriptive rather than prescriptive, a comprehensive investigation of the moves in home advertisements, it is hoped, will reveal the way these advertisements are structured. On the basis of this investigation, a Move Structure for a typical home advertisement will be drawn up. This Move Structure will also be based on regularities that are evident in the home advertisements.

This study offers a way to understand the process of drawing up a home advertisement, and the considerations that determined its structure. It attempts to give an explanatory account of how home advertisements are structured, illustrating the efficacy of a genre based move structure as a system of enquiry into the structure of home advertisements.

An attempt is made to study the difference in the Move Structure, if any, between the two categories of homes, i.e. terrace and country homes. It is hoped that this comparison will reveal the role played by the communicative purpose in determining the moves within a communicative event. This study hopes to show that selection of moves is based on the communicative purpose of, in this case, the writer.

1.4 The Rationale of the Study

In this study, an attempt to explain the rationale for choosing the topic under study is framed by three questions, namely,

- (i) the reasons for studying the language in home advertisements
- (ii) the reasons for studying the home advertisements in a local newspaper, and
- (iii) the reasons for using a genre based approach

1.4.1 Reasons for studying the language in home advertisements

Home advertisements were selected for several reasons:

- (a) they represent a communicative event that is the meeting point of two of the largest industries in Malaysia today, i.e. the Housing Industry and the Advertising Industry. Housing developers

enlist the services of advertisers to help them persuade potential buyers to purchase their property. As such, it would be an interesting communicative event to analyse as it would reveal the communicative purposes of both the communities, and how they strategize to achieve these two purposes, one to sell and the other to boost the sales to obtain greater profit margins.

(b) In addition, it is a communicative event that is largely dependent on language as a tool for achieving its purpose. As such, it would be of interest to the language teacher, and especially to the ESP practitioner as s/he strives to facilitate learners to acquire the specific language needed for them to succeed in their job or occupation. For people in the advertising industry, this study would allow them to use language to its fullest to attract potential buyers to buy their products.

1.4.2 Reasons for studying the home advertisements in a local newspaper

Advertisements are abundantly found in the local newspapers. This is because the best way to reach the public is through the newspapers as reading the newspapers is an activity common to most Malaysians. It is the best and cheapest way of keeping up with the current events.

Interspersed between news and editorial reports in the newspaper are a host of advertisements promoting different products and services. Among them are various types of home advertisements. These home advertisements hold a special place in the newspaper because homes are one of the most expensive properties advertised. Due to this abundance of home advertisements in local newspapers, it is felt that it would be possible to obtain ample samples to select from for this investigation.

1.4.3 Reasons for using a genre based approach

Swales' (1986:13) definition of genre refers to socially-recognised communicative events where the communicative purpose is 'mutually understood by the participants within that event'.

The communicative purpose of home advertisements is to capture the attention of prospective group of buyers by presenting the details of the home clearly and objectively, to make a 'buy' decision. Studying the communicative purpose using the genre based approach allows us to understand how this communicative purpose is achieved.

The genre based approach which is currently popular in the field of ESP helps to provide a greater understanding of the discourse structures of home advertisements. For as Bhatia argues, before anyone can hope to understand how various rules or conventions are varied or transformed for creative purposes, it is necessary to be aware of the existing conventions or structure of home advertisements in question.

Understanding and describing the structures of home advertisements using a genre based approach would be useful for the construction of specific courses tailored to meet the needs of those aspiring to acquire the persuasive skills of advertising.

1.5 Research Questions

This study intends to give an explanatory account of local newspaper home advertisements as a genre. In the process, I hope to discover answers to the following three research questions:

1. Do home advertisements of housing developers (found in the print media) have a general structure?
2. Is it possible to define this structure?
3. In what ways are advertisements for terrace homes different from those for country homes?

1.6 Significance of the Study

An analysis of the moves in home advertisements and the findings will be useful to those involved in teaching ESP(English for Specific Purposes) and copywriters of these advertisements. When first confronted with the problem of writing these home advertisements, newcomers need lines of attack for making sense of how this kind of writing is structured. Concepts such as the Move Structure Analysis can offer help on how these advertisements may be successfully written. These rules will aid in the writing of home advertisements.

The Move Structure also comes in useful for syllabus designers to design teaching methods and courses for ESP in the field of advertising specifically in the creating and drafting of home advertisements.

In addition, these strategies can be used for evaluation purposes. ESP teachers will be able to assess and grade the writing of such advertisements with more accuracy and understanding, if they themselves understand the communicative purposes and strategies of the particular communicative event.