

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 Introduction**

The study is an investigation of ideational meanings in Malaysian billboard slogans. The current study is grounded in the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth SFL) to analyze how the written texts of advertisements, especially the slogans are used to express ideational meanings in Malaysian billboard slogans.

The current study begins with the statement of the research area in Section 1.1, the aim of the study in Section 1.2 and the research questions in Section 1.3. Following this, the theoretical framework and methodology are presented in Section 1.4, the rationale of the study in Section 1.5, the significance of the study in Section 1.6, the delimitations of the study in Section 1.7 and the outline of the study in Section 1.8. This chapter concludes with a chapter summary.

### **1.1 Statement of the Research Area**

It is now widely accepted that a text can no longer be confined to the realm of language alone. Today language is found as making meaning in the context of situation.

Thus, the increasing use of language in many different types of advertisement modes has created a path for language analyst to analyze how meaning is made in the texts.

“In today’s media-saturated world, we are not only surrounded by edited material such as newspaper articles, but also constantly bombarded with advertisements.”

(Kawashima, 2006: 393)

The statement above interprets advertisements as a form of communication that one comes across in his or her daily life. Thus, the importance of advertisements is becoming extremely widespread. In fact, advertising has grown to be an industry worth billions of dollars across the world.

Advertisements cannot succeed to achieve their goal unless they capture readers’ attention in the first place. Advertising messages have a clear purpose. Usually the creative images will attract and hold the attention of the targeted consumer audience. Advertisements derive from the combination of images, including the words, sounds or visuals. This combination of images is called the language of advertising, which is different from other languages. Though emphasis is placed on the image in print advertising, the text is also very important. Advertisements medium include radio, television, movies, the Internet, billboards and printed materials on papers such as pamphlets, brochures, magazines and newspapers.

The current study will focus its attention on one type of advertisement, which is the billboard advertisement. A billboard is a large outdoor advertising structure found in high traffic areas such as cities and highways. Billboards present large advertisements to passing pedestrians and drivers. They are intended to attract readers’ attention without confusing them with lengthy words. Therefore, their wordings are usually short and precise.

The billboard advertisement has been chosen for this study because the language that the advertisers use in promoting their products is rich in meaning. The aim of the study is to examine the nature of the language of advertisements, how corporate messages are constructed, and how the ideational meanings are brought to light through the semantics of the texts. This interest has, to a large extent, been motivated by the need to provide a descriptively comprehensive model text that can be used as a pedagogic tool for effective writing skills in the education system, which means writing according to context.

As texts are viewed as a social construction based on a system of choices that are made to fulfil social functions of various kinds, it is interesting to realize that the role the language and semantics play in the advertisement is rich with colourful thoughts and expressions.

Generally, advertisements are not intended to educate the reader with the terms used in the advertisement but to attract as well as persuade the reader to think about the product. As advertisements are vital in our life, this study is looking into the language of billboard advertisements, especially the slogans by utilizing the SFL theory.

SFL sees language as a meaning making resource, used by people, in specific contexts of situation. Therefore, SFL is functional as it looks at how language acts upon a social context. SFL views the analysis of language from three perspectives: Ideational, Interpersonal and Textual. As this study focuses on groups and phrases, it is mainly related to how meanings are conveyed from an ideational perspective.

## **1.2 Aim of the study**

Advertising is a form of mass communication closely linked with the world of commerce and marketing. It is a powerful tool that influences and persuades people to act or believe. Although images play an important role in advertisements, it is found that in the process of creating advertisements, language, especially the choice of expression is of crucial importance too. As the present study focuses on the experiential and logical meanings of advertisement texts, the other media features especially the visual images will not be analyzed.

As the language of advertisements is rich in meaning, the present study aims to investigate how ideational meanings are expressed in Malaysian billboard slogans. It explores how experiential and logical meanings contribute to the ideational meanings in the genre of advertisements. In fact, this study hopes to make a contribution to this type of analysis in the SFL researches.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to portray how language has been explored to achieve the social purpose in the genre of billboard advertisements. Second, it is also to investigate how ideational meanings are conveyed in Malaysian billboard slogans.

## **1.3 Research Questions**

Bloor and Bloor (2004:10) put forward the views of Halliday that “...metafunctions have a systematic relationship with the lexico grammar of the language.” In this study, the ideational metafunction is appropriate for analyzing billboard advertisements as “language is used to organize, understand and express our perceptions of the world and of our own consciousness” (ibid: 10).

In the Ideational metafunction, the main grammatical system is realized through the systems of Transitivity and Clause Complex. However, the Ideational metafunction is realized not just at the rank of clause but at the rank of groups and phrase as well. That is why Halliday (1994) writes that it is possible to give a structural and semantic description to both the rank of clause and the rank of groups and phrase. Thus, in the current study, the rank of groups and phrase is used in interpreting the slogans of billboard advertisements.

Against such a background, the present study proposes the following Grand Tour research question:

**How are ideational meanings expressed in Malaysian billboard slogans?**

In order to answer the Grand Tour Question, two research questions are formulated as follows:

- i) **What are the experiential meanings expressed in Malaysian billboard slogans?**
- ii) **What are the logical meanings expressed in Malaysian billboard slogans?**

#### **1.4 Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

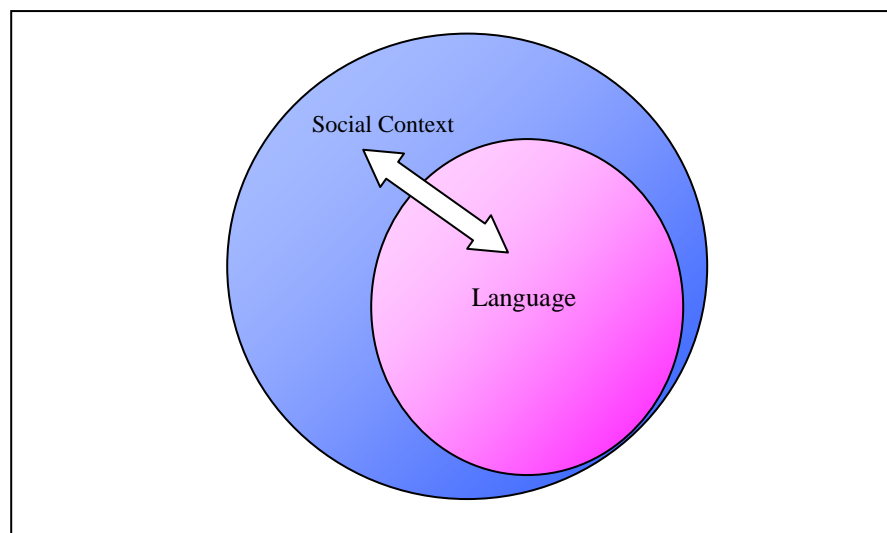
The theoretical background used in this research comprises Halliday and Matthiessen's (2004) Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL). Additionally, the current study also incorporates the views on groups and phrase provided by other systemicists, namely, Butt, et.al (1995), Thompson (1996), Christie and Unsworth (2000), Downing & Locke (1992/2002), Bloor and Bloor (2004). and Eggins (2004).

The fundamental advantages of this theory are firstly, that SFL sees language as a meaning-making resource (Halliday, 1994) and secondly, SFL provides a functional

analysis that reflects a semantic and grammatical interpretation of a text (Ravelli in Unsworth, 2000: 37). Besides that, SFL “interprets language as being a system network of meaning potential” (Morley, 1985: 42) and describes language as being “made up of systems, each having a set of features which are in contrast with one another” (ibid).

As the current study delves into the experience of the world, where the language reflects our view of the world of goings-on, this study is focused on the ideational metafunction, which is divided into the experiential and logical meanings.

Since the language of advertisements is related to the context of situation, the SFL theory is feasible to analyze the texts. Figure 1.1 drawn from Halliday and Martin (1993:25) shows the realization between the language and social context. In fact, Martin (1993) agrees with Halliday that the social context realizes language as well as language realizes the social context.



**Figure 1.1 The realization relationship between Language and Social Context**  
(drawn from Halliday and Martin, 1993: 25)

The research design incorporates a qualitative approach in analyzing the texts on groups and phrase using the SFL framework. However, a quantitative analysis is also

carried out using frequency counts and percentages to further enrich the qualitative analysis. The data is chosen from the slogans of billboard advertisements in Malaysia, written in the English language. The analysis of the data comprises eight steps, which include jotting down of slogans, tabulation of slogans, indexation, grouping, quantitative analysis, and qualitative analysis of the experiential meanings, analysis of the logical meanings and interpretation of the data.

### **1.5 Rationale of the study**

A lot of research has been carried out using the SFL theory. Much of the work done on the Ideational metafunction has been on the rank of clause. Far too little attention has been paid to the rank below the clauses, which are the groups and phrases.

Although this study is closely aligned with Wong's (2001) research on the ideational metafunction, there is a gap in this area, which requires new research. His research was on the components below the clause, which is the Nominal Group. Therefore, the current study is attempted to fill the gap in studies on ideational metafunction by delving into different types of data at the rank below the clause.

The study is focused on authentic materials, which are the billboard slogans. Since advertisements are a common and accepted part of daily life, people tend to look at the written text to get information of a product. Advertisements have their own particular language. Hence, the language of advertisement is very different as the vocabulary and structures may be somewhat unconventional. As a matter of fact, language is clearly a central element in building the image of a product. Since the purpose of advertisements is to attract the readers, therefore the choice of language is different from the normal language. As SFL views that every text is related to certain

contexts of situation, the findings of this study will bring to light how a text is constructed and organized in terms of experiential and logical meanings in the genre of advertisements.

This study is worthy of investigation because it can contribute to the teaching-learning process by providing guidance in writing skills. Since billboard advertisements are authentic materials, which are readily available, they can be used in classroom teaching. They also can be used as tools in teaching students to improve their English writing skills, especially creative writing skills. As an SFL analysis relates text with context of situations, this study is suitable in teaching students how to describe texts in context, such as those created in advertisements. Broadly speaking, such knowledge will help students to develop their language skills as well.

Being so widespread and obviously influential, advertisements are therefore worthy of study for the reasons cited in this chapter.

## **1.6 Significance of the study**

This study is carried out for the purpose of contributing to SFL researches in the genre of advertisements, especially on billboard slogans. Furthermore, this study would help us to see the importance of groups and phrase structures in imparting the message of billboard advertisements to the readers.

Besides, this study would also help us to see how the experiential meanings and the logical meanings of slogans are expressed within the various themes analyzed. It would show us how a similar product is being introduced using different words to persuade the readers to purchase their products or services.



Apart from that, this study would assist the English language teachers to guide students to a better understanding of the relationship between the linguistic choice of written text and the implications of that choice for its meaning. In fact, this study may also be a useful reference to syllabus designers of the English language for Malaysian primary and secondary schools.

In addition to that, a text is vital in SFL analysis because the functional meaning of language is realized in units no smaller than texts. Thus, an SFL analysis describes how a text is related to a social context and how people use language to accomplish their purposes by expressing meanings in context. The unit of analysis in this study is the groups and phrase, which contribute to the meanings expressed by the total texts in contexts. Hence, the findings will provide some insights on how the ideational meanings are conveyed experientially and logically in billboard slogans.

### **1.7 Delimitations of the study**

Since this study will be carried out in one particular area, which is the billboard advertisements written in the English Language, this study will limit itself to analyzing 100 slogans out of a vast resource of billboard advertisements.

Due to time and space constraints, the study is limited to 100 slogans so that it can provide an in-depth analysis of groups and phrase found in the billboard slogans using Systemic Functional Linguistics. Although the findings of this study may not be generalizable to all billboard slogans, some generalizations can be made, as the sample of 100 slogans is representative of the kind of billboard slogans found in Malaysia.

Nevertheless, the current study is sufficient to explore and answer the research questions of the study. A larger sample of slogans may be explored in the future for more sophisticated statistical procedures.

Besides that, this study has only delved into the ideational meanings through the groups and phrase analyses using the SFL theory. A research on the text with the images could provide more information about how the advertisers make a connection between the text and the image in order to accomplish their purpose of marketing a product.

## **1.8 Outline of the Dissertation**

To maintain a clear perspective of the study, the thesis has been divided into five (5) chapters. The outline is as follows. Chapter 1 introduces the issue of the current study. Chapter 2 lays out the literature review of the research. Following this, Chapter 3 delineates the theoretical framework of the study and the research methodology of the study. Chapter 4 forms the heart of the study by providing the analysis and interpretation of data as well as a report of the results of the findings. The last chapter concludes the thesis with a summary of the study, drawing conclusions and pointing towards further future work.

## **1.9 Chapter Summary**

This study is aimed at analyzing the groups and phrase in Malaysian billboard slogans using the SFL theory. Thus, this chapter has presented the background of the study, starting with the statement of the research area, the aim of the study, the research

questions, the rationale of the study, the significance, and the delimitations of the study as well as the outline of the thesis.

This chapter opens the path for the next chapter, which lays out a review of literature related to the current study.