

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Advertising can be seen everywhere. We are exposed to various advertising messages through various media such as television, radio, magazines and newspapers. Williamson (1994) says that advertisements are 'an inevitable part of everyone's lives; even if you do not read a newspaper or watch television, the images posted over our urban surroundings are inescapable.' (Williamson, 1994:11) That is true because besides the types of media mentioned above, advertisements find their way into one's life through other means. Take for instance one's journey from one place to another. The giant billboard on the sides of the road and the banners hanging down from the lamp-posts are scenes that one cannot escape from. Nowadays it is common to find beautifully-painted advertisements on the rears or sides of public transport vehicles such as buses and taxis travelling within the community centres. Advertisements in the form of pamphlets, brochures, and leaflets are often found in one's mail box. Thus, it is quite impossible for one to avoid advertisements.

1.2 Advertising

1.2.1 Definitions of Advertising

Many definitions of advertising have been given and most attempts to define advertising explain it largely from the viewpoint of the marketing functions it performs.

These may include perhaps basic ingredients such as its function in providing information on goods and services; its use of non-personal media; its purchase of 'space' or 'time' and the identification of its sponsor. Therefore, advertising may be adequately defined as follows:

Advertising is any controlled form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services by an identified sponsor that is used to inform and persuade the selected market.

(Bolen, 1984:4)

1.2.2 The Functions of Advertising

Advertising is a form of communication which involves two participants, namely the advertiser and the consumer. It is used to inform the consumers about the availability of ideas, goods or services. It is an essential aid for sound business development, especially in this highly competitive business environment. There is no direct contact between the advertiser and the consumer. The message is heard on the radio, viewed on television, or read on magazines, newspaper, or pamphlets. Its objective is to persuade the consumer to purchase the product or service advertised.

1.2.3 Attitudes to Advertising

Being one of the most ubiquitous and tenacious form of communication, advertising influences one's thoughts, feelings and even life. As Judith Williamson points

out, "Advertisements are one of the most important cultural factors moulding and reflecting our lives today." (Williamson, 1994:14) For Cook, advertising is one of the most controversial among all the contemporary discourse types. The reasons are that firstly, advertising is a relatively new field, and secondly, it is closely linked with the undesirable values such as greed and ambition. (Cook, 1994:16)

People who criticise advertising argue that advertisements create false wants and encourage the production and consumption of things that are incompatible with the fulfilment of genuine and urgent human needs. Advertising is claimed to have distorted people's natural desires, played upon their emotions, and led to extravagance and greed. It 'symbolises the art of making people dissatisfied with what they have.' (Meerloo, 1956) However, the defenders of advertising claim that it is economically necessary and has brought many benefits to the society. It contributes to the society's well-being and raises the people's standard of living by encouraging the sales of mass-produced products, thus stimulating production and creating employment and prosperity. Hence, Cook claims that 'it is unjust to make them a scapegoat for all the sorrows of the modern world.' (Cook, 1994:6)

1.2.4 Commercial Consumer Advertising

There are many types of advertising. Among them commercial consumer advertising is perhaps the kind that is most visible in the society. It incurs more

expenditure and commands more professional skill than any other type of advertising. They are typically directed at the consumers --- people who will buy the product for their own or someone else's personal use. The type of advertisement chosen for this study is focus on commercial consumer advertising which is 'advertising directed towards a mass audience with the aim of promoting sales of a commercial product or services', (Leech, 1966:25) with the expectation of making a profit. In the case of this study, the product will be that of residential property in Malaysia.

Commercial consumer advertisements appear in several different styles such as Straight-lines/Straight-sale, testimonials, image-building,, picture-caption, sweepstakes and lucky-draws, and pretend genres.(Kathpalia, 1992) This study focus on the Straight-lines/Straight-sale advertisement, the type which employs a straightforward approach to sell the product and emphasises the reason the customer should buy the product.(Bovee and Arens, 1992)

1.2.5 The Language of Advertising

Every commercial advertisement is specially designed to achieve its ultimate goal of getting the goods, services or ideas sold. One of the ways to achieve this aim is through the use of language. Language is a complex form of activity and the language of advertising is even more so.

The language of advertising is said to be 'loaded' because, like those of journalism and oratory, '...it aims to change the will, opinions, or attitudes of its audience.' (Leech, 1966:25) Its primary aim is to attract the viewer's attention and dispose him or her favourably towards the product or service on offer. Advertisers use language quite distinctively. Writers are well known for their ability in playing with words and manipulating or distorting their everyday meanings. They deviate from the rules of language for effect, use words out of context and even make up new ones. For instance, " those of spelling ('Beanz Meanz Heinz') or grammar ('Winston tastes good *like* a cigarette should')." (Dyer, 1982 : 160) Catching the attention and imagination of the audience as an aid to memory is perhaps the primary functions of advertising language.

1.3 Rationale for Investigating Property Advertisements in Newspapers

Having a roof over one's head is one of the most fundamental needs of every human being. And, owning a house is every one's wish. Before facing the financial storm known as The Asian currency problem, which caused the Ringgit depreciation, Malaysia enjoyed sound economic growth and people were with better income. Many people were investing their money in property because real estate was profitable and a long-term investment. Some people bought offices, retail and bungalow lots while others put their money in condominiums and medium-cost apartments. In fact, many people owned not only one, but two or more houses. Due to the existence of many projects in progress and the fierce competition among the developers, they advertised

aggressively in order to get a sizeable share of the market. With the current economic recession in Malaysia, the property market sales has slowed down, but advertising is still very aggressive as people want to recover their losses through sales. However, different methods or strategies may be used to promote sales during this difficult period. Anyway, the property advertisements used for this study were collected before the recession hit Malaysia. Therefore, the advertising strategies applied in property advertisements during the recession may not be found in the sample.

Advertising is one of the promotion strategies used in marketing property. The most popular advertising media for property is none other than the newspaper. And as an advertising medium, the newspaper dominates the advertising industry. Thus, property advertisers have to fight for the attention of the newspaper readers along with current news, editorial reports and a host of other advertisements advocating different products and services. The newspaper has been chosen as the media for advertising property because of its ability to reach out to a wide audience. This ability of newspaper advertising is particularly important because property buyers can just be anybody, be it ordinary people or professionals. Since they promote one of the most expensive and biggest products offered, the property advertisements thus hold a special place in newspapers. To the researcher's knowledge, little research has been done on property advertisements and practically none on the linguistic move-structure of this type of

advertisement. This study intends to make an enquiry into the move-structure of property advertisements.

In Malaysia, newspapers are found in various major languages such as Bahasa Malaysia, English, Mandarin, Tamil and etc.. Reading newspapers is a common activity for many people. Among the newspapers in English, The Star is one of the two most read newspapers in Malaysia. The other one is The New Straits Times (Adnan Hashim, 1994). Since most property advertisements are generally of the same texts although appear in different newspaper (except perhaps for the language, e.g. Mandarin in Chinese newspaper), The Star is chosen as the only source of data collection. Moreover, the sizes of the property advertisements in The Star are more manageable. This is because most property advertisements in the newspapers, especially the newly launched ones, tend to occupy one whole page of the newspaper. It is more practical and convenient to reduce the property advertisements in The Star to the A4 size to be included in the appendix.

1.4 Aim of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to describe the structure of property advertisements in the local newspaper using the nine-move structure proposed by Kathpalia (1992). In this study, the researcher hopes to:

- i) investigate the applicability of the nine-move structure, designed by Kathpalia (1992), in analysing the structure of property advertisements, and
- ii) identify the move-structure which is most specific and representative for the property advertisements chosen for this study.

1.5 Significance of the Study

In today's market-oriented world, communication is very important to both the private sector and public organisations. This study hopes to enhance the understanding of academic researchers who are interested in the area of advertising, especially in the linguistic moves in property advertisements and to show how the persuasive power of the advertising language is being used in the move to display its communicative purpose or purposes. Understanding of the linguistic moves of advertising may be useful when advertisements are used as teaching aids in the learning of the English language.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

Advertising has become too large an activity for any study to be comprehensive. This study is primarily concerned with the property advertisements found in the local newspapers. Since property advertisement is broadly divided into four major types, i.e. commercial property, recreational property, industrial property, and residential property,

it is impractical to cover all these property types in this study. In order to reduce the scale of the study to a manageable size, the data for this study includes only the residential type of property advertisements collected from The Star newspaper. Another limitation is that the data includes only the advertisements for the marketing of new houses in the local market launched by local property developers. The advertisements of property in foreign countries, for instance, Great Britain and Australia, will not be considered. The advertisements of used property or second-hand property found in the classified section of the newspaper will not be included in the data too