

A Discourse Analysis of Coffee and Chocolate Print Advertisements: Persian EFL Learner's Problems in Focus

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Abstract

This study was set to investigate the problems Persian EFL learners encounter in reading advertisements. Additionally, this study explored the hidden strategies behind each advertisement. In this regard, 30 Persian EFL university students majoring in English were selected. The model of this study was based on mixed models of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (1994), Fairclough (2010), Huhmann adopted McQuarrie and Philips (2008) and Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) adopted Halliday's Semiotic Approach (1994). The findings of the study indicated that Persian EFL learners had problems not only with semantic, syntactic and phonological aspects of language of advertisements, but also with non-linguistic elements such as colors in advertisements. As a result, the findings of the present study could be helpful for EFL teachers to see possible problems their students encounter in reading advertisements.

Keywords: Advertisement, Discourse of Advertising, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis, Semiotic, Ideology

1. Introduction

Advertising has long been a subject of several studies in different disciplines such as mass communication, marketing, sociology, cultural anthropology, social psychology, semiotics and cultural studies. Discourse of advertising is a way through which people construct their ideas about the world (Goddard, 1992). Words in advertisements do not happen in isolation but occur in complex interaction with music, pictures and other text around them (Cook, 1992). Additionally, discourse of advertising discovers the language of contemporary society.

It is observed that Iranian EFL learners have problems in understanding advertisements. The problem could be related to linguistic elements such as semantic, syntactic, phonological aspects of language as well as non-linguistic elements such as semiotic aspects of language which include psychology of color. As a result, this study aims to discover the problems Persian EFL learners have in understanding advertisements.

2. Literature Review

This part presents a related literature and theoretical background about discourse, critical discourse analysis. Since the framework of this study is based on a combination of several models such as Halliday, Fairclough, Kress and Van Leeuwen, this framework will be focused on.

2.1 Systemic Functional Linguistics

Systemic functional linguistics was developed by Halliday (1994). As Halliday (1994, p.2) mentioned in his book:

Systemic functional grammar is functional rather than formal. It is considered as functional because of these three reasons: 1-text 2-system 3-elements of linguistic system. It is functional in a sense that it is employed to account for the language use.

Moreover, systemic functional grammar is a language interpreted as a system of meaning accompanied by forms through which the meaning can be realized.

According to Bloor and Bloor (2007, p. 2), Systemic functional grammar '(SFL)' "is a branch of grammar which highlights the importance of social context (context of culture and context of situation) in production and develops language both historically and in terms of meaning in individual discourse events".

2.2 Discourse analysis

The term "*discourse analysis*" consists of a wide range of related but somehow contrastive works. It is sometimes used in terms of general methodology (Parker, 1992; Wodak, 1998; Wood & Kroger, 2000). However, different definitions are allocated to discourse analysis by different scholars. Discourse is identified as a "level of structure higher than sentence". This idea is in line with Stubb's idea (1983, p.1), who also believed that "discourse analysis" is analysis of language beyond or above the sentence". By the same token, functionalists such as Halliday's (1994) view toward discourse analysis are the same as structuralism's points of view. According to Schiffrin (1994), there are two definitions for discourse which are briefly stated as particular unit of language and particular focus on language use.

2.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a branch of discourse analysis that takes critical viewpoints in discourse analysis. According to Van Dijk (as Cited in Bloor & Bloor, 2007, p.2), "CDA is a new cross discipline that compromises the analysis of text and talk in all disciplines of humanities and social science virtually." Moreover, CDA is interested in ways language and discourse is used to achieve social goals and partially this use plays a key role in social maintenance and change (Bloor & Bloor, 2007). In similar vein, CDA critically analyzes the language used by people who exercise power. This is due to the fact that language is not powerful by itself; it acquires power when powerful people make use of it (Wodak, 2002).

According to Blommaert (2005), CDA has its root in Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL). According to Fairclough (2003), 'SFL' is concerned with the relation between language and other aspects and elements of social life; therefore, it selects social character of a text and its approach to analyze texts linguistically as well. Furthermore, Wodak (2002, p.16) mentions that "Halliday had emphasized the relationship between grammatical system and the social and personal needs that language is required to serve."

Fairclough (1989) started his critical studies by developing his theory of 'Critical Language Study' (CLS), which explores the connection between language use and unequal relations of power. He observed an increased consciousness of how language contributed to the domination of some people. His later works developed the methods of CDA with the aim of providing an approach to language analysis accessible to those from disciplines outside linguistics with an emphasis on the links between changes in language use and social and cultural element (Fairclough, 1992; 1995; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997).

2.4 Rhetorical Figures in Advertising

Over two thousand years ago, in classical antiquity, rhetorical figures were first identified and discussed (Todorov, 1982). Efforts to systematize the wealth of available figures are almost as old like (Wenzel, 1990). Modern efforts at systematization begins with Jacobson (1967), Halle (1956), Burke (1950) as well as Huhmann (2008) and McQuarrie and Mick (1992).

A rhetorical figure traditionally has been defined as artful deviation (Corbett, 1990). "Deviations refer to the divergence in frequency from normal rules of linguistic structure or over the use of normal usage" (Wales, 1989, p.117). However, it has been revealed that metaphor and other figurative expressions are common in everyday speech (Pollio et al, 1990; Todorov 1982).

2.5 Semiotic Approach to Advertising

'Semiotics' refers to the science of sign in society (Saussure, 1974). Semiotics offers a premise of systematic, comprehensive and coherent study of communication phenomena as a whole (Hodge & Kress, 1988). Put simply, "Semiotic is the study of sign and signifying practice. A sign can be defined, basically, as any entity (words, images, objects etc.) that refers to something else, previously established social conventions" (Eco, 1976, p.16).

The semiotic approach has different branches. Color is one of the sub-disciplines of semiotic approach. Color

belongs to the category of visual mode. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996, 2006), visual modes such as color and image are similar to language and they can fulfill and realize three broad meta-functional communications as well as language does.

Semiotics plays key roles in account of meaning of colors. Semiotically, 'what' people do with colors varies enormously. But, if one stays with the notion that 'what people do' determines the tools and bears in mind that very different things done by different group, that making a sense of colors useful for meaning making (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). Social groups which share common purposes around the use of colors are relatively small and specialized.

To the present time, a great deal of research has been done in the area of discourse of advertising. Rush (1998) studied the noun-phrase in English advertising. She gave a formal description of two unusual features of the noun-phrase in English print advertising. The first is the ability to operate an independent clause in all parts of advertising such as body, headline, and signature and the second one is its complex modifying structure. The results of her study revealed that noun-phrase is both complex and simple. Moreover, the results of her study shed-lights on both its complexity and simplicity of noun-phrase in English advertising.

Danesi (1993) studied the metaphorical competence in second language acquisition and second language teaching. Danesi reached the conclusion that students must be able to convert common experience into conceptually and linguistically appropriate models in order to be conceptually fluent.

Sacristan (2006) investigated the advertising English and ESP. According to his study, advertising which belongs to ESP with a low degree of specialism and social type is on the board line between GE and ESP. The findings somewhat revealed that the discursive modality has largely been forgotten in ESP varieties and there is overlap between ESP and GE as there is combination of specific topics along with everyone.

Talebinezhad (2007) examined conceptual fluency and metaphorical competence in second language acquisition. In his study, non-native like out-come have been examined in the context of UG, where metaphorical language receives less attention. The analysis revealed that native and non-native language differed drastically in both type and amount of figurative language they employed in conveying similar concepts. The results also confirmed the hypothesis that L2 learners need to be exposed to metaphorical language in the L2 in order to become conceptually fluent.

Hashemian and Talebinezhad (2007) investigated the development of conceptual fluency (CF) and metaphorical competence (MC) in Persian students of English. Their goal was to instill in L2 learners a more functional communicative language over a traditional formal competence. The findings indicated that the learners had developed their CF and MC to a large extent, and their written discourse was almost as metaphorically dense as that of metaphorically native speakers. The results showed that it is possible to develop CF and MC in classroom setting and there is a relationship between CF and MC.

Sukrisno (2010) studied analysis of discourse on advertisement. This study was focused on making sense of advertisement from the view point of linguistic construction, meaning, and it's textually. The results of her study indicated that advertisements should be analyzed by means of elliptical operation. Moreover, elliptical sentence function as a text.

El-daly (2011) examined the nature of discourse of advertising. His study aimed at uncovering the basic elements of the most persuasive, influential and inseparable discourse of twenty century. The results of his study showed that texts construct meaning through interaction with other types of discourse and inseparable from culture of the advertising texts.

Chand and Chand Harry (2012) studied creation and perception of meaning. This study was aimed at gauging the gap between creation and perception of meaning through pairs of print advertising. The model was based on a combination of Fairclough's model and semiotic approach. The results of the study showed that consumers usually did not understand the copywriter's strategies and manipulations in reproducing and propagating these discourses through advertising.

Kaur, and Arumugam and Yunus (2013) studied beauty products advertising from the view point of critical discourse analysis. The analysis was based on Fairclough's three dimensional frameworks. The study showed how the ideology of beauty was produced and reproduced through advertisements in popular local magazine. The results of their study showed that advertisers use various strategies to manipulate women.

As for the studies in Iranian setting, Jalilifar (2010) scrutinized the rhetoric of English and Persian advertising. The results of his study revealed that various rhetorical figures incorporated to make advertising vivid, conscious and readable. The findings of his study also indicated that rhetorical figures deserve further attention in writing English advertising.

Najafian (2011) investigated the usefulness of semiotic approach proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) in analyzing discourse. The results of her study indicated that a social semiotic reference has a pivotal point in the relationship between advertising discourse and ideology, color and image. She also found that words, images and colors are products of social practices and these are three modes through which social meaning of advertising are coded.

Behnam and Behnam (2012) examined the similarities and differences in the schematic structure of English and Persian job advertisements. This study made an attempt to compare two overall schematic structures to investigate the existing similarities and differences. The results of their study indicated that regularities existed in certain moves of the structural framework but there was no specific fixed pattern in their occurrences.

Lotfollahi, Ketabi, and Barati (2013) studied Persian translation of English print advertisements for cosmetic and hygienic products. Vinay and Darbelnet's (1985/1995) approach was used in order to analyze the procedure used in their study. They made an attempt to show how such procedures could change the effect of such advertisements in the target language. The results of their study showed that the main translation procedures used were literal and borrowing.

The present study is set to investigate the problems Persian EFL learners encounter in understanding the meaning behind advertisements. The research questions of the present study are as follow:

- 1- What kind of linguistic and non-linguistic elements are more prevalent in coffee and chocolate advertisements?
- 2- What kind of problems do Iranian EFL learners have regarding understanding coffee and chocolate advertisements?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The participants who took part in this study were 30 Iranian EFL learners majoring in English from University of Isfahan and Islamic Azad University, Shahreza Branch. They were both graduate and post-graduate students.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

In this study, a mixed model based on the theory of Systemic Functional Grammar developed by Halliday (1994), critical discourse analysis developed by Fairclough (2010), rhetorical figures developed by Huhmann (2008) and color psychology developed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) were used . Figure 1 shows a schematic representation of the model:

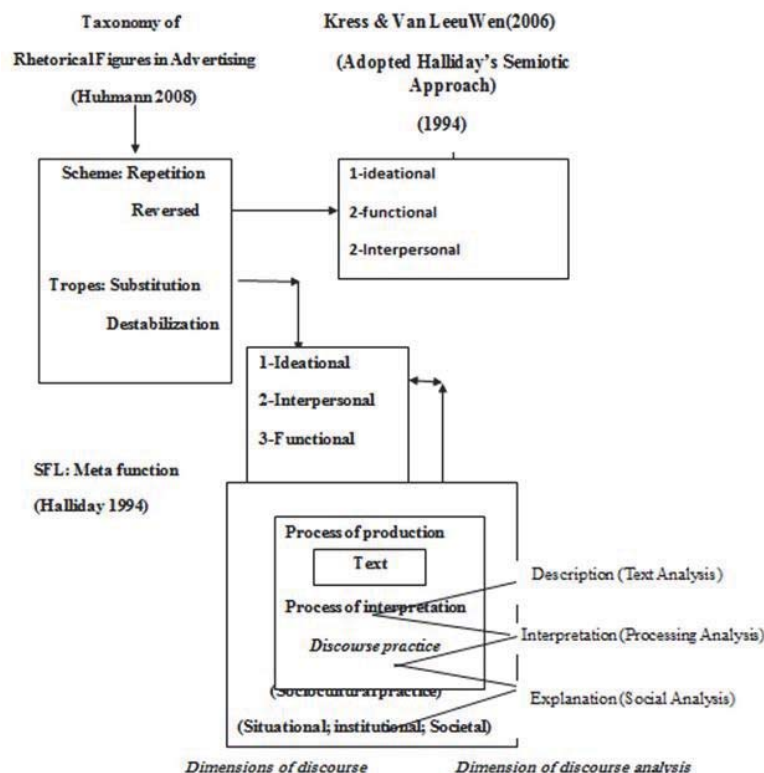


Figure 1. Mixed model

3.3 Materials

In order to collect the data, six coffee and chocolate advertisements were used. The first sets of advertisements are related to chocolate. The first chocolate advertisement is Nestle. The Nestle family belonged to the Dataran Merdeka, Malaya. These advertisements advertised the fun and entertainment, social aspects of coffee and chocolate. The second advertisement is about caraway milk chocolate. The third one is again a Nestle chocolate advertisement. The second sets of ads are related to coffee advertisement. The first coffee is Maxwell House Coffee. The second ad is Nescafe coffee advertisement and the third ad is Lavazza coffee

3.4 Instruments

The questionnaire of this study was a researcher- made questionnaire and was designed based on classified discourse of advertising by Bruthiaux (1996). The questions consisted of 11 questions and one translation part .

3.5 Procedure

In order to collect the data, the following procedure was used: First, six coffees and chocolate advertisements were selected. The students were asked to study the advertisements and then answer the question. They had seventy minutes to perform the job. No dictionary was allowed to be used. The first research question was done qualitatively while the second and third question was done quantitatively.

4. Data analysis and Results

4.1 Analysis of the results of chocolate advertisement 1

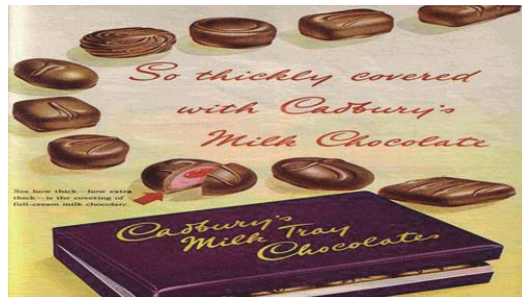


This ad depicts a picture of celebration with presence of star-studded persons who make celebration more fun and happy. This is a kind of marketing strategy called celebrity spokesperson techniques. The people who took parts in celebrations are like chocolate and this could arouse people's attention. Some features of the advertisement are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Analysis of Chocolate Advertisement1

	Sentences	Analysis of sentences
1	100 years celebration!	This sentence involves the figure hyperbole. This is a type of rhetorical figure belonging to the category of substitution trope. According to Huhmann (2008) hyperbole is exaggeration deliberately used for emphasis.
2	Lots of freebies, fun games and activities	In the phrase "lots of freebies, fun games and activities" rhetorical figures 'alliteration' and 'pluralism' are used. 'Alliteration' is a kind of repetition which belongs to category scheme. Put simply, alliteration is repetition of consonants in the initial position of three or more subsequent word (Huhmann , cited in McQuarrie and Philip, 2008).
3	Star-studded Artistes celebrate with us!	The word "star-studded" is eye-catching. It refers to men and women who are sexually attractive. As such, the figure metaphor is used here. This figure belongs to the category of destabilization trope. The metaphor is a figure which its meaning cannot deviate from its basic meaning. "Destabilization tropes such as metaphor does not have any clear meaning at first sight" (Huhmann, cited in MC Quarrie and Philips 2008 p.90).

4.2 Analysis of results of chocolate advertisement 2

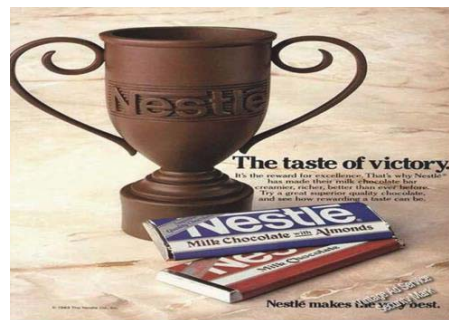


This advertisement is related to Caraway milk chocolate. In Table 2, analysis of this ad is shown.

Table 2. Analysis of Chocolate Advertisement2

	Sentences	Analysis of sentences
1	So thickly covered with caraways milk chocolate	The word "thickly" is an adverb here. The words "so thickly" "and "milk -chocolate "are collocation here. In spite of the existence of class word "Adverb" and figure like "Collocation" as well, the figure, "Alliteration", the repetition of consonants is applied here.
2	See how thick....how extra-thick is the covering of full-milk chocolate	This sentence is representation of figures such as "alliteration" and "anaphora". Nord (1991 p.47) asserts that anaphora increases the extension of the text through repetition at the beginning of the word as well as through parallelism and intonational contour (super segmental features) which it produce. The word "full-cream milk chocolate" is both combination and collocation. The color "light-green" could be representative of "good-luck and calm".

4.3 Analysis of results of chocolate advertisement 3



This advertisement represents a picture of cup which could be a sign of victory and this cup is made from chocolate. The phrase the taste of victory "is metaphor.

Table 3. Analysis of Chocolate Advertisement3

	Sentences	Analysis of sentences
1	The Taste of the victory	The phrase "the taste of the victory" is metaphor.
2	"It's the reward for excellence. That's why Nestle has made their milk-chocolate bar, and see creamer, richer, better than ever before. Try a great superior quality chocolate and see how rewarding a taste can be"	There are "intertextuality" and "presupposition" in this paragraph. The terms "creamers" and "richer" are superlative adjectives. "Try a great superior quality" is an "imperative sentence". The creamers, richer are superlative adjectives..
3	Nestle makes very best	The "hyperbole figure" is applied in the sentence "Nestle make very best." The color "brown" is one of the most prevalent used colors here and it is sign of "friendship and stability".

4.4 Analysis of results of coffee advertisement 1



This advertisement refers to Maxwell House Coffee. Maxwell house coffee started its work in 1892. The year shows that this brand of coffee is very old .To do so; trust and authenticity figure is applied.

Table 4. Analysis of Coffee Advertisement1

	Sentences	Analysis of sentences
1	<i>The one perk everyone deserves</i>	The "one perk" is a metaphor, a hyperbole as well as a polysemy here. The word "perk" at first glance refers to money someone earned but at the second one refers to coffee perchlorate. In doing so, the second meaning is relevant here because it talks about the coffee. The word "Everyone" is a personal pronoun. The "dark blue color" is in association with "calm and relax".

4.5 Analysis of results of Coffee advertisement 2



Table 5. Analysis of Coffee Advertisement2

	Sentences	Analysis of sentences
1	<i>As I sip on lovely coffee it suddenly dawns on me How many people have actually drunk from this one cup?</i>	The word "lovely coffee" is a collocation. The alliteration figure is applied here. The word "how many people" is a rhetorical question. The word "one cup" is numeral and "one" is used for emphasis.

4.6 Analysis of results of coffee advertisement 3

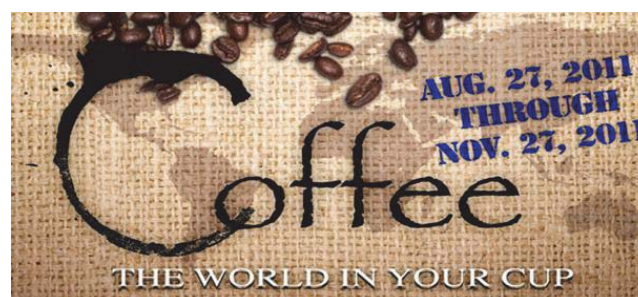


Table 6. Analysis of Coffee Advertisement 3

	Sentences	Analysis of sentences
1	The world in your cup	The background is eye-catching .The background is representative of the map of the world. The phrase "the world in your cup" shows the design of ads. The metaphor figure is applied in the phrase "the word in your cup". The date used here is sign of authenticity and trust .The presupposition figure is used here. According to Bierley (1995) presupposition is on the basis of the fact that the brand is already designed and created positive feeling towards brands. The color "brown" is indication of stability and friendship.

By referring to the second research question, the researcher aimed at figuring out the problems Iranian EFL learners have in understanding the coffee and chocolate advertisements. The results showed that students had problems not only with recognizing the semantic, syntactic, phonological features but also with non-linguistic features like colors (psychology of colors) applied in advertisements. Moreover, they cannot translate the sentences applied in advertisements correctly. As it can be seen in Table 3 and Figure1, the most frequent option is Translation (49%) followed by syntactic aspects of language (24%) and semantic aspects of language (21%) and the option phonological aspects of the language registered the least frequency. Table 7 shows the problems students have with understanding the linguistic elements

Table 7. Problems with Linguistic Elements

	F Incorrect	P Incorrect
Adv1		
Adv2		
Adv3	2	20.0%
Phonological Aspects Adv4	3	16.7%
Adv5	5	0.03%
Adv6		
Total		
Adv1	2	14.3%
Adv2	3	42.8%
Adv3	2	12.5%
Semantic Aspects Adv4	10	55.6%
Adv5	14	77.7%
Adv6	31	21%
Total		
Adv1	9	64.3%
Adv2	3	42.8%
Syntactic Aspects Adv3	14	87.5%
Adv4	4	22.2%
Adv5	2	20.0%
Adv6	32	24%
Total		
Adv1	16	42.0%
Adv2	18	72.0%
Adv3	17	70.8%
Translation Adv4	20	90.0%
Adv5	21	87.5%
Adv6	18	78.5%
Total	108	49%

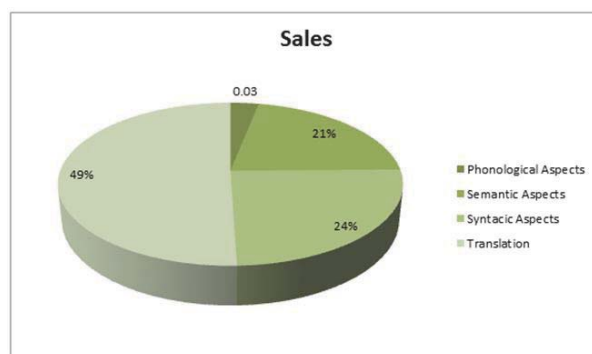


Figure 1. Graphic Representation of Participant's Responses Who Answered Items

As Table 8 shows, by checking the results obtained through coffee and chocolate advertisements, one can understand that students do not have a good command of understanding the psychological meaning of colors. The most frequent option is loyalty (77.8%), followed by blue (13%), brown and dark blue (3%) and the option white registered the least frequency (6%).

Table 8. Problems with Understanding the Non-Linguistics Elements

	F Incorrect	P Incorrect
Blue Red Yellow Calm & Relax White Green Brown Purple Dark blue Total	4 4	13% 13%
Blue Red Yellow White Peace Green Brown Purple Dark blue Total	2 2	6% 6%
Blue Red Yellow White Ordinary & Conventional Green Brown Purple Dark blue Total	3 3	10% 10%
Blue Red Yellow White Energetic Green Brown Purple Dark blue Total		

Blue		
Red		
Yellow		
Loyalty White	7	77.8%
Green	7	77.8%
Brown		
Purple		
Dark blue		
Total		
Blue		
Calm & Relax Red		
Yellow		
White	3	60.0%
Green	3	60.0%
Brown		
Purple		
Dark blue		
Total		

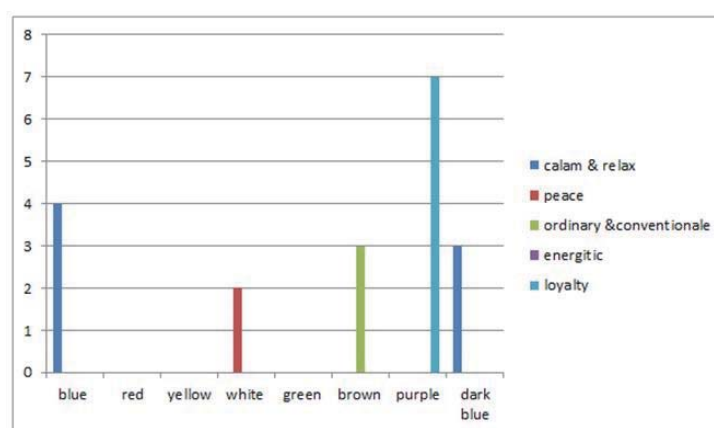


Figure 2. Graphic feature of Participants Responses Who do not have Good Commands of Meaning of Colors

5. Discussion

Findings of Najafian (2011) are also partially the same as the findings of this study. Najafian (2011) stated that the social semiotic approach play an important role in analyzing advertisements. Since words, images and colors are products of her study; she scrutinized the advertisements and mentioned that the most widely used linguistic features were disjunctive syntax, indirect address and conjunctive adjunct which do not support the findings of this study. In other words, colors as a part of semiotic are one of the most widely used linguistic Non-linguistic elements features which are in line with the findings of this study

Moreover, the findings of Rush (1998) are partially in congruent with the findings of this study. Rush (1998) concentrated on noun-phrase in English advertising and gave two formal description of two unusual features noun-phrase in English advertising. In her study, repetition, parallelism, alliteration and rhymes are the frequently used features in advertising English.

Estimating the results obtained through the analysis of results of 6 coffee and chocolate advertisements, the researcher reached the conclusion that the use of superlative, personification, figures and psychological aspects of colors cannot be ignored. In doing so, the findings of this study relatively matched with the findings of Ghorgani & Tahmasebi(2013) which considered superlative adjective, personification, figures and facts and psychology of colors as salient features in Iranian bank advertisements.

According to analysis of the results obtained through the second research question, a phonological aspect of language was considered as one of the linguistic elements applied in the analysis of advertisements. Moreover, a phonological aspect of language is one of the linguistic elements used to attract learner's attention too. As observed in

the task performed by participants, phonological aspects was one of the linguistic elements which participants failed to answer correctly. For example, the phrase lots of 'freebies, fun games and lots of activities' refers to phonological aspects of language while respondents considered it as semantic and syntactic aspects of language. This type of phonological aspects of language is called "Alliteration" which students were not able to recognize it correctly. The findings of this study endorse Danesi's (1993) claim that students are not aware of linguistic elements and metaphorical competence in second language learning in order to be conceptually fluent.

Another area which is worth mentioning here is the semantic aspects of language. Semantic aspects of language are other types of linguistic elements which participants have problem with understanding them. For example, the word 'lovely coffee' denotes collocation. Moreover, the word 'in your cup' is Metaphor. Since students are not conceptually fluent, the meaning obtained from the semantic aspects of language became indirect and cause hinder in production of student's knowledge. This is in line with the findings of scholars namely Hashemian and Talebinejad (2007) state that L2 learners do not have access to conceptual system of English. That is why their written discourse showed a high degree of literariness. As observed in the task performed by the participants, the task showed almost nothing about conceptual system of English namely conceptual metaphor.

Colors in advertisements play crucial role to arouse people's attention. Colors are known as Non-linguistic elements and every color has its own especial meaning which creates another area of difficulty for Iranian EFL learners. For example, brown color is indicative of conventional and ordinary which most of the respondent misinterpreted the meaning of brown color and they were not aware of the correct meaning of most of the colors. The reason of this misinterpretation is lack of knowledge about semiotics (science of semiotic). In doing so, there is a need to compensate this lack of knowledge by having close look at the science of semiotics.

By close examination of the meaning of the sentence and its translation part, the researcher found that students were not aware of the meaning of the sentences used in advertisements or they literally translated the sentences in advertisements frequently. This is lack of awareness about metaphorical concepts and lexical strategies which often cause L2 learners to translate expression in the L2 by using an analogous counterpart of their L1. Therefore, the meaning of the word or sentence is frequently rendered by activating the L1 concepts. However, the findings of this study back up Talebinejad (2007) claim that students did not know anything about the meaning of the word and metaphorical competence applied in their study. In this regard, teachers should develop conceptual Metaphor in classroom setting.

6. Conclusion

The results of this study lent support to the notion those Iranian EFL learners encounter difficulties while reading advertisements. On the whole, according to the results obtained from analysis of data, Iranian EFL learners did not understand the hidden strategies used in advertisements. These strategies include phonological, semantic and semantic aspects of language as well as psychology of colors. Additionally, they could not translate the given sentences because they did not know the meaning of words in advertisements. These strategies are also ways of achieving certain ideologies. Having correct ideologies toward advertising cause L2 Learners improve their reading.

As a result, Iranian EFL learners need specific instruction and coherent text-book about the discourse of advertising as well as hidden strategies and ideologies used in advertisements.

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