



Persuasive language in the subgenre of Persian sales e-mails



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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at classifying and discussing persuasive messages in Persian sales e-mails, based on a move scheme proposed by Cheung comprising 10 major moves and 36 steps. Results of the research showed “introducing the offer” is the most frequent move employed in Persian sales e-mails under study. Besides, new steps “presenting frequently asked questions” and “motto” were found in the data which may be added in the move scheme provided by Cheung, if it is going to be considered cross-linguistically and cross-culturally. In addition, some moves or steps were applied in a twofold manner. Furthermore, the results indicated that culture can be regarded as a factor in choosing the strategies used by the Iranian makers’ advertisements.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, more and more attention has been paid to the functions that internet can perform in different aspects of our lives. So, the role of internet in developing technology and business should not be ignored. It is stated that most dramatic variations in communication technologies are related to the user participation. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that firms will commit substantial financial resources to ease interaction with their customers (Weinberg and Pehlivan, 2011). Sales e-mails as one of the internet communication resources play an important role in collaboration between the firms, organizations, product makers, service providers and their customers. Such e-mails, actually facilitate and give rise to direct access and contact between the makers and users. Cheung (2010: 357) defines sales emails as the following:

A sales e-mail is indeed a form of language use; it is a genre-specific text with a structure. Structure, in this sense, refers to the formal or textual features related not only to the organization or patterning of the semantic units, but also to the linguistic choices made. An analysis of genre-specific texts provides information on the conventions of writing in that genre and the rhetorical patterns that emerge from it. Through these conventions and patterns, we can gain an understanding of the way in which the makers of that text contribute to shaping its viewers’ perception and knowledge of the world.

Besides, Cheung (2008) believes that sales e-mails are both at a much lower cost and globally more reachable, so they help business organizations and personal sellers to promote their products or services. She (ibid.: 162) refers to a survey conducted

Abbreviations: 1SG, 1st person singular; 2SG, 2nd person singular; 3SG, 3rd person singular; 2PL, 2nd person plural; 3PL, 3rd person plural; ATTR, Attributive; EP, epenthesis; EZ, Ezafe particle; IMP, imperfect tense; IMPER, imperative; INDEF, indefinite article; INF, infinitive marker; NEG, negative; OM, object marker; PAST, past stem; PRES, present stem; PRO.CLIT, pronominal clitic; PL, plural; SG, singular; SUB, subjunctive; SUPER, superlative.

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by DoubleClick (2004) which “indicates that consumers are increasingly likely to respond positively to permission-based (opt-in) sales emails, and to see them replacing direct mail communications through prints”.

In addition, as stated by Freeman (2011: 2), “[a]s web sites and web traffic proliferated, businesses were able to use email to reach growing numbers of potential customers at very low cost. In fact, it was nearly free, and the number of marketing messages sent via email quickly surpassed those sent out by regular mails”.

Labrador et al. (2014) assert that a sufficient collection of lexical items and a proper combination and distribution of objective and persuasive information are crucial for directing the reader towards taking the decision to purchase a particular item. Nowadays, media such as internet plays an important role in sales promotion provided by different companies launching different products or services. In this regard, online advertisements share a number of textual and contextual features of a specific subgenre. In addition, textual features involve all the linguistic features applied to describe the product and convince the potential consumers. According to Janoschka (2004), although online advertisements usually apply a more interactional-conversational language approach, differences occur with regard to language use, message flow, and types of direct user addressing. Moreover, regarding the necessity of the more thorough investigation of the marketing communication language, Cheung (2010: 355) holds that:

Given that every company has a brand to build or a product or service to sell, persuasive marketing communication is almost indispensable. If it is agreed that persuasive messages are one of the major media through which companies convey information about their brands, and that such messages create a catalyst effect in boosting sales volume, consistently influence consumers' buying decisions, enhance cross-cultural exchange, and contribute to modern civilization, then an investigation of these messages in relation to business certainly merits our attention.

As applying media like internet, for the sake of a better communication between makers and clients, is increasingly becoming widespread, it seems necessary to investigate different strategies, textual and contextual factors employed by providers of a product or service to promote the clients' motivation for buying a specific product. Thus, this study investigates persuasive language in the subgenre of Persian e-mail advertising in 40 sales e-mails sent from different companies with different products and services. To this end, the authors use the move scheme devised by Cheung (2008), from a 'bottom-up' applied study to see how Iranian makers introduce the relevant products and services to motivate the Iranian clients via e-mail advertising. In addition, the results of the present research may contribute to cross-linguistic and cross-cultural studies.

It should be noted that throughout the article, the terms makers and viewers are used instead of the authors and readers the same as what has been used in Cheung (2008). According to her (2010), the terms authors and readers are too restrictive in this research context because the persuasive messages in sales e-mails might be encoded and decoded through text, new media, or a combination of two. Here, as said by Cheung (2011: 280), the term “makers refers to those involved in the production of the sales e-mails, such as e-marketers, authors, and new media producers, whereas viewers refers to those who receive and view them through the digital interface”.

2. Review of the related literature

Cheung (2008) examined the effect of new media (as stated by her) on the encoding of persuasive messages in sales e-mails as a channel for direct marketing, and the scope to which the use of these media affects the overall interactional or social strategy of reliability enhancement and persuasion in the context of sales advertising. The sales letters investigated involved 80 e-mails and 80 prints. Furthermore, “discussions were made with reference to a conceptual framework called the *Lingual-Belief Interaction Model*” provided by herself (ibid.: 164). Results of her study appeared “to confirm a genre-based hypothesis which predicts that texts written for similar communicative purpose will display similarities in discourse structure, setting aside grammatical constraints” (ibid.: 182). Nevertheless, some differences were identified attributed to the impact of new media on the encoding of persuasive messages as recognized in the discourse structure of sales e-mails. In 2010, she compared 40 Chinese and 40 English direct-marketing sales e-mails regarding the similarities and differences in the encoding of persuasive messages in the two corpora, based on her prior model (2008).

Cheung (ibid.: 354) added that “[d]epending on the rhetorical goals the makers wish to achieve through these texts, the viewer–maker relationships they would like to establish, and the social and cultural contexts in which the texts unfold, the sales genre is likely to adapt in terms of its discourse strategy and textual features in today's marketplace, which is experiencing not only increased globalization, but also increased localization”. In addition, in 2011, she addressed the impact of new media on the design of electronic direct mail (EDM) messages which “have become an increasingly important and convenient mode of communication in the sales and marketing arena”. Chi square test results of her study displayed “significant differences between the message-design strategy of EDMs and that of their print media counterparts” (ibid.: 279). This study, besides, concluded practical advice for the professional communicators and teachers who worked on sales-message design.

Groves (2009) tried to propose some steps regarding how to influence the viewers of e-mail advertisements. Among these steps were: looking like an expert to the viewers, paying attentions to the needs of the customers, inserting links which provide the readers with actions they can take while they're in front of their computers and offering discounts.

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