

## EVIDENTIALS IN ADVERTISING: A SAMPLE STUDY

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**Abstract:** *This paper explores the use of evidential devices in press adverts in English in a compilation of original advertisements. Due to the appellative nature of advertising discourse, I think that these texts are likely to convey source of knowledge through evidentials as an advertising strategy in order to pragmatically manifest a higher level of credibility and reliability of the information presented concerning the products and the brands. The selected corpus of adverts will allow us to focus special attention on this particular genre and on how evidentials are used, in the fashion of other works carried out in other textual genres (cf. Fox, 2001; Kaplan, 2007; Marín-Arrese, 2004, 2007; Ortega-Barrera and Torres-Ramírez, 2010). Evidentials are studied as part of a set of persuasion strategies used by different linguistic communities in the discourse of advertising (Block de Behar, 1992; Cook, 1992; Cortés de los Ríos, 2001; Pavitt, 2000; Rein, 1982). Conclusions will report on how evidentials are used in print adverts, and whether a type of evidential device prevails over the rest.*

**Keywords:** *evidentiality, evidential devices, epistemic modality, advertising, advertisement, persuasion.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to study evidentials (cf. Chafe, 1986:48ff) –i.e. the semantic domain related to the expression of the information source in a speech act– in press adverts in English. To this end, a compilation of original print adverts will allow us to detect cases of evidential devices. Due to the appellative nature of advertising discourse, these texts are expected to convey source of knowledge through evidentials as an advertising strategy in order to pragmatically manifest a higher level of credibility and reliability of the information presented concerning the products and the brands. As O’Shaughnessy and O’Shaughnessy (2004:8) put it, the success of advertising “relates to source visibility, credibility and attractiveness”. According to these authors, credibility has to do with projected expertise and trustworthiness. We shall see how the concepts of credibility and source reliability relate to the concept of evidentiality in due course in Section 3 with specific reference to advertising.

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This paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents a description of the notion of evidentiality, and the way in which I understand it within current approaches. Section 3 describes the way in which advertising and evidentiality may be related. Section 4 includes the categorization and description of evidential devices in the selected corpus of print adverts. Section 5 offers the conclusions drawn from the present study.

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## 2. EVIDENTIALITY

Evidentiality is defined as the coding of the author's source or mode of knowledge. It is commonly accepted that interactants tend to appraise source of knowledge in terms of truth, and this leads speakers to further evaluate the proposition framed by the evidential from high to low degrees of authorial commitment. This view of evidentiality remains within the scope of epistemic modality at least from a functional perspective. Epistemic modality refers to "the evaluation of chances that a certain hypothetical state of affairs under consideration (or some aspect of it) will occur, is occurring or has occurred in a possible world" (Nuyts, 2001:21). As pointed out, the apparent connection between the evaluation of the propositional truth and the type of evidence at hand (Stukker *et al.*, 2009) may provoke the same effects as epistemic devices can. The nature of the evidential source, namely first hand (visual and other sensory means), hearsay information, and inference (Willet, 1988), may be perceived as an indicator of the reliability of the proposition given. In this context, it is not difficult to see the strong ties that exist between evidentiality and epistemic modality.

Three distinct approaches result from this relationship between evidentiality and epistemic modality, namely (a) inclusion, (b) intersection, and (c) disjunction. The inclusive types consider evidentiality as a subdomain of epistemic modality; one in which degrees of truth and commitment are evaluated in terms of the source of information presented. However, it seems obvious that there are certain differences when we say

- (1) I think this is the cheapest flight to Moscow.
- (2) This may be the cheapest flight to Moscow.

The use of the epistemic modal *may* in (2) clearly indicates that there is the possibility of finding a cheaper flight than the one in mind. It seems that, in this instance, the speaker wants to convey the idea that there might be more options they cannot anticipate at the time of speaking. Nonetheless, the use of *I think* in (1) does not appear to indicate this same indexical function. The matrix *I think* suggests the author's conclusions concerning the available options and the information he/she has access to, without considering possible future possibilities, even if these may also contradict this previous assumption.

Another approach to evidentiality in relation to epistemic modality is intersection. Intersection describes evidentiality as a category strongly related to epistemic modality without merging into a single category. This method tries to reconcile the two concepts, although it fails to describe why all evidentials can have an epistemic meaning while all epistemic modals cannot have an evidential meaning. In addition, this method does not explain sufficiently the reason why the two concepts do not merge if both are interpreted under the same semantic dimension of truth. Going back to examples (1) and (2), an intersective approach would identify differing degrees of authorial commitment in the use of *I think* and *may*, and both can be differently allocated somewhere in the continuum between low commitment and high commitment, as shown in Carretero (2004).

Van der Auwera and Plungian (1998) identify epistemic necessity as one case of functional overlapping, as in *The light is on. She must be in*, where *must* conveys the idea of both likelihood and inferential reasoning. We could wonder, nonetheless, whether the intention of the writer is to indicate some degree of likelihood by using this modal. What remains clear is that the evidential function of *must* results as a conclusion from the speaker's own assumptions and knowledge of the world. In this sense, the evidentiary function in the use of *must* is more important than the alleged epistemic meaning. In other words, first the speaker wants to say *I conclude she is in* given the fact that the light is on without really conveying indecision or doubt, and second, that the chances that the lights could have been switched on by someone else is highly hypothetical or even unacceptable. A similar case is the use of *may* employed to show evidentiary inferentiality in medical academic papers, as described in Alonso-Almeida and Cruz-García (2011). The use of *may* in this context is both to give a conclusion from inferences and to leave a door open to accommodate academic reputation and future criticism.

Disjunction considers evidentiality and epistemic modality as two distinct concepts, and so evidentiality does not entail truth of the propositional content. Cornillie and Delbecque (2008) state that the use of evidentials shows the involvement by, rather than the commitment of, the author, in the construction of information. This means that the primary function of evidentials is to make manifest the role of the speaker as a conceptualizer (Cornillie and Delbecque, 2008).

From a cognitive perspective, Cornillie and Delbecque's approach entirely furnishes the category of evidentiality with a descriptive potential on its own without involving the interference of other categories. In this same line of thought, I argue that, while the use of epistemic *may* in *She may stay for a good while* has a scope over the proposition with a mitigating effect, the matrix *I think* in *I think the result is correct* does not behave in the same way. To support this view, I would add that *may* can be safely replaced by *probably* to mean likelihood, but this substitution is not possible in the case of *I think* without affecting the complete meaning of the sentence in which this matrix is given.

### 3. ADVERTISING, INFORMATION SOURCE AND PERSUASION

Advertising messages, based on social and cultural values, aim to persuade the addressee to act in a particular way (De Mooij, 2009), and to do so they appeal to the consumers' emotions and hopes: comfort, good health and physical appearance, security, prestige, pleasure, adventure, sensuality, etc. However, it is difficult to determine what resources (verbal and non-verbal) help achieve the intended purpose in the making of the advert, and much consumer research is needed to this end. For example, although wordplay is very frequently used in advertising discourse, critics have questioned its benefit to persuasion since they consider it too indirect in its approach (McQuarrie and Mick, 1992).

As to persuasion strategies, advertising uses a variety of linguistic techniques targeted at a specific type of audience: weasel claims, unfinished claims, claims stating that a brand is different and unique, tautological claims, vague claims, testimonials, statistical claims and rhetorical questions, among others.

From a syntactic perspective, the language of advertising exhibits simple, short sentences. Subordination is limited to the use of conditional, comparative and result clauses. Imperative sentences are commonly used, together with interrogatives, to establish a direct link with the addressee, while exclamations seem to suggest personal, face-to-face communication. From a lexical and semantic standpoint, neologisms, hyperbole, ambiguity, euphemisms, wordplay, among others, are fairly regular. Lexical relations have been shown to reinforce good and positive life values. In this respect, Kannan and Tyagi (2013) highlight this positive use of language devices, including both lexical and other linguistic strategies, as in the instance *It gets clothes whiter*, in an advertisement for a detergent. This utterance would inevitably lead the listener to wonder *But whiter than what?*, which is an inclusive technique in the sense that the audience becomes somehow part of the advert.

From the point of view of non-verbal elements, images are used as strong and effective persuasion devices. As Messaris (1997) points out, the role of images in advertising is twofold: drawing attention to the ad and evoking emotions on behalf of the product advertised. Thus, adverts resort to appealing images such as people smiling, luxurious cars and houses, and beautiful landscapes representing the lifestyles dreamt of by the audience. The use of the above-mentioned testimonials (where a celebrity, an expert or a satisfied user explains how others can benefit from the product or service advertised) might affect both the written text and the image employed in an advert. Apart from getting attention and raising awareness, celebrities, in particular, add credibility to the brand image (Erdogan and Baker, 1999), which implies advertising believability<sup>1</sup>. Thus, photographs of celebrities play an important role in adverts and will count towards the interpretation of evidentials from a truth-value perspective. This interpretation, we shall see, is somehow used as ostensive stimuli (Sperber and Wilson, 1986) to force truth-value interpretations of the evidentials.

The language of advertising has frequently been the object of much research (Adams, 2010; Block de Behar, 1992; Cook, 1992; Dyer, 2003; Ferraz Martínez, 1993; López Eire, 1998). However, to my knowledge, the function of evidentiality exclusively in advertising has been under consideration only in Fuertes-Olivera *et al.* (2001) and Bednarek (2014). The definition of evidentiality by Fuertes-Olivera *et al.*, follows Hyland (1998), and it serves a metatextual function in discourse:

Evidentials indicate a source of textual information which originates outside the current text. They establish intertextuality, thus helping copywriters to persuade consumers by associating their messages to other cultural artifacts. Since this interrelationship is not worded, copywriters must resort to very well-known texts. (Fuertes-Olivera *et al.*, 2001:1303)

This definition of evidentials is in line with mine in the sense that it indicates source of information. The authors include an intertextual function of evidentials in the discourse of advertising. Nevertheless, none of their instances seems to be evidential, and intertextuality cannot be safely demonstrated. In truth, I think that this metatextual reading is forced to comply with Hyland's (1998) description of evidentials in academic discourse, which is in much more textually intricate genres than ads. The following examples from Fuertes-Olivera *et al.* (2001) are illustrative:

- (3) Feels like a cream/ Vanishes like a lotion/ Works/ Like a dream (Dove Deodorant).
- (4) Roger and Kate couldn't afford expensive school fees. So they put off having children and travelled the world instead (Natwest).
- (5) How to make up for getting home later than him (Classic food for cats).
- (6) The one and only Wonderbra (Wonderbra).
- (7) To Lift/ his spirit (Aubade lingerie).

<sup>1</sup> This is a common belief although discussion on the impact of celebrity endorsements can be also seen in Modi (2007).

My notion of evidentiality cannot account for any of the examples above. The sort of source of information Fuertes-Olivera *et al.* (2001) mean refers to an abstract source of knowledge (a) that cannot always be identified, and (b) in which attribution cannot be acknowledged. In the examples above, even if we consider evidentiary information of a perception type in (3) and (7), the other examples cannot be neatly categorized as evidentials at least from my working definition of evidentiality. In (6), for instance, rather than intertextuality *the one and only Wonderbra* establishes a comparison with other similar bras in the market. It could be argued that it refers to shared knowledge of commercial fakes in relation to this type of bra, but the idea of comparison would prevail, rather than evidentiary intertextuality. In this context, it is not possible to safely accommodate the function of intertextuality within the present framework of analysis, at least in the way conveyed in their analyses. Their evaluation of evidentials in advertising seems to obey a different appreciation of the term, one in which source of knowledge can be covertly manifested in almost any action describing a change in the current state of affairs (e.g. (4)), the object of change (6), or a change in behavior (7). All these changes clearly aim to indicate the benefits of the product.

In general, the analysis in Fuertes-Olivera *et al.* (2001) is not the type of analysis intended in the present study. Their examples do not even represent the type of resources described here. I might share some of the conclusions concerning the use of evidentials with them in terms of their persuasive function but that is the only point I might have in common along with the core meaning of evidentials as indicators of source of knowledge.

In my view of evidentiality, its function is to indicate the way meaning has been constructed without any reference to external values and interpretations. Should we consider externally motivated effects of evidentiality, I hypothesize that evidentials appear in adverts to implicate different degrees of reliability from a pragmatic standpoint. In this context, evidentials stand as an excellent way to involve illusory manifestations of reliability and speaker's commitment by purposefully forcing particular readings of these evidentials.

In what follows, I present an analysis of samples excerpted from a corpus of English adverts gathered for the occasion. I will follow a disjunctive type of analysis, and so I will categorize evidentials as a separate category even when their communicative potential in ads rests on certain contextual implications.

#### 4. THE CORPUS AND METHOD

For the present paper, 442 ads have been analyzed from 19 British and American magazines published between May 2012 and February 2013. Magazines include these well-known titles: *Architectural Digest* (25 ads), *BBC History* (3 ads), *Bon appétit* (27 ads), *Britain* (9 ads), *Business Traveller* (17 ads), *Cosmopolitan* (39 ads), *Country Living* (34 ads), *Do it Yourself* (9 ads), *Elle* (51 ads), *Hello!* (9 ads), *House Beautiful* (17 ads), *Men's Fitness* (39 ads), *Military History* (17 ads), *National Geographic Traveler*, 2 issues, (29 ads), *OK!* (20 ads), *Simply Crochet* (6 ads), *Stereophile* (67 ads), and *Yachts and Yachting* (24 ads). As seen from these titles, the topics, interests and targeted audience of the magazines are certainly dissimilar, which guarantees a good sample of different adverts to justify the analysis. Classified ads and those adverts appearing in block format at the end of the publication have been excluded since they do not share the same set of linguistic and persuasive features with adverts aided by the visual support of photographs, graphs, drawings, and similar devices.

*Architectural Digest* (Condé Nast Publications) is an American monthly magazine devoted to interior design and aimed at a wealthy and style-conscious audience. *BBC History* (Immediate Media Company) is a British monthly publication owned by BBC Worldwide and devoted to history articles on both British and world history. It is aimed at a readership of all levels of knowledge and interest. *Bon appétit* (Condé Nast Publications) is a monthly American food magazine aimed at people with a taste for cooking and eating. *Britain* (Chelsea Magazine Company) is a British magazine published 6 times a year which includes articles on the story of the British Isles and features with ideas for where to go and what to see there. *Business Traveller UK* (Panacea Publishing) is published ten times a year and contains the latest news about hotels, airlines and airports, technology and destinations, aimed at frequent business travelers. *Cosmopolitan* (Hearst Magazines) is an international monthly magazine including articles on women's issues, fashion, celebrities, sex and health, among others. *Do It Yourself* (Meredith Corporation) is an American magazine published four times a year, mainly aimed at women, that presents stylish and affordable ideas for home decorating, remodeling, and gardening. *Country Living UK* (Hearst Magazines) is a monthly magazine devoted to decoration, food, health, nature and rural affairs and is aimed at a wealthy audience. *Elle* (Hearst Magazines) is a women's monthly worldwide magazine focused on fashion, entertainment and beauty. *Hello!* (Hello Ltd.) is another women's magazine, published weekly and specializing in celebrity news and human-interest stories, including beauty, fashion, travelling and health sections. *House Beautiful* (Hearst Magazines) is published ten times a year and is devoted to interior decoration and domestic arts. *Men's Fitness* (UK and Ireland) (Dennis Publishing) is a monthly men's magazine devoted to health and fitness (training, nutrition, sports) that targets men of all ages. *Military History* (Current Publishing) is a British monthly magazine devoted to all aspects of military history from ancient times to current time. *National Geographic Traveler* (Absolute Publishing) is a monthly

magazine that offers storytelling from travel writers about any part of the world, its cultures and people. *OK!* (Northern and Shell) is a British weekly magazine specialized in celebrity news. *Simply Crochet* (Future Publishing) is a British monthly magazine, mainly aimed at women, featuring crochet patterns and inspirations, together with instructions and advice. *Stereophile* (Source Interlink Media) is an American monthly magazine that focuses on audio equipment, such as loudspeakers and amplifiers, and audio-related news. *Yachts and Yachting* (The Chelsea Magazine Company) is a British monthly magazine presenting expert advice about sailing techniques and news about sailing and competitive racers.

The corpus was analyzed manually, hence its manageable size, because semiotic and other pragmatic variables cannot be safely registered using software corpus tools. Not only interpretation but also categorization of devices requires careful inspection of the contexts in which evidentials appear. This is the case of the semiotic component of adverts, which has proved essential in the pragmatic interpretation of evidential devices in advertising, as I will hopefully show in future research.

## 5. EVIDENTIALITY IN ADVERTISING: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I have collected 173 examples of evidential devices out of the 442 print adverts in the corpus. The topics of these adverts are varied, including cosmetic products, food, furniture, bank solutions, computers, bags, and flight tickets, to mention some of them. For this research, I had no intention of categorizing texts according to the register variable of topic and targeted audience in order to avoid any kind of initial intuition, as this is one of the first approximations to the study of evidentiality in the genre. The focus was on the detection and examination of evidentials in these texts, as well as their linguistic nature, to see whether the device is indeed a productive way to communicate persuasion.

In my analysis, I have grouped findings according to their formal features into (a) matrices, (b) modals and (c) lexical items. Evidential matrices refer to those devices which show either report (*X said / claimed / told us that p[roposition]*), experience (*X has seen that p*), or knowledge, even if it is the result of an inferential process (*X knows that p, X concludes that p*). As pointed out in Section 2 above, modal verbs may indicate source or mode of knowledge, as in *X must p*, where *must* indicates evidentiary inferentiality, as in *Pick up the phone! That must be Sara*. The last group, i.e. lexical items, includes adverbials and other expressions that show source of information. In the case of evidential adverbs, these may involve items, such as *evidently, clearly, and obviously*, among others. The distribution of the 173 evidential devices identified in this corpus are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of evidentials per magazine (raw figures)

Magazines	Samples
Architectural Digest	6
BBC History	1
Bon Appétit	6
Britain	1
Business Traveller	3
Cosmopolitan	11
Country Living	20
Do it Yourself	2
Elle	7
Hello!	6
House Beautiful	4
Men's Fitness	6
Military History	1
National Geographic Traveler	7
OK!	6
Stereophile	83
Yachts and Yachting	3

Table 1 evinces that *Stereophile* presents the largest number of adverts with evidentials in the corpus, followed by *Country Living*, *Cosmopolitan* and other lifestyle magazines. Magazines on travels do not contain many adverts with evidentials, and magazines for a specialized community offer very few cases of adverts including evidential devices. These preliminary results would allow us to tentatively evaluate the function of evidentials and to test the hypothesis concerning authorial reliance on the pragmatic effects rather than on the semantic side of evidentiality.

The forms of the evidential devices found in the corpus are visually given in Figure 1.

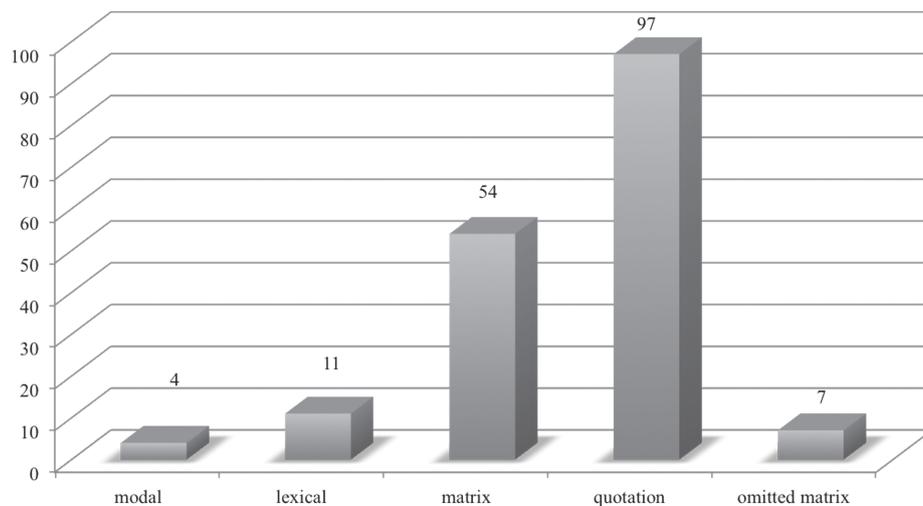


Figure 1. Evidential devices in corpus (occurrences).

As can be deduced from Figure 1, quotations, such as

- (8) “What’s all the fuss about **BB creams**? I’ve had that box ticked for years with total effects” (*Cosmopolitan*, February 2013:24),

are counted separately, although they actually belong to the group of evidential matrices, since they report on previous experiences and present the syntactic structure of a main clause. The evidential matrix would present a reportative verb of the *tell*-type (Dixon, 2005). This grouping shows a clear picture of the forms evidential devices take in the present corpus. Moreover, I have given the results of matrices and omitted matrices separately, since these matrices are only contextually implicated and they are not introducing quoted material either. Both types will be discussed under the same heading in Section 5.2, below. This graph also shows that matrices exceed the number of lexical and modal devices given in the texts.

My description of evidential constructions will be performed by order of frequency: quotations, matrices and omitted matrices, lexical expressions, and modal verbs.

### 5.1. Quotations

Quoted material is the most recurrent means to show evidence. The authors of the adverts elaborate meaning by using exact wording from information source making clear their involvement in the construal of information, as exemplified in the following examples:

- (9) “Defeat the heat.” Cheryl (*Elle*, February 2013:162).
- (10) “I have been taking **Wellman** for many years now and I just don’t feel the same when I’m not using it. Anyone competing or living a healthy lifestyle needs **Wellman** in their life. I’m a champion and I recommend it.” Ashley Theophane (*Men’s Fitness*, December 2012:82).
- (11) “...Sleep is the golden chain that ties health and our bodies together.” Thomas Dekker (1609)  
“Proper diet, exercise and true sleep, are the triad to a healthy life. Sleep is the foundation to the triad, to a better life and is the World’s wonder drug that people forget to take every night.” Dr Neil Stanley, World’s leading sleep expert.  
“In life I believe there are certain things that are essential investments. The Vi-Spring mattress to me is one of those. The sleep experience is simply life changing” Martyn Lawrence-Bullard, multi award winning, top 100 Designer. (*Architectural Digest*, February 2013:162).

In all these instances, the use of testimonials calls for a very low involvement of the advert designers in the construal of information. The pragmatic effects of testimonials refer to the usability and the veracity of the product as described by users. These users might also encourage others to benefit from the effectiveness of the product, as in the case of all the examples above. In (9), the reader is compelled to use L’Oréal’s Elnett’s Satin, which is a styling spray to protect the hair from heat, frizz and humidity, as explained in the advert. The use of the bare command *defeat* (*the heat*) represents a command given in the form of an external opinion. In a way, the reader does not experience this command as aggressive language because these words come from a user, Cheryl, who is also a celebrity. She appears in the advert showing beautiful hair. Another case of celebrity endorsement is given

in (10). This time the quoted material describes the successful life of Ashley Theophane, a World Champion boxer, thanks to the Wellman protein supplements. The interpretation of this evidential in terms of truth indicates that the benefits promised in the description of the product are genuine: “Wellman is an advanced range of nutritional products... It has helped top athletes... Stay ahead of the game and, whether competing or not, it could do the same for you” (*Men’s Fitness*, December 2012:82).

The example in (11) corresponds to an advert for a mattress and presents a testimonial and opinions from two experts. The intention of the advert is to persuade through the ideas of experience and quality so that the reader might feel this brand, i.e. Vi-Spring, is the right option for them. Semiotically this interpretation of evidentials is geared by the use of several pictures containing images from production to actual use of the mattress. These images portray the delicate manufacture of the product following traditional techniques, and the result is shown in the last picture of a girl sleeping comfortably. In this line, the first testimonial is taken from Thomas Dekker, an English writer and playwright, 1572-1632. The quotation has become highly idiomatic, and so reference to source is omitted in the advert. It is excerpted from Dekker’s *The Guls Horne-Booke* and the passage in which it appears deals with the benefits of sleeping, which is paired with the godly ambrosia: “For sleepe is that golden chaine that ties health and our bodies together... Beggers in their beds take as much pleasure as Kings: can we therefore surfet on this delicate *Ambrosia*?” (Dekker, 1609:10). The testimonial contributes to the feeling of tradition pursued in this advert, and the truth of the information presented is backed with knowledge as earlier as the seventeenth century. The opinion of a modern expert, Dr. Stanley, follows Dekker’s words, and his recommendations are also based on the traditional Salernitan precepts of good diet, exercise and sleep to stay healthy. The last quotation in (11) refers to the testimonial of a user rather than to the opinion of an expert. The user testifies that sleeping on Vi-Spring mattress has certainly changed his life. His testimonial represents the validity of the experts in that sleeping is essential for good living, and this has an effect on success in life. In fact, the Vi-Spring mattress is presented as an investment. In short, it is interesting to note that these quotes in (11) show the copywriter’s construction of meaning. In this case, they have developed argumentation from general belief, as represented in Dekker’s famous words, to an expert opinion, which is also based on very old medical precepts, to the stand of a modern and successful user. This combination of quoted sources and the use of pictures, including a full picture of a magnificent bed surrounded by nature, leads readers to interpret the advert in terms of the reliability of the information presented. Unsurprisingly, the pictures of a handmade mattress show a mature man, while the last picture shows a young and satisfied user secured beneath her blankets. These pictures are visual ostensive stimuli, and they monitor the interpretation of the quoted material since they maximize relevant selection of contextual premises in the readers’ interpretative process leading to the interpretation of messages in truth-conditional terms.

## 5.2. Matrices and omitted matrices

Matrices are the second most frequently used evidential resources in the texts. They have been grouped according to a semantic classification. This classification considers cognitive, experiential and communicative matrices (Marín-Arrese, 2009) according to the semantic classification of their main verbs. Cognitive evidential matrices include verbs of the *know*-type, while experiential devices involve the use of sensory and perception verbs and, in general, refer to information which may be apprehended by observation. Figure 2 shows the occurrences of these matrices.

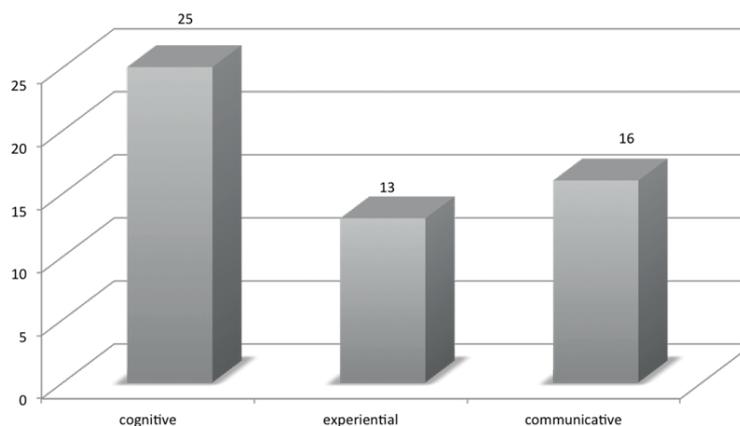


Figure 2. Semantic classification of matrices in corpus into cognitive, experiential and communicative.

The graph in Figure 2 evinces that matrices involving cognitive verbs are preferred in the corpus to indicate both the way meaning has been elaborated and aspects related to some kind of appropriation of knowledge. One representative example is the following:

- (12) Did you know that 88% of women believe natural beauty is about making the most of what you've got? (*Cosmopolitan*, February 2013:144).

In example (12) the evidential combines with other common advertising strategies: (a) direct address to the reader and (b) the use of rhetorical questions. The readers are boldly appealed to through the use of the second person singular *you*. By doing this, the reader inevitably becomes part of the message, and this shortens the interpersonal distance between the addresser and the addressee. The function of the rhetorical question pursues the similar function of involving the reader. The addresser seeks active participation through the formulation of these questions concerning the addressee's actual knowledge of state of affairs. Another interesting similar case is given in (13):

- (13) Who says beauty is only skin deep? At Magnet we believe a kitchen should have a combination of both style and substance (*Country Living*, February 2012:51).

This example is taken from an advertisement for new kitchen drawers and materials. The page layout gives the text *Who says beauty is only skin deep?* offered in the largest font size in the middle below the picture, which occupies half the page showing an elegant, modern and attractive woman in the kitchen. She appears standing in the foreground of the picture, hands tucked behind her, legs crossed, looking absolutely satisfied with life. The perfect order of gadgets in the kitchen and the use of white and yellow colours reinforce this idea of happiness and emotional stability. Behind the text, there are three pictures showing details of the kitchen that help to make life a little easier. After this, there is text in a very small size. The brand name and the slogan are given in the bottom right hand corner.

The formulation of the rhetorical question does not contain the second person singular *you* because the subject of the evidential communicative matrix is deliberately left unspecified with the pronoun *who*. In this line, the addresser is showing that he/she has construed their information basing their understanding on knowledge that cannot apparently be attributed. However, the complete *mise-en-page* and the visual technicalities stand as a sort of stimuli invoking the reader to wonder not only *who says beauty is only skin deep*, but also *who* the woman in the photograph is. In the fashion of scholastic didactic dialogues, the readers are compelled to read the text in the smallest size in the advert if they want to find out the answer. This combination of font sizes is not trivial, since the answer is revealed as a sort of secret between the addresser and the addressee. The answer contains another evidential cognitive matrix, *At Magnet we believe*, showing the high involvement of the speakers in the information given. Authority is also present in the use of deontic *should* in the subordinate clause and this modal verb points to the idea of necessity, which is precisely the main motto of advertising: we have what you need. In this context, a truth-value analysis of *who says...* and *At Magnet we believe* concerns aspects of reliability and commitment. This strategic use of these two aspects allows the addresser to achieve his/her persuasive goal. In other words, the strategic combination of the communicative evidential and the cognitive evidential makes the reader feel safe because he/she can trust the ad.

In (14) below, the subjectivizer *we* is also used in the cognitive matrix *we know*:

- (14) And we know you will love the sound quality (*Sterophile*, February 2013:86).

Here, the use of *we* in combination with the cognitive verb *know* makes manifest the high involvement of the addressers in the construction of information given in the subordinate clause following the evidential device. The use of *you* in this clause seeks a reduction of interpersonal distance since there is a direct appeal to the potential buyer. From a pragmatic perspective, the addressee may interpret *and we know* in terms of trustworthiness and likelihood that the information in the subordinate clause is true. However, this interpretation also points to another scenario: one in which the interpersonal distance is not so close, as the use of *we* and *you* in combination with the modal *will* suggests. The use of the deontic modal *will* in the subordinate clause emphasizes the idea of authority since the addresser depicts himself/herself as an expert who has and controls information. In many respects, the pragmatic analysis comes to acknowledge the ruling power of knowledge. Since the advert is included in a highly specialized magazine, the effect of this interpretation is minimized. Readers are also experts, and this is considered as communication among equals. The principle behind this is that one specialist knows what another specialist would like. In addition, the pictures of the products advertised, namely the VPI Traveler and the Audioquest Dragonfly, suggest the idea of expertise and, also, on the same page there are quotations presenting good reports from members of the same community of connoisseurs in matters of sound quality.

Communicative matrices are second in frequency after the cognitive ones, and they play an important role in adverts, as shown above in the description of example (13). The following example contains a communicative matrix with the perception verb *to hear*:

- (15) Have you heard... “I cannot speak highly enough of the Neptune team, you certainly went the extra mile”.  
*Josephine, Richmond - December 2012 (Country Living, February:75).*

This instance seems to be indicative of the importance of others' evaluation of the products as a means to qualify their efficacy or relevance for the buyer's life. The communicative matrix is expressed in the form of a rhetorical question, which can also be reinterpreted as the cognitive matrix: 'didn't you know...?' This structure triggers the interest of the reader to find out what it is that he/she should know. The answer, i.e. the signed testimonial, constitutes the persuasive element of the advert. In the evidential matrix, the reader is again addressed directly by means of the second person *you*, which results in a shortening of the interpersonal distance between the addresser and the addressee. The combination of the matrix and the quoted material forces an interpretation of the message in terms of credibility. The pragmatic persuasive role of these devices is obvious. The use of the internal possibility modal *cannot* and the factual adverbial *certainly* in the quotation seeks to lead the addressees towards the truth interpretation, and so readers may assume the reliability of the information, although this meaning is not overtly expressed in (15).

Finally, the following examples present experiential matrices:

- (16) Total Protection Whitening toothpaste is proven to be less abrasive than some other leading brands of both whitening and regular toothpastes (*Men's Fitness*, December 2012:33).
- (17) 90% of women felt their skin was soothed and hydrated in just one day (*OK!*, January 2013:89).

Experiential matrices of the type in these examples offer information obtained through attestation by some empirical means, which, together with a comparison with other brands, either explicitly or implicitly mentioned, is a common persuasive device especially in adverts for cosmetic and cleaning products. The attribution of knowledge is not given in (16) while (17) gives a high percentage of women who can confirm the validity of the product. The use of this figure has a tangible persuasive function since statistics are normally seen as irrefutable support of argument. Obviously, these matrices seek to create an effect of the reliability of the product presented. However, a promissory act is not really intended with any of the matrices described, but rather an illusory pragmatic effect which the speaker cannot be blamed for, if the product does not satisfy the potential buyer's needs and expectations.

The expressions indicating omitted matrices present the same function of overt matrices, as the following examples show:

- (18) \*Survey of 191 discoverers, October 2010 (*OK!*, January 2013:89).
- (19) \*Measured as smoothness on medium texture bleached hair (*Elle*, February 2013:164).

In these examples, the asterisks indicate that the information given is the result of claims in the body of the adverts. The note in (18) comes after the text in (17), already discussed above. The note in (19) corresponds to a Pantene advert and comes after the text “Aqua Light. Nourishment that brands the price can't beat 7x”. In both cases, the notes appear in small font sizes in the margins, and there is a lack of contrast between the font colour and the background colour. The evidentiary information included in these notes refers to statistics or precise indications as to the way in which the research mentioned in the advert has been carried out. Although the exact evidential matrix the authors would use in each case to convey their involvement in the making of the information is difficult to determine, the use of a claim and the words *survey*, *discoverers* and *measured* are sufficient to cognitively activate contexts in which the addressee may understand differing degrees of authorial commitment to truth. This is precisely the pragmatic effect the copywriters seek with the use of evidentials in advertising, even if this is not the primary (semantic) meaning of these devices.

### 5.3. Lexical expressions

Lexical evidentiary expressions play a fundamental role in the adverts, and these may appear in isolation and sometimes also accompanied by other words related to the concept of truth, reliability and commitment, as in the following examples:

- (20) No wonder it's mums' most trusted lunchbox (*Hello!*, December 2012:108).
- (21) **Regenerist 3 point treatment cream**, with its highly concentrated amino-peptide complex, noticeably restores elasticity and suppleness to areas most prone to sagging - the eyes, jaw line and neck (*Elle*, February 2013:65).
- (22) In 4 weeks, all facial zones are visibly tightened and skin looks visibly younger (*Bon Appétit*, February 2013:2).

The evidential lexical device *no wonder* in (20) is used in combination with *trusted* as an appeal to reliability as to the information presented. This idea is also reinforced by the presence of the adverbial *most*. The adverbs *noticeably* and *visibly* in (21) and (22), respectively, clearly refer to the way in which information is gained. In all cases, the adverbs are in the realm of visual perception. From a pragmatic standpoint, following Willet (1988), visual evidentiary information indicates higher degrees of reliability of the information presented.

#### 5.4. Modal verbs

There are very few cases of modal verbs with evidential meaning in the corpus. These frequently represent inferential processes leading to evaluation of the expected outcome as to use of the specific product advertised, as in (23):

(23) Oil seal dryer will save time on your manicure (*Cosmopolitan*, February 2013:147).

In this example, the use of the modal *will* indicates a deduction as to the occurrence of a future event, such a deduction being based on earlier experience. In a sense, it also presents some deontic nuances showing how convinced the speaker is of the efficacy of the product. Here, the typical pattern cause-effect is used, where the cause is the action of using the product (*the oil seal dryer*) and the effect is the benefit obtained through its use (*to save time*).

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study of evidentiality in advertising reveals that its main function is appellative since its ultimate goal is to persuade the target audience to act in a particular way, i.e. to buy the products advertised. In principle, the meaning of evidentials is to indicate source of information, and its main function is to show the author's involvement in the construction of information. In advertising the function of evidentiality is to persuade readers of the effectiveness of the products, and this function is purely pragmatic. This persuading effect relies on a pragmatic interpretation of the evidential devices, and for this reason the evaluation of contexts, including the semiotic context, is fundamental in order to deduce reliability from information source.

The authors of the adverts analysed use a wide range of evidential devices which fall into the following groups: matrices, lexical expressions, quotations and modals. Readers are constantly informed of the excellent qualities of the products advertised using mediated information. This information is attributed to personalities and reputed professionals, including academics. Quotations are the commonest device beyond doubt.

A very interesting use of evidentiality in adverts reports on the combination of evidential devices to achieve a persuasive function. This is the case of communicative evidentials and cognitive evidentials. The same happens with the strategic use of cognitive evidentials and quoted material (*testimonials*). In fact, many of the traditional strategies described by experts in advertising discourse can be explained and apprehended more precisely from the perspective of evidentiality, i.e. weasel claims in the presentation of statistics, claims stating that a brand is different and unique, tautological claims—which introduce propositions whose truth is guaranteed or cannot be denied—, as well as the above-mentioned testimonials, statistical claims and rhetorical questions.

We have also seen that the particular truth-value interpretation of evidentials is somehow maximized by the semiotics of the pages. These elements constitute ostensive stimuli, which the authors of the advert use to force a particular reading of the text by helping readers in their selection of contextual premises leading to the credibility and reliability of the information presented. All this suggests that the use of evidentials in adverts pursues a clear pragmatic effect of persuading potential buyers rather than of showing how information has been construed. The appeal to authority is certainly linked to trustworthiness, and this is cunningly achieved with evidential devices.

The use of modal verbs with an evidential meaning is underrepresented in the selected corpus. Very few have been found, and modals detected with evidential meaning show logical deduction, which again reinforces the idea of credibility and authority, as shown in the cases of the evidential matrices. Hopefully, future research using a larger corpus will shed light on the use of modals as examples of evidential devices.

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