

# The Interpersonal Function of Advertising Texts of Sports Brands A Perspective of Functional Stylistics

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**Abstract:** This paper investigates the interpersonal function of advertising texts for sports brands through the theoretical lens of systemic functional linguistics. It explores how language within these texts serves not only to represent reality but also to enact social relations and influence consumer behavior. By examining the use of person-pronoun systems, sentence types, and grammatical structures such as parallelism and climax, the study reveals how advertisers craft messages that resonate with the target audience and establish an emotional connection with consumers. The analysis of selected advertising blurbs from well-known sports brands illustrates the strategic employment of the second-person pronoun to create a sense of direct address and the use of imperative sentences to convey a persuasive tone. The study also touches upon the role of modality in advertising, noting the absence of modal verbs that convey probability or obligation, suggesting an intentional approach to assert the brand's message unequivocally. The findings contribute to the understanding of the persuasive mechanisms in sports brand advertising and offer insights for marketers seeking to enhance their advertising strategies. The paper concludes by highlighting the significance of the interpersonal function in shaping consumer perceptions and the potential areas for future research in linguistic and marketing disciplines.

**Keywords:** Interpersonal Function; Advertising Texts; Sports Brands; Systemic Functional Linguistics

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## 1. Research background

Advertisements permeate contemporary life, appearing ubiquitously across diverse media, from television screens to mobile devices and public spaces. With the burgeoning popularity of fitness and sports, brands in this sector continuously refine their marketing strategies, and advertising language emerges as a key instrument of influence. This paper delves into the interpersonal function of advertising texts, employing the theoretical framework of systemic functional linguistics.

The interpersonal function, as conceptualized by M.A.K. Halliday, constitutes a fundamental aspect of systemic functional linguistics, alongside the ideational and textual functions. It posits language as a means of enacting social relations, not merely representing reality or creating textual cohesion. Halliday (1978) introduced the concept of “metafunctions,” categorizing language functions into these three domains. The interpersonal function specifically examines how language constructs social identities and mediates interactions between participants in communication (Halliday, 1978). Subsequent scholars have elaborated on this theory, exploring its applications across various linguistic domains. Martin and Rose (2003), for example, investigated the role of mood and modality in realizing the interpersonal function, highlighting the linguistic systems that convey attitudes, judgments, and social roles.

The interpersonal function has become central to discourse analysis, with scholars like Thompson (2004) analyzing its implications for meaning-making in dialogue. It is recognized as integral to understanding the dynamics of question-and-answer formats, the negotiation between writer and reader, and the conveyance of stance.

Liao (2001) and Huang (2002) applied the interpersonal function theory to the analysis of classroom discourse and the translation of literary works, respectively. These studies underscore its utility in educational settings and its potential to enhance second language acquisition.

While the interpersonal function theory has garnered widespread acceptance, it has also faced critiques. Some scholars advocate for a more nuanced understanding, arguing that it might oversimplify the complex interplay of social forces in language use (Fowler, 1996). Nevertheless, the interpersonal function theory remains a dynamic area of research within systemic functional linguistics. Its

exploration of language as a social semiotic offers valuable insights into the interplay between communication and social relationships.

## 2. Analysis from the Interpersonal Function

Creating an advertising blurb for popular sports brands involves highlighting their key attributes, such as innovation, quality, and the connection to sports culture. Here are some examples for a few well-known sports brands:

Nike: Unleash your potential with Nike. Where every athlete finds inspiration and every dream takes flight. Just do it.”

Adidas: Fitness meets style. Elevate your game and embrace originality. Impossible is nothing.”

Under Armour: Protect this house with Under Armour. Gear up for the grind. Stronger, faster, better.”

Puma: Forever Faster with Puma. Ignite the athlete within. Feel the rush of victory.

Reebok: Be more human with Reebok. Train, transform, and redefine your limits. Fitness that feels right.

New Balance: Made to move you. Crafted for the relentless pursuit of better.

Asics: For the love of the run. Embrace the journey, chase the feeling, own the road.

Lululemon: Feel the sweat. Live the life. Wear the yoga-inspired performance for every pursuit.

Gatorade: The fuel for champions. Hydrate, perform, dominate. Win from within.

Wilson: Play harder, play better. The choice of champions, the partner in your game.

Each blurb is designed to resonate with the brand’s target audience, emphasizing the brand’s unique selling points and the emotional connection sports enthusiasts have with their athletic endeavors. The author found blurbs of ten of the most popular sports brands in the world and analyzed them from the following aspects.

Firstly, from the perspective of the person-pronoun system, all of the blurbs employ the second-person pronoun. For example, Nike’s “Unleash your potential with Nike. Where every athlete finds inspiration and every dream takes flight. Just do it.”, and Reebok’s “Be more human with Reebok. Train, transform, and redefine your limits. Fitness that feels right.” However, some blurbs do not employ the explicit second-person because they’re imperative sentences. There is no use of the first- person pronoun or third-person pronoun, because the second-person pronoun has the following advantages.

It can help the advertisers create an ambiance of face-to-face conversation with the consumers and set up a kind of friendly relationship with them at the same time. In the advertising texts, using the second personal pronoun “you”, the advertiser aims to draw the potential consumers’ attention by giving consumers a potential feeling that they are being addressed. In these three examples, the advertisers deliberately design potential non-face-to-face interactions with the consumers by employing the second personal pronoun you, which refers to the potential consumers directly, to create a sense of familiarity to tell the potential consumers the good quality of their products.

Secondly, from the perspective of types of sentences, all the blurbs are imperative sentences. For example, Puma’s “ forever faster with Puma. Ignite the athlete within. Feel the rush of victory. ” Reebok’s “be more human with Reebok. Train, transform, and redefine your limits. Fitness that feels right.”, except New Balance’s “Made to move you. Crafted for the relentless pursuit of better,” which is a declarative passive sentence. The declarative sentences are mostly employed to state objectively the information about advertisers’ products.

Imperative clauses are often employed by advertisers to express their suggestions or persuasions and so on. In this example, the imperative sentence is used three times here to draw the attention of potential customers and to set up a kind of close relationship between the advertiser and the female consumers through creating an ambiance of face-to-face dialogue with consumers.

Some also use parallelism. In grammar, parallelism is a balance of two or more similar words, phrases, or clauses, and look again that is used three times here is also a parallel structure to improve expressive force and appeal. For example, Reebok’s “Be more human with Reebok. Train, transform, and redefine your limits. Fitness that feels right.” Reebok’s blurb effectively uses parallelism to create a compelling and memorable call to action. The blurb uses parallel structure by employing a series of three imperatives: “Train,” “Transform,” and “Redefine.” This repetition of grammatical structure creates a sense of rhythm and flow, making the message more impressing and easier to remember. By placing the verbs “Train,” “Transform,” and “Redefine” in parallel construction, Reebok highlights the transformative nature of their products and the active role users play in achieving their fitness goals. The parallel verbs create a sense of momentum and encourage action. The reader is urged to “Train,” “Transform,” and “Redefine” their limits, suggesting a journey of continuous improvement and self-discovery. “Be more human”: This phrase acts as a powerful opening statement, suggesting a connection between fitness and self-improvement, emphasizing a holistic approach. “Fitness that feels right”: This statement emphasizes the importance of individual needs and preferences, creating a sense of authenticity and reliability.

Reebok’s blurb effectively utilizes parallelism to create a persuasive and memorable message. The rhythmic structure and repeated

verbs create a sense of momentum and encourage action. The overall message is one of empowerment and self-discovery through fitness, resonating with individuals who seek to achieve their full potential.

In the Lululemon's example, climax is also employed. Lululemon's "Feel the sweat. Live the life. Wear the yoga-inspired performance for every pursuit." "Feel the sweat" is the foundation, setting a tone of physical exertion and effort. It implies a commitment to pushing oneself, hinting at the positive results of hard work. "Live the life" builds upon the first part, elevating it to a higher level of aspiration. The phrase implies a desirable lifestyle that's attainable through the actions described in the previous part. "Wear the yoga-inspired performance for every pursuit" is the climax. It directly links the brand with the ability to live the life previously described. "Yoga-inspired performance" positions the clothing as more than just apparel, but a tool for achieving this desirable lifestyle. The final phrase "for every pursuit" further broadens the appeal, making it relevant to all aspects of life. By using climax, Lululemon creates a compelling narrative that subtly appeals to both the physical and the emotional desires of its target audience. It positions their product as a key element in achieving a fulfilling, active lifestyle. This approach connects the brand to a higher purpose, making it more than just clothing.

The interpersonal meaning of the advertising texts can be realized through modality. As an important type of modality, modalization is related to the probability and usuality. Probability means how likely of what the speaker says to be true, which can be illustrated by the forms of modal auxiliaries, modal adjuncts and so on. While usuality can be seen as how often of what the speaker says to be true. Modulation is related to the degree of commitment that speakers put on the demanding, which means obligation and offering, which means inclination. However, in the advertising texts, there are no such words conveying probability, usuality or obligation. Because the blurbs should express explicit meaning and persuade consumers to buy their products resolutely. So this paper does not discuss this aspect.

### **3. Conclusion**

The imperative sentence structure, prevalent across the blurbs, serves as a powerful tool for advertisers to convey their suggestions and persuade potential customers. The strategic use of parallelism and climax in these texts enhances the expressive force, creating a rhythmic and memorable call to action that resonates with the target audience's aspirations and desires.

While this research has contributed to the understanding of the interpersonal function in sports brand advertising, it also opens avenues for further investigation. Future studies could examine the impact of varying linguistic strategies on consumer behavior and decision-making processes. Additionally, comparative analyses across different cultural contexts could provide insights into the universality or specificity of the observed linguistic patterns.

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