



Book reviews

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Stella Bullo, *Evaluation in Advertising Reception: A Socio-cognitive and Linguistic Perspective*, Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014; vii + 207 pp., £55 (hbk), ISBN 9781137350428.

Reviewed by: YJ Doran, *Department of Linguistics, The University of Sydney, Australia*

Stella Bullo's *Evaluation in Advertising Reception* joins the growing linguistic tradition that looks seriously at evaluative language as a key way of meaning in our social life. Bullo's contribution, sitting under the banner of reception studies, considers how people respond to print advertising and how their discourse is organized to marshal this evaluative response. In this way, Bullo focuses on the language that respondents use when discussing advertisements rather than considering the advertisements themselves. For discourse analysts this is an intriguing object of study, potentially offering insights into how varied reading positions are developed and negotiated and how they converge with or diverge from those intended by advertisers. To investigate this, Bullo utilizes Martin and White's (2005) appraisal theory (in particular, the attitude categories of affect, judgement and appreciation) in conjunction with various socio-cognitive interpretive frameworks.

The book contains five chapters as well as two helpful appendices of analysed data and an index. Following a brief introduction in Chapter 1 that situates the study within the context of reception studies, Chapters 2 and 3 lay the groundwork by introducing the interpretive frameworks and methodology of the study. In doing so, it is explained that the study in part aims to 'unveil the socio-cognitive resources inferred to play a role in the selection of evaluative discourse' (p. 41), including metaphor and metonymy, intertextuality and interdiscursivity. The data consist of two focus group discussions using three print advertisements as stimuli. Each advertisement involves the appropriation of a classical artwork (*The Girl with the Pearl Earring* used to advertise Holland as a tourist destination, *Whistler's Mother* used to advertise Mercedes-Benz and *The Birth of Venus* to advertise IKEA).

Chapters 4 and 5 present the results of the study, primarily as percentage tables showing the relative frequency of attitude categories used by both focus groups for each advertisement. These tables display some surprising results that are given considerable discussion.

Unfortunately, however, this discussion often does more to highlight issues with the study than to clarify the findings. For example, one of the main findings of these tables is that judgement (of humans and their behaviour) is the primary means of evaluation by

the respondents, garnering over 50% of the tokens in the data. Given that the stimulus material is advertisements (i.e. semiotic artefacts), a heavy emphasis on the evaluation of human behaviour (as opposed to an appreciation of the advertisements' aesthetic appeal or effectiveness) is an unexpected finding, one that is duly discussed. By way of explanation, Bullo relies on a particular interpretation of the boundary between judgement and appreciation. Many instances of attitude that at first glance look like appreciation of the advertisements are interpreted rather as judging the producers of the advertisements through metonymy. That is, the interpretation involves looking past the explicitly stated targets of evaluation (the advertisements) and positing that the targets are actually the advertisers themselves. This is a big leap and one that requires strong justification. Unfortunately, however, this justification is often lacking. Some instances do receive explanation by way of intuiting the meanings of the words outside the specific contexts of their use. For example, in 'it's very elitist' (p. 90), despite the target being an advertisement (referred to through *it*), the attitude is encoded as being a judgement of propriety of the advertisers as 'the notion of "elitism" assumes volitional action by some human agent, that is, the advertiser's act of making a conscious choice or decision on the creation of the advert' (p. 90). If we accept this explanation, then under Martin and White's (2005) framework this potentially offers a reading whereby there are two layers of attitude at play: the inscribed appreciation of the advertisement and an invoked judgement of the advertisers. However, this is not the analysis Bullo chooses. Rather, this instance is analysed simply as an *inscribed* judgement. Why this is the case is not made clear. One possible justification is to follow Bednarek's (2009) argument for prioritizing the attitudinal standard arising from the lexical item rather than using the target as the main criterion. Under this interpretation, this example could be analysed as an instance of ETHICS Lexis (most commonly associated with judgement) that is being used to appreciate. This analysis thus prioritizes the judgement meanings of 'elitist', offering a method for preserving in part Bullo's analysis. However, without an explicit justification along these lines, it is difficult to see whether this interpretation is what is intended.

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident. Other instances of apparent appreciation analysed as judgement receive even less explanation and are often difficult to reconcile with the conventional interpretation of the appraisal framework. For example, in 'I think the ad is effective' (p. 117) and 'I think the advert really works' (p. 92), the tokens of attitude (underlined) are canonically appreciation; however, they are both analysed as judgement without explanation. Analytical issues such as this are not isolated to the boundary between judgement and appreciation. The book is riddled with questionable analyses that are rarely justified through the linguistic probes. A particularly egregious example is during the initial explanation of inscribed attitude realized through Processes (p. 64). Of the six examples used to illustrate inscribed attitude realized through a Process, only one in fact shows this combination ('it appeals'). The other five examples, although arguably displaying attitude, are not inscribed, are not realized through the Process, or both: in 'people look twice', the attitude is realized by the full idiom 'look twice', not just the Process 'look'; in 'I've been dragged around galleries', 'dragged' provokes attitude through metaphor, rather than inscribes it; in 'yeah I don't have a problem with that', the attitude arises through the Process plus the following Attribute 'don't have a problem', rather than just the Process, and in 'it's not really saying anything about

Holland', the attitude is flagged by the graduation 'really' and the negation 'don't', rather than being inscribed by the Process. Given the findings of the study are displayed quantitatively, the unfortunate regularity of questionable analyses significantly undermines any conclusions that may be drawn from the relative frequencies of different categories. It is a credit to the book, however, that the wealth of examples given both in text and in the appendices allows the reader to probe the analysis and draw their own conclusions. Without these, the above discussion, for example, could not have taken place. This is much preferable to a simple presentation of the quantitative findings without full exemplification and should be a standard across discourse analysis.

It is possible to pass over these analytical issues if the broader interpretation or conclusions allow useful insights into the object of study. Regrettably, the interpretations that are drawn rarely lift above the level of commentary of specific instances. Conceptual metaphors such as BUSINESS IS WAR (p. 125), SADNESS IS DARK and HAPPY IS LIGHT (both p. 101) are used to explain specific instances of appraisal in the focus group discussion, but the reader is left to work out how these explanations could be generalized in a way that could aid studies that have different focus groups, different advertisements or different reception contexts. That is, it is difficult to see how the conclusions can inform a broader understanding of evaluative discourse or its underlying socio-cognitive organization that is not locked on to this particular object of study. Thus, although Bullo's *Evaluation in Advertising Reception* offers an intriguing object of study with the potential to further our understanding of author-viewer relations and the negotiation of reading positions, the analytical issues and the method of explanation sadly ensure that it does not reach this potential.

References

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Antoon De Rycker and Zuraidah Mohd Don, *Discourse and Crisis: Critical Perspectives*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2013; 505 pp., \$149 (hbk), ISBN 9789027206435.

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The authors of this volume view crisis as a complex phenomenon that is both socially produced and discursively constituted (p. 10), with interactions among crisis, text, discourse and their constitutive semiotic-material practices. Against this backdrop, *Discourse and Crisis: Critical Perspectives* sufficiently addresses how organizational, political and media discourses articulate crisis, to what extent their linguistic utterances within their multi-layered contexts play a role in the materiality of crisis, as well as how crises function socially and discursively on a cognitive level.

The volume consists of 15 chapters, divided into an Introduction, three primary sections and an Epilogue. The Introduction (Chapters 1–2) outlines the background of discourse and crisis, the notion of crisis and the contents of this collection. It argues that