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AUDIOBRANDING IN AMERICAN AND SLOVAK TELECOMMUNICATIONS ADVERTISING: A LINGUISTIC STANDPOINT

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Abstract. This paper examines the phenomenon of audiobranding from a linguistic perspective. It presents the results of the phonosemantic and acoustic analyses of American and Slovak commercial telecommunications advertisements, providing the reader with a deeper understanding of how audio-based advertising elicits an emotional response from consumers, which holds a potential of influencing their buying behaviour.

Key words: audiobranding, commercial, advertisement, emotional, American, Slovak, influence.

Introduction

Our increasingly media-saturated society considers advertising as one of the most powerful influences that can shape and affect opinions. In order to remain relevant,

credible, and effective, modern digital telecommunications meticulously work out their advertising campaigns, focusing their attention on the language used in the advertising media (Hekelj 2017). Easily affected by technological and economic factors, the telecommunications industry, made up of cable companies, internet service providers, satellite companies, and telephone companies (Telecommunications industry, *s.a.*), expands, forcing companies to go abreast of the newest developments in order to win subscribers and customers. Peppard and Rylander (2006: 128-129) argue that communicating over a distance is our future, and nowadays mobile operators are in a dominant position due to owning the mobile delivery channel and relationships with customers. In order to reap rewards, the authors continue, operators must maintain their current privileged position yet provoke innovation and excitement in the kind of products and services that will create value for customers, thus unceasing the revenue growth. In addition to this, the mobile phone is today more than just a functional piece of technology used to connect to mobile transmission networks. The scholars conclude that it can hardly replace the landline since it is also a fashion item that has become an essential gadget and even one of key facets of identity.

One cannot argue with Dyer (1982: 1), who emphasizes the compellingly persuasive nature of modern advertising, increasingly "involved in the manipulation of social values and attitudes and less concerned with the communication of essential information about goods and services". As William Bernbach, one of the founders of the Doyle Dayne Bernbach advertising agency, states "advertising is the art of persuasion" (as cited in Avi 2019). Advertisers have started focus more on the advertisement appeal with the aim of affecting their potential consumers, persuading them (Dralliou, *s.a.*: 8; Dyer 1982: 66; Mudrochová & Panasenko 2021; Zabuzhanska 2021). Taking into consideration that some commercials last less than a minute, one may agree that the spoken word plays a relatively minor role in them, giving way to the combined power and impact of visual and aural material (Dyer 1982: 115; Zabuzhanska 2021: 40).

A persuasive message is always loaded with emotions. People subconsciously or sometimes deliberately shift toward using more emotional language to enhance their powers of persuasion (Rocklage et al. 2018). Since emotion studies have recently come to the forefront of scholarly explorations (Adelman et al. 2018; Bongers 2019; Dralliou, *s.a*; Ogarkova et al. 2013; Rodero 2011; Rodero & Larrea 2021; Soriano et al. 2013; Stashko 2018; Van Dijck 2006; Zabuzhanska 2017), the timeliness of the present research, which sheds light on the role of emotions in audiobranding, is obvious.

Little is known, however, about the interplay between sound, meaning, and persuasion in rational processes of decision making concerning modern telecommunications. Recent decades have witnessed a considerable interest of scholars to sound symbolism in advertising, which can be accounted for by its ability to provide businesses with valuable knowledge, which can be applied in copywriting. Furthermore, respective publications offer insight on how sound symbolism elicits an emotional response that can affect buying intention. However, most of this research, as mentioned above, is focused on brand naming, namely, on how sound symbolism in brand names (Bongers 2019; Dyer 1982: 112; Matúš & Martovič 2016; Pio Correia 2017) and slogans (Nufer 2018; Scorupa & Dubovičienė 2015; Zabuzhanska 2021) can convey information about product features. There is abundant research on the role of emotions in decision making in the Slovak language (Hudíková et al. 2020; Ihnátová 2013). However, to date, no empirical work on the topic in Slovak telecommunications advertising has been done. Therefore, the **aim** of this research is to bring out cross-linguistic and cross-cultural features of the phenomenon of audiobranding.

The paper is structured in the following way: **Section 2** reviews the historical background and the psychological nature of advertising, shedding light onto types of commercial advertisements, as well as discussing the current state of advertising. The purpose of **Section 3** is to present the sampling procedure and the methodology of the research. The most extensive **Section 4** attempts to describe the application of

audiobranding from a linguistic standpoint in both US and Slovak telecommunications advertising. Finally, conclusions as well as further perspectives of the study are suggested in **Section 5**.

1. Advertising as a means of communication in the new millennium

Before turning to the specifics of modern advertising language, it is necessary to give a brief overview of the historical development and psychological nature of advertising, as well as of its typology and functional capacity.

2.1 The old vs new advertising and the advent of audiobranding

Advertising is any form of paid communication by an identified sponsor aimed at informing and/or persuading target audiences about an organization, product, service, or idea (Dyer 1982: 8; Fennis & Stroebe, 2015; Krajčovič & Čábyová 2016; Kusá et al. 2020; Scorupa & Dubovičienė 2015: 109). Its commencement dates back to such major civilizations of the ancient world as Greece, Rome, Egypt, and Mesopotamia, where sellers verbally advertised their products in the market. Later, in Medieval Times, public criers, who shouted out the wares of local traders and shopkeepers, became well-known figures (Dyer 1982: 11; Holm 2017: 18). The 17th century marked the appearance of the first printed newspapers, also called mercuries, containing various announcements. They bore resemblance to "classified", or "small ads", as we call them today. However, as trade expanded and manufacturing substantially increased, it changed the "face" of advertising – the formal language was replaced by words set out in blocks, more spacing between sentences and contrasting type sizes were introduced (Dyer 1982: 11-24). Beyond the promotion of individual goods, nineteenth-century advertising also served the wider role of presenting the new consumerist way of life in an attractive way (Holm 2017: 22). Dyer (1982: 31) emphasizes that by the end of the 19th century advertising "had reached new heights of boldness and confidence if not to say impertinence". In a similar vein, Holm (2017: 23) affirms that that period was marked by conflicts in the advertising industry regarding the establishment of acceptable practices, regulations, and codes of ethics. As the 20th

century progressed, advertising moved to the centre of the nation's economy. Marketers adopted new ways of appealing to and persuading shoppers. For instance, the use of psychology provided them with the technique of "associations" (Dyer 1982: 35). In his famous contribution to media communication "Advertising as communication", Dyer reports a piece of advice that was given to advertisers by an American instinct psychologist:

"An advertisement should be presented in such a way that a reader would associate it with his own experience, which was best done by appealing to his ruling interests and motives. These include the desire to be healthy, to hoard, to possess, to wear expensive clothes etc." (ibid.).

Later on, the theory of subliminal advertising stemmed from such a psychological approach suggesting that images or words secretly implanted in advertising, below the level of conscious perception, could exert powerful control over the behaviour of the audience. Therefore, the advertisements of that time were filled with pseudo-scientific arguments (Holm 2017: 24), yet they employed a wide range of methods for inserting such subliminal messaging. They included subtle photo manipulation, quick-fire editing, and audio back-masking (Dyer 1982: 66; Holm 2017: 29). It is posited that the period featured massive expansion of American consumer society:

"In this environment, advertising appeared, on the one hand, as a potential menace that could harness the power of new developments in social science and psychology to steer the minds of the masses. On the other hand, the Creative Revolution promised a rejuvenation of the power of advertising to entertain and enliven everyday life" (Holm 2017: 15).

Consequently, among the promotional methods brought about in the aftermath of World War II was the product jingle – catchy songs about a product or service that usually carry the advertising theme and a simple message (Nufer 2018: 7). At first, they were considered an irritating but effective catch phrase or piece of verse set to a catchy tune, e.g., "Murray Mints, Murray Mints, Too good to hurry mints" (Dyer 1982: 47) or the one by McDonald's "I'm lovin' it". The success and popularity of jingles is explained by the strong mnemonic effect they achieve (Gustafsson 2015: 28; Nufer 2018: 7).

The 21st century advertising once more changed its style, in which realism and rationality prevailed: prose became simpler, claims were accurate, and imagery appeared to be tasteful and relevant (Holm 2017: 24). The other key part of this shift was a transition from understanding advertising as a form of art to understanding it as a form of science through the greater integration of statistical and psychological approaches (ibid., 25).

Speaking about the advertising of the new millennium, one must agree with Holm, who postulates that "advertising now is all about the new" (ibid., 14). Such novel frontiers encompass new digital technologies, new online platforms, and new forms of data gathering. They all contribute to the creation of new forms of advertising, new spaces, in which to advertise, and new conditions for unprecedented monitoring of consumers' behaviour (ibid.).

Hence, a relatively new tool in advertising – audiobranding (also called sound branding, acoustic branding, or sonic branding) – has recently appeared (Gustafsson 2015: 21). The first development of audiobranding began with a publication by Bruner (1990), who studied the idea of music in marketing. The importance of the brand's sound identity is out of question since branding strategists have started to realise that people in their purchase-making decisions respond to more than simply the tangible product or service being offered (Kotler 1973: 48) and addressing the consumer only by visual stimuli is no longer enough (Matúš & Martovič 2016).

However, nowadays audiobranding is viewed as an approach that applies the strategic use of sound, one of the main sensory channels (Kotler 1973: 48), in order to better differentiate a product or a service, enhancing recall, creating preferences, building loyalty and trust, and eventually helping to increase sales (Gustafsson 2015: 23; Holm 2017: 26; Pio Correia 2017: 1). Moreover, it can convey a brand's essence and values while meeting the listener's emotions and cognitive processing of the message (Nufer 2018: 3; Rodero & Larrea 2021: 74). Rodero and Larrea (2021: 74) claim that

audiobranding stems from the fusion of two domains putting together sound from a communicative perspective and branding from the marketing field aimed at creating meaning. This statement is also supported by Gustafsson (2015: 23).

The idea of using sound to create meaning in marketing has led to the creation of "The audio branding academy", founded in Hamburg in February 2009 with a company motto "Make the world sound better" (Audio branding academy, *s.a.*) – the first independent institution for acoustic brand communication. Since an effective audio design "affects us emotionally oftentimes beyond our awareness and our field of action" (Rodero & Larrea 2021: 71), the main goal of the academy is to promote a deliberate and responsible usage of audible elements within brand communication.

Audiobranding traditionally includes:

- **an audio logo** (an analogue of a visual logo) – the main brand identifier, a short instrumental or vocal composition that can be used in almost any situation;
- **a jingle** – a short version of a brand's advertising campaign, often with the brand's name or slogan sung; its use is usually temporary;
- **a corporate anthem** – an image tool, an integral attribute of the business style, embodying company's values and mission;
- **a corporate song** – an event instrument created for specific events, for instance, for a company's birthday, New Year, etc.;
- **a beat** – a short melody, lasting 1-2 seconds, marking the beginning and end of the advertising message;
- **a corporate voice** – an important tool for the sound image of the brand, which can be used in advertising and informational videos, in a voice greeting, audio clips on the website and in social networks (Audio branding academy, *s.a.*).

Though the advantages of audiobranding are quite evident, some theorists still fiercely oppose its application. In particular, apart from being a strategic asset for the company (Gustafsson 2015: 31), Bradshaw and Holbrook (2008: 26) perceive it as a sort of manipulation and, paradoxically, a means of social control. In other words,

audiobranding began to be associated with "the dark side of the new consumer society" (Holm 2017: 29).

As one can see, the idea of audiobranding strongly resonates with the idea of marketing phonosemantics (Danilchuk 2018: 1) and the theory of sound symbolism (Sapir 1929). The symbolic value of sounds has never been a secret to linguists that is why they have extensively explored sound symbolic mappings in many languages over the last century and prolific literature can be found in this area (Adelman et al. 2018; Bongers 2019; Nuckolls 2003; Preziosi & Coane 2017) revealing hidden dimensions of richness and meaning in language (Sidhu & Pexman 2018: 1637). Since Sapir's (1929) groundbreaking research, which established a direct correlation between phonemic (e.g., /i/ vs /a/) and size contrast (e.g., 'small' vs 'big'), traditional linguistic theory has been producing evidence that supported non-arbitrary (iconic) mappings of sounds and their meanings (Panasencko & Mudrochová 2021: 428-432; Sidhu & Pexman 2018: 1619; Stashko 2017; Zabuzhanska 2021). In its simplest sense, sound symbolism is the study of the associations between the phonetic sounds in words and meaning (Bongers 2019: 4). It is noteworthy that these associations arise from some quality of the phonemes, which are regarded as multidimensional bundles of acoustic and articulatory features (Sidhu & Pexman 2018: 1619-1624). However, Nuckolls (1999: 228) suggests that not only a single phoneme, but a syllable or a tone can directly express some kind of meaning. His statement is in line with the opinion of Hinton et al. (1994: 4) who call sound symbolism synesthetic and viewed it as the process when certain vowels, consonants, and suprasegmentals are chosen to consistently represent visual, tactile, or proprioceptive properties of objects. Following the lead, Hirata et al. (2011: 929) have extended the definition, adding such referents as colour and emotion.

A substantial contribution to the theory of sound symbolism was made by linguists suggesting the idea of crossmodal correspondences – sensory interactions among the senses (Spence 2011: 971). According to Sidhu and Pexman (2018: 1637), such symbolic associations illuminate the multimodal nature of human cognition. Emerging

research on cross-modal correspondence has revealed that cross-modal correspondence is most commonly reported between vision and audition (Kanaya et al. 2016: 1111), but the association between the acoustic effect of a sound and light, size, and even taste (especially sweetness) is stable across language borders (Liberman 2005: 30). Previous linguistic research has documented correspondence between segmental and suprasegmental phonetic units of speech and shape, size, duration, temperature, and emotions (Stashko 2017; Thompson 2013; Zabuzhanska 2021).

The arrangement of sounds in language has always been at the heart of poetry. However, Borys and Materynska (2020: 10) explain that the incessant fusion of various branches of linguistics leads to colossal terminological interchange. Therefore, one may speak about the migration of such terms far beyond the domain of poetics and its vast application in mass media communication (Roper 2011; Scorupa & Dubovičienė 2015; Stashko 2018; 2020; Zabuzhanska 2021). Thus, we speak of alliteration as the recurrence of the same consonant sounds, assonance – relatively close juxtaposition of similar sounds, and rhyme (correspondence in terminal sounds of units of composition or utterance) (MWOD) as manifestations of audiobranding on the segmental level.

Our study does not limit sound symbolism to phonemes only. The linguistic aspect of audiobranding includes an in-depth analysis of intonation as an instrument for arousing various sensations in the listener (Rodero 2011: 26). According to Wells (2006: 1), intonation is the melody of speech. To be specific, that is how the voice pitch rises and falls and how speakers use this pitch variation to convey linguistic and pragmatic meaning. Amongst an array of the functions it performs, the attitudinal one comes to the fore in this context – it serves to express people's attitudes and emotions, to show shock or surprise, pleasure or anger, etc. (ibid., 11). Conversely, it can be used to evoke such emotions.

Several intonation studies explore how emotions are encoded in the tone of voice (Забужанська 2016; Musiienko 2017; Orlandatou 2012; Zabuzhanska 2017).

Specifically, the high pitch is reported to convey positive emotions, such as euphoria, excitement and joy. This pitch is recommended to be used in case the brand aims at transmitting energy, freshness and amusement. On the other hand, extensive usage of syntagms with a high pitch signals the presence of alertness, fear, or nervousness. Regarding its perception, the high pitch in speech is associated with clarity and intelligence as well as transparency. Conversely, negative psychological states such as sadness and depression are associated with low-pitched voices. However, they can also be used to convey relaxation and tranquility. Rodero (2011) and Rodero and Larrea (2021: 80), for instance, hypothesize the perception of low-pitched voices as more credible and reliable – an indispensable quality while persuading and manipulating.

The current study focuses on audiobranding from a linguistic point of view, delineating the use of sound in a broader context (both segmental and suprasegmental levels) to create additional meaning and evoke an emotional response, and thus excluding the research of music.

1.2 The psychology of advertising: Argument-based vs affect-based appeals

Psychology has always played a crucial role in the success of an advertising campaign since a great many of psychological ploys are used by advertisers in marketing, which Dyer (1982: 66) calls "psychological warfare". In other words, marketers apply the latest developments in psychoanalytic research and social anthropology in order to develop a better sense of the person's hidden anxieties and insecurities, values and desires of the consuming public. Equipped with such knowledge, advertisers can appeal to the subconscious and irrational drives of consumers. As a result, they purchase goods or services "for which they had no rational need or desire" (Dyer 1982: 66; Holm 2017: 28). Therefore, these psychological persuasive strategies help companies understand their consumers and reveal how personal characteristics can affect the response of people towards products (Dralliou, *s.a*: 11; Gustafsson 2015: 21; Holm 2017: 33). Moreover, they are aimed at influencing consumers' behaviour since

when exposed to an advertisement people can have not only cognitive but also emotional responses (Dralliou, *s.a.*: 13; Dyer 1982: 64; Holm 2017: 26).

Therefore, as rightly grouped by Fennis and Stroebe (2015: 45), advertisements can use different types of appeal: argument-based and affect-based. The first one invokes reason and uses fair-minded arguments while the second one uses emotions and feelings to convey the message. Dyer (1982: 2) supports this statement, emphasising that advertising is an irrational system that mostly appeals to people's emotions and has nothing to do with the purchasable goods. Based on such an approach, it is claimed that the products that are evaluated by personal preference lend themselves well to affect-based appeals. This category encompasses beverages, perfumes, designer clothes, etc. since they are evaluated by taste, flavour, or style. Having little cognitive content, such products are primarily based on effect. It is noteworthy that "the rise of television created favourable conditions for ever greater emphasis on affective appeals and aesthetic play... which can be seen in the emphasis on 'emotional selling points' that shaped advertising in the 1980s." (Holm 2017: 31). Alternatively, such products as computers, TV-sets, and some other electronic devices are typically promoted with the help of with argument-based (logical) appeals. It can be explained by the presumption that cognitive learning processes, through which consumers obtain information about a product or service which is going to be stored in their memory and will be used in a future decision making process, embrace all consumer mental activities (Batkoska & Koseska 2012: 73).

Consequently, the aforementioned dichotomy enabled Dralliou (*s.a.*) to distinguish two types of advertisements: affect-based (designed primarily to provoke emotions) and argument-based ones (using data and the functional characteristics of a product). Dyer (1982: 4) supports such a classification, mentioning that producers are hardly likely to provide us with neutral information. Regardless of the type, the advertisements' primary function is to introduce a wide range of consumer goods to the public and thus to support the free market economy (*ibid.*, 1). The universal functions of advertising

are to inform, persuade and influence potential consumers (Dralliou, *s.a.*: 8; Dyer 1982: 77; Zabuzhanska 2021: 39). From a broader perspective, advertising contributes to society's wellbeing and raises peoples standard of living by encouraging the sales of mass produced goods, stimulates production, creates prosperity.

2. Material and methods

Within the framework of this research, a wide range of American and Slovak mobile network commercial advertisements has been analysed. Our sample consists of 45 commercial advertisements of three most popular American network and mobile operators: T-Mobile, Verizon, and AT&T Wireless and 30 Slovak commercial advertisements of 3 network and mobile operators: Telekom 1, O2, and Orange. The body of the data includes the advertisements released at the time of Christmas (2011-2022). The details necessary for the research are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Details of the data sample

American mobile network advertising				Slovak mobile network advertising			
Network and mobile operator	Number of advertisements	Number of syntagms	Duration	Network and mobile operator	Number of advertisements	Number of syntagms	Duration
T-Mobile	15	860	20 minutes	Telekom 1	10	216	5 minutes
Verizon	15	480	10 minutes	O2	10	190	4 minutes
AT&T Wireless	15	458	14 minutes	Orange	10	164	6 minutes
Total	45	1798	44 minutes		30	570	15 minutes

The methodological strategy breaks down the research into a sequence of logical steps. On the segmental level, both phonological and phonosemantic analyses (including quantitative and qualitative content analyses) are employed while on the suprasegmental level the speech units undergo an acoustic analysis. Thus, the material obtained from the YouTube Channels and the official sites of the abovementioned telecommunications services was converted into sound files in the *.wav format with the help of the Audacity 1.3 program. Beta (Unicode) (Audacity 2022). Fixation and

graphic visualization of the fundamental frequency was done with the help of Praat (Boersma & Weenink 2021).

The fundamental frequency was studied by:

- 1) localizing pitch maximum and minimum of the syntagms;
- 2) determining the frequency range of syntagms – the difference between the maximum and minimum indicators of the fundamental frequency, and is calculated by the formula

$$i = \frac{f_{\max}}{f_{\min}},$$

where i is the interval of two tones, f_{\max} is the highest frequency, and f_{\min} is the lowest frequency of the analysed fragment.

These parameters were set separately for each syntagm, and the results obtained were summarized in protocols, the samples of which are provided in Table 2 for American commercial advertisements (e.g., "Video calling Santa for Christmas" by T-Mobile) and Table 3 for Slovak commercial advertisements (e.g., Sk.: "Máme vianočný darček pre každého." [Eng.: "We have a Christmas present for everyone"]).

Table 2. Protocol for recording acoustic measurements of "Video calling Santa for Christmas" (abridged)

Syntagm	f_{\max} (Hz)	f_{\min} (Hz)	Interval of two tones	Frequency range
Happy holidays	353	79	4.5	expanded
Happy holidays from T-Mobile	479.8	81.4	5.9	wide
Do you, guys, think	192.9	83.8	2.3	narrowed
You can help me	179	83	2.2	narrowed
Spread some Christmas cheer	487	80	6.1	wide

Table 3. Protocol for recording acoustic measurements of the Slovak advertisement "Máme vianočný darček pre každého" [Eng.: "We have a Christmas present for everyone"] (abridged)

Syntagm	f_{\max} (Hz)	f_{\min} (Hz)	Interval of two tones	Frequency range
Sk.: "Tati, tati" [Eng.: "Dad, Dad"]	526.4	103	5.1	wide
Sk.: "ten bicykel je super" [Eng.: "that bike is great"]	478.4	98.5	4.9	expanded
Sk.: "A ty si dal už Môj darček Mišovi" [Eng.: "And you have already given my gift to Misha"]	493.6	218.8	2.3	narrowed

The high pitch includes the expanded and wide frequency range, while the narrow and narrowed frequency ranges belong to the low pitch domain.

4. Discussion

4.1 The US telecommunications advertising

Before embarking on the analysis of applying audiobranding on the segmental and suprasegmental levels, it is necessary to specify that 30% of American commercial advertisements under investigation appeared to be purely affect-based (examples 1-3), appealing to consumers' emotions, while 40% are argument-based since they are communicated with logical appeal (examples 4-6).

(1) *"John! Is that really you? We were just talking about you and how you saved the wireless industry from the abominable carriers [Verizon and At&T Wireless]. Oh, yes, the abominable carriers, they only cared about silver and gold and how to take it from the people of the world!"* ("The year without a Santa Claus", T-Mobile);

(2) *"Hi! Hello! Happy holidays! Do you guys think you can help me spread some Christmas cheer?"* ("Virtual caroling with T-Mobile's senior leadership team", T-Mobile);

(3) *"What I really want is my mummy not to work and I want her to be fine, I don't want her to be stressed and I love her so much!"* ("Video calling Santa for Christmas" T-Mobile);

(4) *"Can you help Santa with a new data plan? Sure, a thing. Right now you have 15 Gb of data for the price of 10Gb."* (AT&T Wireless);

(5) *"I wish we had iPods to practice math more. But two iPods means two data plans. That's crazy. Maybe not. With AT&T adding and iPod is just 10\$ a month"* ("We wish we had iPods", AT&T Wireless);

(6) *"That's the unlimited effect. Switch AT&T and have direct TV."* (AT&T Wireless). The remaining 30% of the advertisements provide potential customers not only with factual information, but are also aimed at bringing positive emotions (7-8). Since it is difficult to draw the demarcation line here, we refer these advertisements to mixed-appeal ones (argument+emotion):

(7) *"Get the technology they love and a network they deserve...and Galaxy Nexon or Samsung Stratosphere for unlimited time get twice the data. Verizon."* (Verizon);

(8) *"This is our best unlimited plan ever...Up to 10 times the speed. Or 5G data is unlimited. Because a better plan deserves a better phone."* (Verizon).

Moreover, these findings convey an important implication regarding the companies in question. In particular, the market leader company in the USA – Verizon – makes use of the advertisements that are both affect- and argument-based. Being the second and simultaneously the rival, T-Mobile plies affect-based advertisements, while AT&T Wireless that closes the top 3, avails itself of mainly argument-based appeals.

4.1.1 Audiobranding on the segmental level

On the segmental level, audiobranding includes the use of various phonological (also called phonostylistic) devices: rhyme, alliteration, assonance, etc. The analysis demonstrates that rhyme is not so widely applied in the language of telecommunication advertising. The obtained results reveal that only 10% of the studied commercials contain rhyming words and syllables. Interestingly enough, some mobile operators resort to rhyme only in those cases when they either use Christmas poems which are well-known to an average American consumer, e.g., "A visit from St. Nicholas" by C.C. Moore (9) and carols "Jingle bells" and "Deck the halls" (10-11), or release a special corporate song – and updated spin on the holiday classic, "(There's no place like) Home for the holidays" (12):

(9) "*'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the **house***

*Not a creature was stirring, not even a **mouse**;*

*The stockings were hung by the chimney with **care**,*

*In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be **there**" (Verizon);*

(10) "*Jingle bells, jingle bells*

*Jingle **all** the **way***

Oh, what fun it is to ride

*In a one-horse open **sleigh**" (T-Mobile);*

(11) "*Deck the halls with boughs of **holly***

Fa la la la la, la la la la (fa la la la la, la la la la)

*'Tis the season to be **jolly**" (T-Mobile);*

(12) "*From Atlantic to **Pacific**,*

*Gee the traffic is **terrific**!*

*For the pleasure that you **bring***

*When you make that doorbell **ring**..." (T-Mobile).*

It is evident that such songs have always evoked positive emotions. Thus, the persuasive effect is achieved by the potential influence of literature and music – they interfere with the feelings and thoughts of their recipients. The evidence is supported by Gustafsson (2015: 24) who stated that original music in advertising is more effective as a memory device than parodies of songs. It goes in tune with Van Dijck (2006), who investigated the crucial role of music in the construction of personal and collective cultural memory processes. Classical Christmas favourites, already precedent, sound heartwarming and seem imprinted in the consumer's DNA.

Upon closer examination, examples (13-17) show that Verizon, the largest wireless carrier in the United States with over 142.8 million subscribers at the end of 2021 (Verizon, s.a.), frequently employs alliteration to strengthen its attempts at persuasion:

(13) "*Smile because this holiday Verizon is doing it better. Right now you can get Iphone pro from us. Just bring in your older damaged phone and we'll give you the phone everybody wants and America's most reliable network on any unlimited plan. Better. Better. And everyone gets up a thousand dollars when they switch. Okay. Everyone, say "Better", "Better", "Better" holiday with Verizon. Because everyone, everyone, everyone deserves better. Shop online, in a store or call today*";

(14) "*You are gonna fit right in here. Five times more 3G coverage. Verizon wireless is your destination for great gifts*";

(15) "*Verizon has amazing gifts that last the whole year through. With a new HTC-Rezound power by Verizon. HTC-Rezound. For the same low price. Get the technology they love and the network they deserve*";

(16) "*Are you listening, Snow is glistening... Verizon now has the gifts everyone wants. Get last minute holiday gifts deals. Save 50 dollars on selected devices*";

(17) "*Holiday^s at Veri^zon. And the be^st deals around the be^st network. With no ^surprise coverages. Get the be^st deals and the be^st network only on Veri^zon*".

The alliterating phonemes /s-z/ can be found in each commercial by Verizon. Moreover, one may notice that the phoneme /z/ is also used in the name of the brand. These findings allow room for speculation about the sound symbolic usage of the aforementioned alliterating sounds as some studies demonstrate that sibilants may express power, liveliness and seduction (Stashko 2017: 315-316; Stashko 2018: 139). The other US telecommunication service companies – T-Mobile and AT&T Wireless – once in a while resort to this persuasive phonological device. The only striking example (18), spotted in the body of the data, is the abovementioned "Virtual caroling with T-Mobile's senior leadership team" by T-Mobile:

(18) "*Jingle bells, jingle bells*

Jingle all the way

Oh, what fun it is to ride

In a one-horse open sleigh";

"Deck the halls with boughs of holly

Fa la la la la, la la la la (fa la la la la, la la la la)

'Tis the season to be jolly

Fa la la la la, la la la la (fa la la la la, la la la la)

Don we now our gay apparel

Fa la la la la, la la la la (fa la la la la, la la la la)

Troll the ancient Yuletide carol

Fa la la la la, la la la la".

Particular attention should be paid to the sonorant /l/, which is considered "soft", "nice" (Crystal 2009), and "smooth" (Zabuzhanska 2021: 44). Coincidentally, this commercial contains some vivid cases of assonance. It is apparent that the vowel /ʌ/ is

recurrent in carol (18). According to some research, this sound tends to be associated with big things (Preziosi & Coane 2017; Stashko 2017: 305-306; Thompson 2013). In this context, big things are connected with big Christmas attributes such as gifts, a Christmas tree, wreaths, candy canes, etc.

Several other instances of assonance are found in the commercials by Verizon:

(19) *"Smile because this holiday Verizon is doing it better. Right now you can get iPhone pro from us. Just bring in your older damaged phone and we'll give you the phone everybody wants and America's most reliable network on any unlimited plan. Better. Better. And everyone gets up a thousand dollars when they switch. Okay. Everyone say "Better", "Better", "Better" holiday with Verizon. Because everyone, everyone, everyone deserves better. Shop online, in a store or call today".*

This example demonstrates the extensive use of the English vowels that can be classified into the e-type (timbre) [e, ə, æ, ɜ:, eɪ, eə, əʊ, eɪə, əʊə] (the words which contain them are underlined in the text above).

Needless to say, assonance is less apparent to the eye and sometimes to the ear than alliteration; therefore, it is much harder for the listener to identify (Zabuzhanska 2021: 40) in view of the English vocalic subsystem: the inventory of vocalic phonemes in English is richer than the inventory of vocalic phonemes in Slovak (Gregová 2008: 19). The research results reveal that AT&T Mobility LLC, also known as AT&T Wireless, an American telecommunications company with 100.6 million subscribers as of the end of 2021 (AT&T Wireless, *s.a.*), uses the persuasive potential of phonological devices least of all since no apparent cases of rhyme, alliteration, and assonance have been found.

4.1.2 Audiobranding on the suprasegmental level

It is common knowledge that the suprasegmental level features larger speech chunks and refers to stress placement, speech rhythm, and intonation patterns. It should be

stressed that only pitch analysis and interpretation are under scrutiny in this study. This constrained is necessitated by a complex nature of intonation (Забужанська 2016; Wells 2006).

The acoustic analysis of the audio material reveals that the pitch of the speakers of different age and gender, which is employed in the commercials under consideration is used in different ways. However, our analysis suggests the following tendency (Fig. 1): the top market leader, Verizon, releases commercials where 81% of syntagms have the low pitch, while 19% – the high pitch. T-Mobile, the runner up, prefers the commercial advertisements with 58% of high-pitched syntagms and 42% of low-pitched syntagms. AT &T Wireless, which closes top 3, also makes use of low-pitched syntagms (64%) against the high-pitched ones (36%).

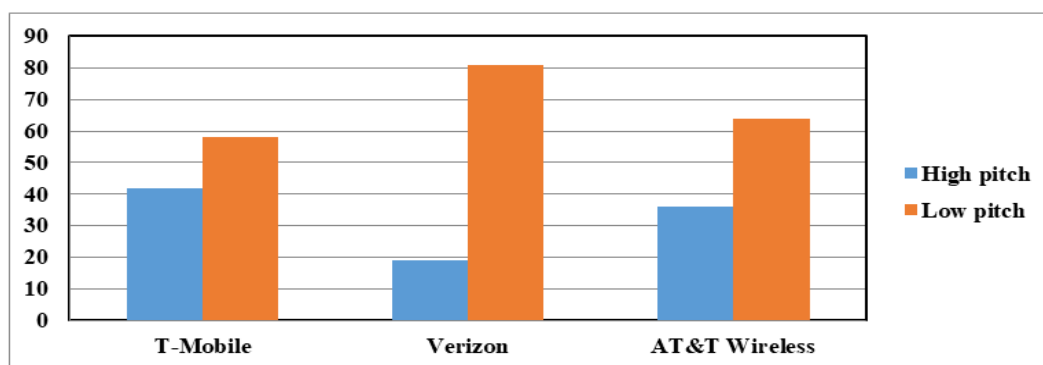


Figure 1. Distribution of syntagms with low and high pitches in advertisements of different companies (Source: Own processing)

Furthermore, the acoustic analysis of the US telecommunications advertisements demonstrates that the high pitch is predominantly used in those syntagms that do not have any deliberately employed phonological devices, such as alliteration or assonance, as is shown in example (20) and Figure 2.

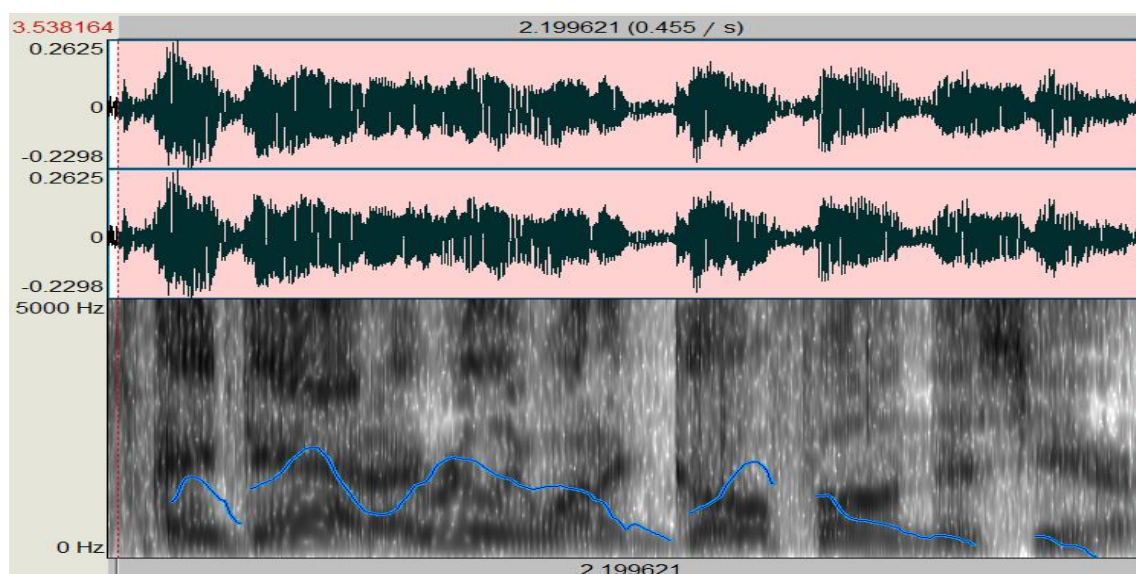


Figure 2. Spectrogram and oscillogram of the utterance "Hey, dad, I really want a go phone this year" (Source: Praat).

(20) *"Hey, dad, I really want a go phone this year"*

These findings confirm the hypothesis put forward by Rodero and Larrea (2021: 80) that with the aim of persuading and manipulating low-pitched voices are to be used in advertising since the target audience perceives them as more credible and reliable. One more significant conclusion can be drawn: the more successful the company is the more commercials with low-pitched syntagms it releases.

Additionally, as regards the application of audiobranding on the segmental and suprasegmental levels, we can visualize it with the help of two models in the following way (Fig. 3).

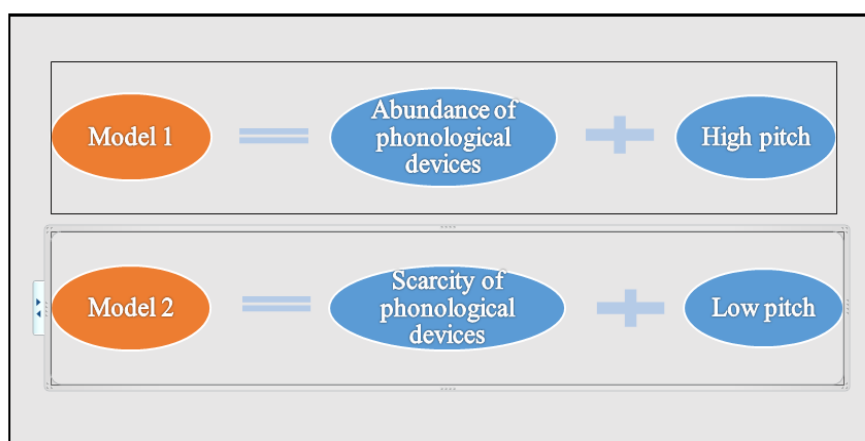


Figure 3. Models of segmental and suprasegmental interplay

Thus, the profound effect of persuasion and, supposedly, manipulation results in either the abundant use of phonological devices (of the same type or in combination) and the high-pitched voices of the speakers (model 1); or the predominance of low-pitched speech segments without a significant backup on the part of a segmental level (model 2).

4.2 The Slovak telecommunications advertising

The general analysis of Slovak commercials against the suggested typology "argument-based vs affect-based appeals" demonstrates that 70% of Slovak commercial advertisements under investigation are entirely affect-based (21), appealing to consumers' emotions, while 30% are of a mixed appeal (argument+emotion) (22).

(21) Sk.: *"Pripojiť sa k zaujímavej komunite, aj s kamoškou? Kulturisti! Moje nervy. Tak to si si pekne naložila. Skúsme niečo iné. Ummm, linecké. Otužilci? Bacha na močáky. Sssss, ešte teraz sa klepem. Aaa, toto bude nejaká burza. Kaktusov? Kam nás internety povedú tento krát. Spevokol. Vianoce za rohom, treba oprášiť koledy. Kamoši precítili. Vy dve ste sa našli. Spoľahlivý internet vás pripojí k rôznym komunitám. A v ponuke love ho môžete mať ešte výhodnejšie. Orange."* –

[Eng.: Join an interesting community, even with a friend? Bodybuilders! My nerves. So you handled it nicely. Let's try something else. Ummm, Linz. Hardeners? Watch out for swamps. Sssss, I'm still knocking. Aaa, this is going to be a stock market. Cacti? Where the internet will take us this time. Singer. Christmas around the corner, carols need to be dusted. The buddies felt it. You two found each other. Reliable internet connects you to different communities. And in the offer of love you can have it even more advantageous. Orange];

(22) Sk.: *"No ale toto. No tak ale toto. To je čo? K O2 smart paušálu vám dáme teraz 5G telefón navyše."* – [Eng.: But this. Come on, this. What is it? We will now give you an extra 5G phone for the O2 smart package].

4.2.1 Audiobranding on the segmental level

No instances of rhyme used in Slovak telecommunication advertising have been revealed. In contrast to the US mobile network advertising, which, though seldom, but still uses rhyme as part of Christmas poems, carols or corporate songs, Slovak Christmas commercials makes use of exclusively famous backing tracks. As regards other phonological devices – alliteration and assonance – some vivid examples (23-29) illustrate their extensive application in the Slovak advertising language. In particular, alliteration has been found in the commercials launched by Telekom 1 (23-26) and Orange (27-29):

(23) Sk.: "Sadni, MIšo sadni, Sadni. Máme nové Vianočné prekvapenie, ktoré sadne každému. Príďte si po smart televízor a my k nemu pribalíme smartfon ako darček. Váš Telekom." – [Eng.: Sadni, MIšo sadni, Sadni. We have a new Christmas surprise that will suit everyone. Come for a smart TV and we will pack a smartphone as a gift. Your Telecom];

(24) Sk.: "Tati tati, ten bicykel je super. A ty si dal už Môj darček Mišovi. Nie, chcel som, aby sme to spravili spoločne. Veselé Vianoce, kamoš." – [Eng.: Dad, Dad, that bike is great. And you have already given my gift to Misha. No, I wanted us to do it together. Merry Christmas, buddy];

(25) Sk.: "Chce to len hlboký nádych a odvážny tón. Pomalý výdych a... Chce to len hlboký nádych a odvážny tón. Pomalý výdych a to ide von. Počúvaj uchom a dolad' to hneď, podrž to bruchom a haj naspamäť. O jeeee, rád si zahrá na fujareeee. Už ide internet. Chvalabohu. Záleží nám, aby ste boli opäť rýchlo pripojení, preto v prípade nečakaného výpadku máme záložný internet pre každého. Máte v rukách celý svet." – [Eng.: It just needs a deep breath and a bold tone. Slow exhalation and then it just takes a deep breath and a bold tone. Slow exhalation and it goes out. Listen with your ear and fine-tune it now, hold it in your stomach and keep it in mind. Oh jeeee, he likes to

play fujareeee. The internet is coming. Thanks God. We care that you are quickly connected again, so in the event of an unexpected outage, we have a backup internet for everyone. You have the whole world in your hands];

(26) Sk.: "*Stál, stál, pred vzdialeným cieľom. Stál, stál pred pláňou bielou. Stál, stál v neľúostných búrkach. Chodte radšej tam, kde ešte všetci neboli. Šiel šiel... Darujeme vám nekonečné dáta, aby ste mohli objavovať nekonečné krásy Slovenska. Aktivujte si ich v Telecom aplikácii. Záleží nám, aby ste mali v rukách celý svet.*" – [Eng.: He stood, he stood, in front of another goal. He stood, standing in front of the white plain. He stood, standing in relentless storms. You'd better go where not everyone has been before. Went, went... We give you endless dates so you can discover the endless beauties of Slovakia. Activate them in the Telecom application. We want you to have the whole world in your hands];

(27) Sk.: "*Pripojiť sa k zaujímavej komunite, aj s kamoškou? Kulturisti! Moje nervy. Tak to si si pekne naložila. Skúsme niečo iné. Ummm, linecké. Otužilci? Bacha na močáky. Sssss, ešte teraz sa klepem. Aaa, toto bude nejaká burza. Kaktusov? Kam nás internety povedú tento krát. Spevokol. Vianoce za rohom, treba oprášiť koledy. Kamoši precítili. Vy dve ste sa našli. Spoľahlivý internet vás pripojí k rôznym komunitám. A v ponuke love ho môžete mať ešte výhodnejšie. Orange.*" – [Eng.: Join an interesting community, even with a friend? Bodybuilders! My nerves. So you handled it nicely. Let's try something else. Ummm, Linz. Hardeners? Watch out for swamps. Sssss, I'm still knocking. Aaa, this is going to be a stock market. Cacti? Where the internet will take us this time. Singer. Christmas around the corner, carols need to be dusted. The buddies felt it. You two found each other. Reliable internet connects you to different communities. And in the offer of love you can have it even more advantageous. Orange];

(28) Sk.: "*Tak čo si vyskúša Ivanka dnes? Pripojiť sa k zaujímavej komunite. Pankáč. Fúúú, začíname zostra. Ten účes vyzerá stabilne, aj ten internet. Od pankáčov k*

umelcom? Tak čo, spokojná? Nevadí. Pokračujeme ďalej. Šach, v tomto si sa našla. A ďalší ťah. Uuuuu, futbal. Talent. Na ten sa netreba vždy spoliehať. Aspoň, že na internet sa môže spoľahnúť. Spoľahlivý internet vás pripojí k rôznym komunitám. A v ponuke love ho môžete mať ešte výhodnejšie. Orange." – [Eng.: So what is Ivanka trying today? Join an interesting community. Punk. Wow, we're starting sharply. That hairstyle looks stable, even the internet. From punks to artists? So, satisfied? Never mind. We continue. Chess, you found yourself in this. And another move. Uuuuu, football. Talent. You don't always have to rely on it. At least the internet can count on it. Reliable internet connects you to different communities. And in the offer of love you can have it even more advantageous. Orange];

(29) Sk.: "*Pozrite sa všetci na mňa. Netvárite sa tak nedostupne. Náš pevný internet je dostupný pre takmer všetky domácnosti na Slovensku.*" – [Eng.: Everybody, look at me. Don't look so inaccessible. Our fixed internet is available for almost all households in Slovakia].

The examples above confirm a wide use of recurrent plosive consonants /k/, /t/, and a post-alveolar affricate /tʃ/. Alliterating fricatives /s/ and /ʃ/ often go "hand-in-hand", as well as sonorants /l/, /m/, and /n/ contribute to pleasant tonality.

As regards assonance, its vivid instantiation is relatively scarce except for the commercials released by O2 Slovakia, a Slovak telecommunications company, mobile communications provider operating in the country since 2002 (O2 Slovakia, *s.a.*):

(30) Sk.: "*Trasú sa mi ruky trasú. Čakáš niekoho? Dobrý. Daj robota. Päťgéčko, päťgéčko, prišiel jeho čas. Priniesol ho O2 k nám, potešilo zas, hej! Moja, máme pre nich niečo? Niečo iné sa nenájde? Toto je nová generácia... Vianočné darčeky pre sieť novej generácie na vás čakajú v O2 predajniach.*" – [Eng.: My hands are shaking. Are you waiting for someone? Good. Give the robot. Five-gecko, five-gecko, his time has come. O2 brought him to us, pleased again, hey! My, do we have anything for them?

Is there anything else found? This is a new generation. Christmas presents for the new generation network are waiting for you in O2 stores];

(31) Sk.: "*No ale toto. No tak ale toto. To je čo? K O2 smart paušálu vám dáme teraz 5G telefón navyše.*" – [Eng.: But this. Come on, this. What is it? We will now give you an extra 5G phone for the O2 smart package];

(32) Sk.: "*Hovorím o tomto sú Vianoce. Počkať! Halo? Tam si? Neroberte si starosti. K O2 smart paušálu vám teraz dáme 5G telefón navyše.*" – [Eng.: I'm talking about this is Christmas. Wait! Hello? There you are? Don't worry. We will now give you an extra 5G phone in addition to the O2 smart package].

Given that the inventory of the vocalic phonemes in Slovak is relatively limited (in comparison to the English language), it seems natural that the use of assonance (30-32) is scanty and the only vividly recurrent vowel is of the o-type (*o-ó*). However, likewise by Verizon, one may speculate about whether it is a coincidence or rather a deliberate symbolic name of the brand (O2).

4.2.2 Audiobranding on the suprasegmental level

The acoustic analysis of Slovak telecommunications commercials identifies the use of the following pitches (Figure 4): the low pitch is observed in 75% of syntagms (Orange), 63% of syntagms (Telekom 1), and 51% of syntagms (O2). Against this background, the high pitch is observed in 25% (Orange), 37% (Telekom 1), and 49% (O2) of syntagms respectively.

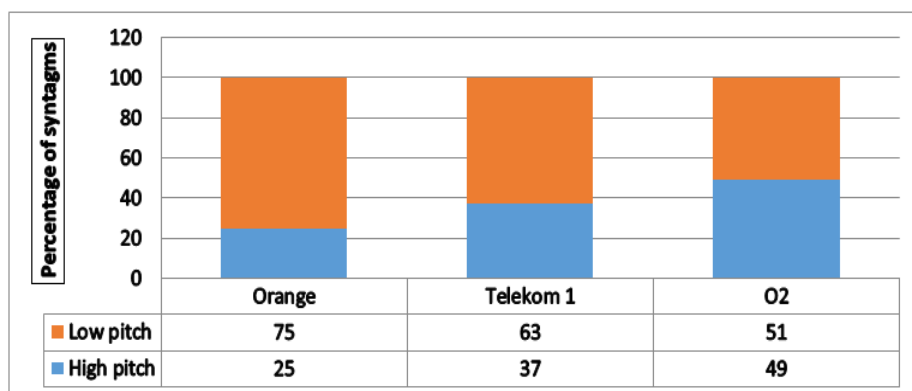


Figure 4. Distribution of syntagms with low and high pitches in advertisements of different companies (Source: Own processing)

Figure 5 presents the oscillogram of utterance (33) Sk.: "*Veselé Vianoce, kamoš.*" – [Eng.: "Merry Christmas, buddy"] in which the minimum pitch is 82 Hz while the maximum one is 123 Hz, so the interval of the two pitches is just 1.5.

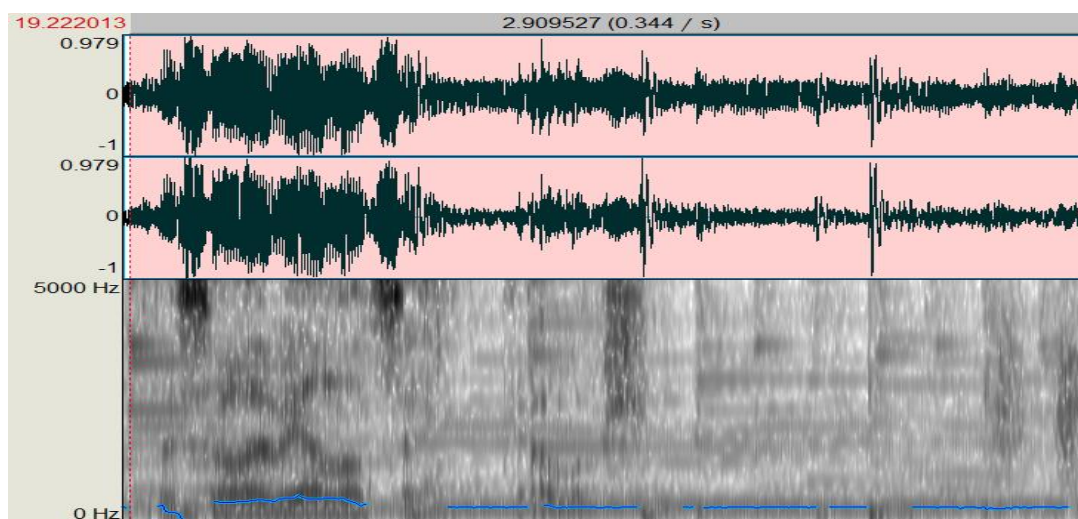


Figure 5. Spectrogram and oscillogram of the utterance Sk.: "*Veselé Vianoce, kamoš.*" [Eng.: "Merry Christmas, buddy"] (Source: Praat)

It is worth mentioning that we deliberately excluded the utterances pronounced by children as they always speak in high-pitched voices. Additionally, some considerations on the interplay between segmental and suprasegmental levels as regards Slovak telecommunications advertisements can be made. In particular, Orange, by far the most successful telecommunications company in Slovakia (Orange, *s.a.*), has Christmas commercials with low-pitched voices, which contributes to the feeling of credibility and trustworthiness and confirm the tendency as regards to the US mobile

advertising. The runners-up, Telekom 1 and O2, also use the low pitch in their advertisements, however, less. Instead, more cases of alliteration and assonance contribute to a strong persuasive effect. Thus, the interplay between the segmental and suprasegmental levels can be visualized with the help of the models elaborated in (4.1.2).

5. Concluding remarks

The fast pace of telecommunications industry development inevitably leads to innovation and excitement, considerably changing advertising campaigns. On the one hand, advertising contributes to society's wellbeing and raises people's standard of living by encouraging the sales of mass-produced goods, stimulates production, creates prosperity. On the other hand, it is often associated with persuasion and manipulation appealing to emotions rather than logic. In contrast to the old practices in advertising where the visual component dominated, the current stage of its development is necessarily associated with sound – a powerful communication resource. Maintaining their lead in the market, mobile operators resort to audiobranding – deliberate use of speech sound on all the levels to enhance the persuasive power of commercials.

This contrastive analysis of the American and Slovak telecommunications advertisements allows us to draw some conclusions. The similarities concern, first of all, the types of advertisements based on psychological appeal. It has turned out that, contrary to popular belief, telecommunications advertisements are instantiated with emotion-based appeals. Secondly, multiple mechanisms play a role in a single persuasive effect that contributes to the success of the advertising campaign. However, it is done not always simultaneously, but rather sequentially. On the segmental level, the application of audiobranding manifests itself in the use of alliteration and assonance mainly. The recurrent sounds are used symbolically, which agrees with the sound symbolism theory. On the suprasegmental level, the low pitch is predominantly used, implying more credibility and trust – an essential pre-requisite for persuasion and manipulation.

Third, the significant effect of persuasion and manipulation can be enhanced by the abundant use of various phonological devices (of the same type or in combination) and the high-pitched voices of the participants or the predominance of low-pitched utterances without a significant backup on the part of a segmental level. This interplay seems productive since as we found out both the most successful telecommunications companies – Verizon (the USA) and Orange (Slovakia) betake it.

We have detected some differences as well. In order to maximize effectiveness, US mobile advertising sometimes resorts to rhyme only in those cases when they either use Christmas poems or carols, which are well-known to an average American consumer, or updated spins on the holiday classics. The persuasive effect is achieved by means of appealing to the collective cultural memory.

It is possible to enlarge the scope of the study, encompassing further contrastive phonological research (incorporating a larger set of variables – tempo, pauses, and intensity) and such facets of non-verbal communication as appearance, age, gender, manner, etc.

Notes

All the examples in the text from Slovak into English are translated by the authors – Matej Martovič and Marija Hekelj.

Abbreviations

Eng. – English

Hz – Hertz

MWOD – Merriam-Webster online dictionary

Sk. – Slovak

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Résumé

This pilot study focuses on the notion of audiobranding in modern telecommunications

advertising as the deliberate use of sound in a broader context (both segmental and suprasegmental levels) to create additional meaning and evoke an emotional response. Our sample includes American and Slovak commercial advertisements of the countries' most successful telecommunications industry companies. The authors argue that in an extremely volatile and competitive telecommunications market, advertising relies more on emotional rather than logical appeal. The research of two typologically different languages has proved that the multiple mechanisms combine (sometimes simultaneously, but predominantly sequentially) to play a major role in enhancing the persuasive power of an audio-based commercial advertisement. These mechanisms include the application of phonological devices and the speech pitch. The evidence shows that the profound persuasive effect is achieved with the help of either the abundant use of phonological devices (of the same type or combined) given their sound symbolic usage and the high-pitched voices of the speakers or the predominance of low-pitched speech segments without a significant backup on the part of a segmental level. However, two different linguistic traditions are observed: persuasion is achieved by means of appealing to the collective cultural memory through well-known precedent songs, poems, etc. only in American advertising. The phenomenon of audiobranding is studied cross-linguistically and, consequently, can contribute to effective cross-cultural communication. This research can be seen as an obvious impetus for an extended contrastive project encompassing further comparative phonological study (incorporating a larger set of components – tempo, pauses, and intensity) along with various facets of non-verbal communication.

Key words: audiobranding, commercial, advertisement, emotional, American, Slovak, influence.

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