

# Social Realities in Iranian Advertising

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**Amouzadeh, Mohammad. 2002. Social Realities in Iranian Advertising. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 10(4), 179-209.** The discourse of advertising provides a wealth of data for sociolinguistic investigation. By analysing a few advertisements from the pre- and post-revolutionary periods of Iran, this paper argues that advertising not only mirrors but also structures social realities. The comparison between the pre- and post-revolutionary advertising indicates that the pre-revolutionary advertisements tend to represent western social realities which do not recognise local cultural norms. Themes such as the happiness of the family and womens liberty can be regarded western issues for Iranians at that particular time. In contrast, the advertisements in the post-revolutionary era attempt to construct social realities relevant to Iranian society such as national rival soccer teams, supporting local industry, and equality for women. In short, the current study shows that Persian advertising is not a perfect mirror image of social realities. It reflects and constructs certain social realities, and it also **leaves** certain realities unsaid.

**Key Words:** Advertising, Social realities, Persian, Ideology, Gender Representation

## 1. Introduction

The discourse of advertising includes both verbal and visual communicative codes which indicate certain important aspects of a given society at a particular period. In the light of certain theories of linguistics (eg. Saussure, Sapir, Whorf and Halliday) and sociology (Berger and Luckmann), this study will focus on magazine advertisements of two separate periods in Iran<sup>1)</sup> (pre- and

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1) Iran has undergone diverse socio-political changes in the past two decades, following the Islamic revolution in 1979 and it has had a significant impact on

post-revolutionary) to investigate and compare the extent to which the advertising discourse represents social realities or particular ideologies in the two eras. First, a brief theoretical account of language and world-views will be presented. It will be then followed with the analysis of the relevant data from each period.

## 2. Language and the world-view

Prior to presenting a brief account of language and world-views, it should be noted that within the scope of sociolinguistics the terms *world-view*, *ideology* and *social reality* are used interchangeably in relevant literatures. This sloppiness will lead to certain methodological problems for any study dealing with language and social realities and this study will not be an exception to it. Such absent of a unified treatment of language and ideology was acknowledged by scholars (Malrieu, 1999; van Dijk, 1998) in this area, too. However, it does not mean that the different treatment of world-views in language by Anglo-American structural-anthropological linguists and by French social and semiotic scholars is incompatible. A combined treatment of these two major traditions can be seen in Halliday's works, and consequently in critical linguistics. The current study deals with advertising in a way similar to critical linguistics. In a sense it adopts an eclectic approach to tackle social realities in Persian advertising. Regarding *reflection* and *construction* of social reality, it must be mentioned that strictly speaking all realities are constructed products. In a sense there is no reality which is not non-humanly constructed either socially, conceptually or culturally. Therefore, a sharp distinction between reflection and construction of reality will not be unproblematic;

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several aspects of Iranian social life. The pre-revolutionary data date from 1970-78 coinciding with directive modernisation and the post-revolutionary data from 1992-96 coinciding with the economic reconstruction period after the war with Iraq (1981-1989). There is a gap between the two periods since commercial advertising, except for some educational ones, lost its position after the revolution and continued to remain inactive because of the war.

so one may use the term *representation* to neutralise the distinction. However, reflection of reality in this paper mainly means an ideology already existed in the socio-cultural system of a community; while, the construction of reality refers to a new ideology introduced to a community. With these remarks concerning the methodological issues, let me provide a general review of language and ideology.

Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), Edward Sapir (1884-1939) and Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897-1941) are the pioneer linguists who have postulated theses about language and world-views. Their core message is that the perspective of human beings about the world is not free from language patterns. In Sapir's terms (ed. by Mandelbaum;1970, p. 69):

Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society.

Sapir's point is that the study of language plays a crucial role in understanding the social organisation and cultural cognition of a society in terms of its political, social, environmental and religious conditions. Also, the importance of language as a medium of expressing and constructing social reality has been acknowledged by sociologists. For example, Berger and Luckmann state (1966, pp. 51-52) that "the common objectivations of everyday life are maintained primarily by linguistic signification. Everyday life is, above all, life with and by means of the language I share with my fellowmen [sic]. An understanding of language is thus essential for any understanding of the reality of everyday life".

The relation between language and ideology can also be traced back to the semiological study of language. Ferdinand de Saussure, the father of modern structural linguistics, regards the study of language as a branch of semiology, the general study of signs. In order to establish an autonomous branch of science for linguistics, Saussure restricts the

study of language to the study of language structure. It is interesting, however, to note that Saussure (trans. by Harris, 1983, p. 9) defines language as a socio-psychological phenomenon. In Saussure's terms, "language has an individual aspect and a social aspect. One is not conceivable without the other". He also mentions that "the structure of a language is a social product of our language faculty". In this way, Saussure does not deny the role of language systems in shaping our perception of reality; he simply mentions that it is not within the scope of pure structural linguistics.

Semioticians believe that meaning is understood through sign systems. The existence of meaning before its sign cannot be perceived by human beings, and language is the most advanced sign system which we possess. Following that they have postulated a binary system for language. The scheme in which language works encompasses two relations: paradigmatic and syntagmatic. Paradigmatic relations hold among signs which display any kind of relevant similarity; on the other hand, syntagmatic relations hold among signs and parts of signs which are regarded as constituents of meaningful strings. The classificatory aspect of a given language imposes a framework on its speaker to put his/her ideas into patterns of language. On the other hand, the selective facet of a particular language gives its speaker a degree of freedom to express his/her ideas.

Lee (1992) has employed Saussure and Whorf's classic ideas about the crucial roles of classification and selection in language in order to see how language reflects and constructs reality. Through the processes of classification and selection, language highlights certain aspects of reality and ignores others. The point is that language is not a true mirror image of social reality. In other words, language partly reflects and partly constructs social reality. For example, in English the gender classification of third person singular *he* and *she* is used to differentiate between the male and female sexes respectively. This reflects the perception of biological reality of difference between the two sexes, but this classification ignores other types of reality such as age and race. A further example is the choice of *to* and *shoma* as second person

singular pronouns in Persian, which does not simply reflect the social situation in which they are used. However, the selection of either of them constructs a different social relationship between the addresser and addressee. Consequently the selection constitutes a different reality.

Any sign system is a conventional apparatus and leaves many meanings unsaid. The unsaid meanings are recoverable through the shared knowledge of the interlocutors and the context of the situation. To realise how language reflects and perpetuates social reality, an understanding of those uncoded meanings is indispensable. Lee (1992, p. 12) points out:

Every utterance that we produce is shaped by our evaluation of the position from which addressees view the situation as well as by our own perspective. In other words, our utterances are designed to interact with the knowledge, presuppositions, attitudes, prejudices of our audience, as we perceive them. Even more significantly, we often use linguistic processes to construct a viewpoint for addressees and assign them to it.

Language, through the resources available to it, namely, vocabulary and grammatical structures, categorises reality in many different ways. Such resources are also available to advertising discourse although it uses another sign system, namely visual language, too.

### **3. Advertising and social reality**

The discourse of advertising, as a public discourse, provides a wealth of information for investigating how it reflects and structures everyday social reality. I will offer both micro and macro analysis of the data. The analysis tends to start from micro to macro analysis. Three advertisements from each period have been selected to carry out this study. Two important points should be mentioned here. Firstly, all advertisements discussed here come from the area of cosmetics and hygiene, except advertisement 7,<sup>2)</sup> which should be considered as a

supplementary text. Secondly, since visual aspects of advertisements convey important meanings, they are not overlooked for the analysis.

### 3.1. Social reality in the pre-revolutionary era

Advertisement 1



I shall start by analysing advertisement 1 from pre-revolutionary times. In it, we see the champions of a team are holding a victory cup, and the victory cup has the sign of Nivea Creme. Even without any verbal components, the illustration can convey the core message of this advertisement. The picture shows what item the advertisement advertises, and it also implies that Nivea Creme brings victory and happiness to any person who uses it. As far as the representation of social reality is

concerned, the illustration shows both genders, women and men, but with different social roles. The men are shown in the centre of the

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2) It is a movie advertisement. The reason for choosing this item from another category is simply that I want to compare the image of women in both periods, pre- and post- revolutionary, and the use of the image of women in commercial advertisements is not allowed in the post revolutionary period.

advertisement as actual winners and victors. The advertisement may also suggest that men need to use Nivea Creme in order to win the attention of women. This indicates how the perception of biological differences between the sexes is used to promote social realities. It should be noted that the sponsor is a western company and does not take into consideration certain Iranian cultural values. In a sense such a scene does not reflect the social norm of Iran but the west.

The verbal elements of in advertisement 1 are as in (1). For the protection of freshness and health of skin, everywhere Nivea exists the victory exists too.

- (1) a. NIVEA Crème  
 b. jam-e piruzi  
 cup-of victory  
 c. berye hefz-e teravet ve selameti pust-e bāden,  
 for protection-of freshness and health skin-of body  
 hær ja ke niva hæst piruzi hæm hæst  
 every where that Nivea is victory also is  
 d. kerem-e mojezeasa ve sefid-e niva dær qutihaye abi-ræng  
 cream-of miraculous and white-of Nivea in boxes blue-color  
 Miraculous and white cream of Nivea in small blue boxes

*Everywhere Nivea exists<sup>3)</sup> the victory exists too* in this advertisement is an interesting sentence which shows how linguistic devices are used to construct social realities. Grammatically speaking, this is a sentence with two paratactic clauses (in Hallidays terms, 1994), and the second clause functions as a paratactic enhancement. By enhancement, it means one clause which enhances the meaning of another by qualifying it in one of a number of possible ways: by

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3) I have translated *hast* as *exists* rather than as *is* for two reasons. Firstly, in Persian grammarians tend to distinguish between existential /hæst/ and relational /æst/ *being* by prescribing different spelling and pronunciation for each of them. However, people normally pronounce both of them similarly. Secondly, I want to illuminate this ambiguity in the translated version.

reference to time, place, manner, cause or condition. Based on Halliday's notion, thus, *everywhere Nivea exists the victory exists too* is a paratactic causal-conditional enhancement. It is paratactic due to its sequential meaning; the existence of victory occurs after the existence of Nivea and this sequential meaning is realised in the order of the clauses. This linguistic pattern of Persian involves two logical patterns as:

- i. because  $p$  result  $q$
- ii. if  $p$  then  $q$

$P$  stands for the proposition Nivea and  $q$  stands for the proposition victory. It should be noted that the logical relation between  $p$  and  $q$  does not work the other way around. In other words,  $p$  entails  $q$  but  $q$  does not entail  $p$ . Furthermore, *everywhere Nivea is the victory is too* presupposes another logical pattern namely if not  $p$  then not  $q$ , in the sense that there is no victory without Nivea. As Whorf (1956, p. 252) mentions, "the linguistic order embraces all symbolism, all symbolic processes, all processes of reference and of logic". Based on this linguistic pattern, which already exists in the mind of its speakers, the advertiser builds up another logical construction, or rather the advertiser constructs a linguistically social reality which does not exist in external worlds.<sup>4)</sup> Hence, the advertiser takes advantage of the logical patterns of language to convince her/his potential readers unconsciously that Nivea brings victory and happiness, and victory is impossible without Nivea.

Another device which is used for reality construction is objectification (Kress and Hodge, 1993). This is the same as reification in Berger and Luckmann (1966) and Lees (1992) terminology.

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4) Historically, the relation between language, logic and reality was a central issue of Stoic philosophy (in Lyons, 1968). Although Stoics investigated language as a tool of analysing the structure of reality, their endeavours aimed to illustrate that the structure of language is a product of reason, and the different languages of men are only varieties of a general and rational system. However, they did not look at how a language system might influence our logical and rational system.

Objectification refers to a process by which a subjective entity or process is realised as an objective entity. Berger and Luckmann (1966, p.106) define reification as “the apprehension of the products of human activity as if they were something other than human products - such as facts of nature ... or manifestation of divine will”. The grammatical process of nominalisation is the main linguistic resource which is used for objectification. Objects are the prototypical members of the noun category in many languages. When things including processes are categorised under the name of noun, they will unconsciously be associated with the semantic process of reification. This associated meaning lends a status of reality to any item which occupies the position of noun in grammar. Thus, nominalisation as a linguistic phenomenon promotes reality construction. It is also true that to nominalise a process gives the opportunity to a speaker to obscure both the agent and the patient of that process. However, processes<sup>5)</sup> characteristically tend to be put into the category of verb, and a verb very often indicates at least two elements: agent and

Advertisement 2



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another aspect of the process (eg. time, place, manner, continuity, etc). Transitive verbs, apart from these two elements, require the element of patient as well. I will elaborate the issue of nominalisation more fully by analysing another advertisement from pre-revolutionary times.

In **advertisement 2** we see a happy family who spend their leisure time on the beach. By looking at the syntagmatic relations of characters in the circle, a fixed syntactic order is observed. From right to left a boy, his mother, her husband and a ball (with the Nivea sign on it). This suggests a hierarchical order in which the mother looks after her son, the father looks after his wife and son, and Nivea looks after all the members of this family.<sup>6)</sup> The fixed syntactic order between family members implies hierarchical social roles for its members (see Passikoff and Holman, 1987, p. 383, for a semiotic interpretation of the stereotype of father, mother, and children in advertising). This reading undoubtedly places the father in the position of head of the family. I tend to regard this meaning as a reflection of social reality which is not particular to the Iranian society. However, this reading ignores the fact that a Persian reader usually reads a text the other way around. It might be more appropriate for Persian readers if the syntactic order of people were the other way around since the right hand is the focal point for Persian readers rather than the left hand. Again, the sponsor does not observe the local norm as far as the image of undressed body is concerned. Two types of explanations may be offered in this regard.

The first one is that the sponsor does not know that certain social norms/ideologies/realities in Iran differ from the ones in the west. The second one will be that the sponsor deliberately ignores the local norms in order to promote a western ideology since selling certain western products require the relevant ideologies.

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5) Strictly speaking, everything in the world undergoes changes (processes), even concrete objects. But I refer to those processes which are perceivable to human beings and also have been realised by language, in particular Persian.

6) Goffman (in Leiss et al, 1990, p. 216) finds that advertisements are highly ritualised versions of the parent-child relationship, with women treated largely as children.

The latter reading is parallel to the policy of directive modernisation/westernisation in Iran in the pre-revolutionary era. More importantly, advertisements such as 1, 2 and 3 violate some cultural taboos in order to construct western ideologies. The cheering of men publicly by women, the display of undressed body, particularly of women, and to advertise menstrual pad are still social taboos in Iran. However, such violations of local norms were pervasive in the advertisements of pre-revolutionary times.

To return to the use of nominalisation as a linguistic process for reality construction, I will translate the two captions, one from the top and the other from the bottom, of advertisement 2.

- (2) a. mæsulat-e tabestan-i **niva** beraye borunze-shodenpust-e  
 products-of summer- **Nivea** for bronze-become skin-of  
 bædæn ve jolugiri æz âftab-suxtegi  
 body and prevention from sun-burning  
 'Niveas summer products for bronzing of skin and prevention  
 of sunburn.'
- b. be-hengam-e şena ve hæmmam-e âftabbe-hæmrahe  
 at time of swim and bath-of sun with-accompany  
 şanevadeha xanevadeha borunze ba mæsula-e tabestan-i **niva**  
 freshness familiesbronzing with products summer-of **Nivea**  
 'At the time of swimming and sunbathing, in happy times of  
 families - suntanning with Nivea summer products.'

It should be noted that neither of sentences (2a) and (2b) contains a finite verb. In terms of structural linguistics, they are not well-formed sentences. However, the lack of linguistic processes does not indicate the lack of actual processes which are perceivable by human senses. The technique of nominalisation is used to transfer the meaning associated with the category of verb to the category of noun. (2a) contains three nominalised verbs: bronzing, prevention and sunburning. (2b) also includes three nominalised processes: swimming, sunbathing, and bronzing. I mentioned earlier that the process of nominalisation can

be used for the purpose of reification or objectivisation. In other words, nominalisation can be regarded as a linguistic construction of reality. However, in this particular type of discourse the main purpose of using nominalisation is to condense meanings by condensing codification. Thus, it can be argued that the strategy of nominalisation has been adopted by the advertiser to convey as much meaning as possible with as few forms as possible. It is also true that nominalisation frees the proposition from spatial and temporal limits. Thus, it gives the proposition a status of omnipresent reality.

The linguistic category of causal-conditional enhancement, which promotes reality construction and persuasion, is the crucial characteristic of this text. Halliday classifies (1994, p.234) the causal-conditional types of enhancement in the following way:

<b>Category</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
cause: reason	because p so result q
cause: purpose	because intention p so action q
condition: positive	if p then q
condition: negative	if not p then q
condition: concessive	if p then, contrary to expectation, q

In the light of the above classification I shall go back to the sentences in advertisement 2 to see which categories can be applied to them. For convenience, I will rewrite those sentences here, as well as underline the *qs* and leave the *ps* unchanged.

- (2) a. Nivea summer products **for** suntanning of skin and prevention of sunburning.  
 b. At the time of swimming and sunbathing, a happy time for families - suntanning with Niveas summer products.

The unmarked interpretation of (2a) will be: because of intention *q* so action *p*. This means use Nivea for the purposes of bronzing of skin and prevention of sunburning. An alternative reading would be if you

want *q* then take the action of *p*. To put it more explicitly, the advertiser attempts to make the reader perceive the statement as an objective reality through a logical pattern of language, and perhaps through the process of nominalisation. The word *berye* (for) here plays a crucial role in establishing a linguistically logical pattern.

The causal-conditional enhancement among propositions in 2.b is based on sophisticated relations. First of all, we have one *p* and four *qs*, and the *qs* seem to be unrelated to each other. In particular, in terms of formal logic, it is extremely difficult to establish a logical relation between family<sup>7)</sup> happiness and the other propositions. By looking at the sentence, it will become clear that it is the word *ba* (with) which connects the *p* to the *qs*. In Persian *ba* carries out two functions. For instance, compare the following pairs:

- i. **ba** dær-baz-kon qoti ra baz-kon.  
with door-open-er can OM open-do.  
Open the can **with** a can opener.
- ii. **ba** ali be medrese boro.  
with Ali to school go.  
Go to school **with** Ali.

This shows that *ba* in (i) means by using something as a tool, but in (ii) it means in the company of someone. It should be mentioned that the use of *ba* in (i) is prototypically associated with objects; however, the use of *ba* in (ii) is characteristically associated with human beings. Interestingly, the preposition *ba* in the both cases, either with a person or an object, has the meaning of by the help of in itself. Moreover, it is highly important for this text to note that the latter use of *ba* contains in itself the semantic feature of protector. In other words, the person who accompanies tends to be regarded as a protector, and the person who is accompanied is considered to be protected. By using this

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7) According to Passikoff and Holman (1987), the family form in commercial advertising "is a powerful one not only because it teaches us about life but also because we engage in a similar/analogous relationship in life.

linguistic feature, the advertiser attempts to promote reality construction, by giving the roles of protectors to Nivea products.

Taking into consideration the aforementioned comments, it will not be unreasonable to think that the advertiser is taking advantage of two kinds of uses of *ba* to constitute a reality. Thus, in this particular context, both uses of *ba* are contrived. A transfer of semantic meaning from explicit level to implicit level is involved. This suggests a semantic process of reification. In the light of this explanation, the relations between *p* and *qs* will be as follows:

- i. if you want *q* then use *p*
- ii. if you want *q* then you should be accompanied by *p*

Advertisement 3



Now, the rather unlikely relation between the happiness of families and Nivea products is quite understandable, yet it is not a genuine relation according to formal logic. The role of advertising discourse in constructing social reality can be spelled out more fully by looking at another advertisement from the pre-revolutionary period. Advertisement 3 contains four pictures: (1) at the centre of the page, two women and two men are busy playing with a ball; one of the women who is in the process of jumping

to hit the ball is in the focal point, (2) in the top right-hand corner of the page, a woman is energetically riding a horse, (3) a woman who is playing tennis, and (4) in the left-hand corner of the page, there is a picture of sanitary pads. These visual images suffice to convey the core message of this advertisement. The text is obviously advertising sanitary pads, and it also attempts to construct a causal-conditional relation between pads and active/energetic roles of women. This visual meaning will be reinforced by verbal devices. The translation of the verbal language of advertisement 3 is as in (3a).

- (3) a. in čænd ruz ra hæm...  
 this few day OM also...  
 mesle ruz-haye digar, fæ'al, por--tehrrok ve  
 like day-s other, active, full-motion and  
 motmæyen baš-id  
 confident be-you  
 ba nevar-e bedašti magnolia 2000  
 with strip-of hygienic Magnolia 2000  
 'Be active, energetic and confident in these few days, just like  
 the other days, with Magnolia 2000 pads.'

Prior to presenting a textual analysis of this advertisement, the translation of two other sentences of this text as in (3b) from advertisement 3 will be useful.

- (3) b. nevar bedašti magnolia 2000 tæنها nevar bedašti æst  
 strip hygienic Magnolia 2000 only strip hygienic is  
 ke tebq-e zæn-e por-tehrrok emrozi ke niyaz mobræm be  
 that according woman full-activity today's that need pressing to  
 âsayeš ve etemad-be-næfs dæred dæ bala-terine standard  
 comfort and confident-self has at high-est standard  
 saxte ve ba qeimet-i estesnayi ærze miševd  
 made and with price-of exceptional offer become  
 'The Magnolia 2000 pad is the only pad which [has been

made] according to the needs of today's active woman who is in urgent need of self-confidence and peace of mind. It has been made to the highest standard and it is offered at a special price.'

- c. nevar bedašti magnolia 2000 dær xedmet  
 strip hygienic Magnolia 2000 in service  
 bedašt ve selamet banevan ve došizegan  
 hygiene and health ladies and maidens  
 'The Magnolia 2000 pad at the service of the hygiene and the health of women and girls.'

To return to (3a), this must be regarded as a verbal version of codification of the visual text. Before discussing the implication of causal-conditional relations in this sentence, I should make a few remarks. First of all, in contrast to advertisements 1 and 2, this text is mainly a dialogue text rather than an impersonal text, although it also includes impersonal sentences. The text addresses women either verbally or visually. Secondly, the phrase *in čænd ruz* (these few days) requires explanation.<sup>8)</sup> In Persian, grammarians (eg. Lazard, 1992) classify demonstratives, /in/ (this) and /ân/ (that), into two categories: pronoun and adjective demonstratives. The former deictic term takes the position of a noun phrase, but the latter deictic term precedes a noun phrase. Based on this definition, /in/ in (3a) should be regarded as an adjective demonstrative. Persian grammarians also argue that the deictic term /in/ is used by the speaker to point (here) to something which is close physically to him/her, but the other deictic term /ân/ is used to indicate (there) that something is far from the speaker. It seems that the grammarians' account of /in/ does not work in this case since /in/ undoubtedly refers to menstruation time so it is not a matter of spatial closeness (hereness) to the speaker or to the hearer. But, /in/ in this

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8) The Persian version of the word is *in* (this) rather than *inha* (these) since demonstratives before a noun phrase, even if before a plural noun, remain singular. It is also true in Persian that the so-called countable nouns when preceded by words such as many and a few, do not receive plural inflection.

text refers to something which is familiar to both speaker and addressees, to female readers in particular. In pragmatic terms, it refers to psychological closeness. It would seem that this semantic transfer from the physical domain of space (object) to the domain of familiarity (abstract) involves a semantic process of reification; thus it is a kind of linguistic construction of reality.

It is also important to note why the advertiser uses these few days rather than menstruation or period. This usage clearly suggests that the explicit way of talking about menstruation may be a cultural taboo or inappropriate for the context of this situation. So the advertiser adopts an implicit strategy because the explicit device either might not bring about the desired behaviour in addressees or it may create a negative reaction from the addressees. However, the point is that the reality of inappropriateness or cultural taboo is linguistically constructed.

I shall now return to the discussion of the causal-conditional relation in 3.a, *Be active, energetic and confident in these few days, just like the other days, with Magnolia 2000 pad*. First of all, this sentence presupposes that women are not active, energetic and confident during menstruation. The unmarked relation is achieve *p* as result of *q*, which subsumes other relations:

- i. if you want to achieve *p* then buy *q*
- ii. if you have *q* then you have *p*
- ii. not *q* then not *p*

All of these causal-conditional relations are built by linguistic patterns and do not map (in Graces term; 1987) the world. Of course, in formal logic, many of these types of relations between propositions are not valid; however, they work in everyday communication between people. The point is that the advertiser endorses the social norm, menstruation as a torpidity period, while s/he is also challenging this world view. The former meaning is understood by presuppositions while the latter is expressed by verbal and visual devices. Presuppositions can also be used to construct social realities. To illustrate this point, one needs to

go back to (3b):

Magnolia 2000 pad is the only pad which [has been made] according to the needs of *today's active woman* who is in urgent need of self-confidence and peace of mind. [my emphasis]

This chunk of discourse presupposes that the intended addressee is a modern<sup>9)</sup> woman who needs self-confidence and peace of mind. It also implies that the non-modern women (traditional women) are not active and because of inactiveness they do not need self-confidence and peace of mind. This point raises certain interesting socio-political issues in terms of women and liberty, modernity (westernity), and womens social roles in Iran. I will discuss these in the concluding section. Thus, the advertising attempts to construct this ideology that you are a modern woman, so you are active, therefore you require self-confidence and peace of mind. It should be noted that a causal-conditional relation underlies these propositions. You are *r* because of *p*, and you are *q* because of *p*.

It can be argued that the above advertisement distorts womens freedom by limiting it to consumption. Tomlinson (1990, p. 13) argues "if we think we are free when our choices have in fact been consciously constructed for us, then this is a dangerous illusion of freedom". In a sense, women are free in so far as they consume. Freedom in consumption overshadows their actual social rights.

I have discussed three advertisements from the pre-revolutionary era so far. It can be concluded that all of the three attempt to represent ideologies relevant to a westernised society. In the following sections, I shall refer to examples from the post-revolutionary period.

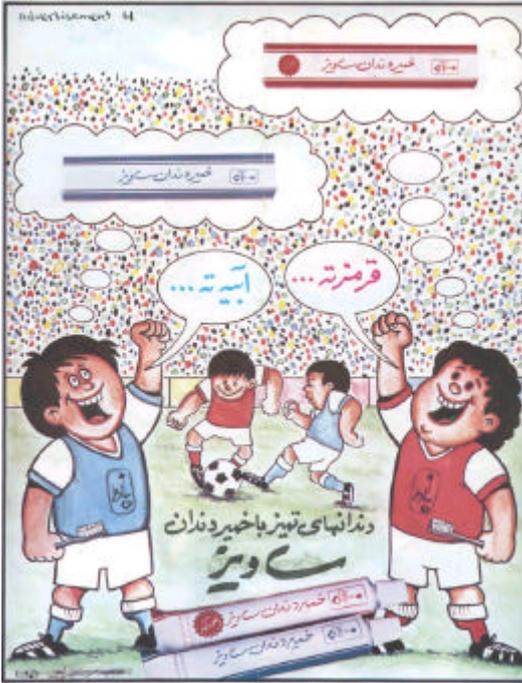
### 3.2. Social reality in the post-revolutionary era

The textual analysis of data in the previous section has suggested

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9) It should be noted that 'modernised' unequivocally meant 'Westernised' in the pre-revolutionary era.

Advertisement 4



from the post-revolutionary period. I shall begin by analysing advertisement 4, which advertises toothpaste.

At the top of the advertisement 4 (left corner), it contains the picture of a toothpaste box with a red margin. In the right corner of the box, in the rectangle, the trade mark of the product (Saviz) is seen; in the middle of the box is written Saviz toothpaste and then in the left corner of the box, inside a flashing red circle is written including fluoride. Below the top toothpaste box, on the left side, another toothpaste box with the same features is seen; its margin colour is blue, which differs from the former one. It is also true that the latter

that language reflects the human conceptualisation of the world rather than mapping the world. The conceptualisation of the world involves a cognitive process which is motivated by the human personal and socio-cultural environment. The former process tends to be realised at language-general level,<sup>10</sup> forming the universal aspects of language. On the other hand, the latter process tends to be realised at language-specific level, shaping the cultural facets of language. This section will be devoted to analysing advertisements

10) I have borrowed this term from Huddleston (1988).

box does not include the sign including fluoride. At the bottom of the page, there is a picture of two tubes of toothpaste with exactly the same characteristics as the two boxes.

The advertisement displays four soccer players - two of them are playing soccer and the two others are shouting. The blue one is shouting: "What a red!", and the red one is shouting: "What a blue!". The trade mark of the product can be seen on their shirts.

This is an interesting advertisement for manipulating certain artistic devices either linguistically or non-linguistically, which have not been observed in the pre-revolutionary data. First, apart from choosing a Persian trade name, it employs a type of colloquial language which has not been observed in pre-revolutionary data, particularly the non-honorific<sup>11)</sup> use of you. The use of *to* as a singular second person pronoun is not very common in Persian public discourse and its inappropriate use may be regarded as rudeness, impoliteness, or ignorance. Yet, it is legitimate for the speaker to address his/her interlocutors with *to* when both are in an equal power relation and intimate with each other, for the purpose of solidarity. The following table shows the appropriate contextual situation for the uses of *to* and *šoma* in the Persian language.

	distance	non-distance
private	ššoma	to
public	ššoma	šoma

However, the artistic freedom allows the copy writer to select a marked

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11) Keshavarz's study (1988) shows, the complex honorific terms declined after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran. Keshavarz (1988) argues that "the revolution has promoted the use of reciprocal and solidarity forms of address. However, honorific forms which are deep-rooted in the Iranian culture and have traditionally been an integrated part of the polite system of Persian have not been affected by the revolution". It should be noted that the reciprocal terms, namely *baradar* (brother) and *khahar* (sister), which used to be the most common terms of address after the Islamic revolution in Iran, are no longer very common in the post-revolutionary period.

rather than a unmarked pronoun to attract the attention. In addition, an artistic marked choice of pronoun can also function for entertainment

Secondly, the sentences *qermezete* (what a red [shirt] you have!) and *âbiyete* (what a blue [shirt] you have!) can be pronounced in two different ways: urban and rural pronunciations. The rural pronunciations are /qermezeteh/ and /âbiyete/ respectively. Thirdly, the slogan *dândanha-e tæmiz ba xæmir-dændan Saviz* (clean teeth with Saviz toothpaste) has benefited from another linguistic device - rhyme; *tæmiz* ends with the same sounds and letters as *Saviz*. Finally, the choice of red *qermez* and blue *âbi* is not arbitrary but very significant from cultural point of view. Cultural knowledge tells us that the blue and red are associated with two famous and rival soccer teams in Iran. In Iran, people, particularly young males, support one of these two teams. Although each of them has its own official name *Piruzi* (Persepolis) and *Esteqlal* (Taj),<sup>12</sup> they are very often called red dressers and blue dressers. The advertisement, therefore, takes advantage of cultural norms to persuade people to buy the product. However, many Iranian people who do not know anything about soccer may not be able to make this association.

These remarks show that understanding this advertisement requires important social and historical knowledge. The advertiser presupposes this knowledge as social facts, then by using this knowledge s/he embarks on constructing another world view. To return to the illustration, people on the right side of the stadium support the red toothpaste by virtue of shouting *Saviz Toothpaste*, while people on the left side of stadium support the blue toothpaste. It is clear that the utterances *qermeze-te* (red-your) and *âbiye-te* (blue-your) out of the context of situation do not convey any of the above-mentioned

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12) The official names of these two rival soccer teams were changed after the revolution. The names in parentheses indicate the name of pre-revolutionary time. The motivation for this change was due to being associated with the semantic domain of the monarchy regime: *Persepolis* refers to the name of a castle which belonged to ancient Iranian King, and *Taj* means crown. On the other hand, their revolutionary names indicate a sense of the revolutionary period; *Piruzi* means victory and, *Esteqlal* means independence.

meanings. However, in this particular context of situation they are associated with several meanings. The unmarked interpretation for *qermezete* must be: we admire and support your choice of Saviz Toothpaste with fluoride, and for *âbiyete* must be: we admire and support your choice of Saviz Toothpaste without fluoride. In this advertisement, as in the previous ones, an ideology is verbally and visually constructed on the basis of social realities which have already existed in that society. And this differs from the pre-revolutionary advertisements promoting ideologies not rooted in the local culture.

It should be noted that *ba* in 4, *dândanha-e tæmiz ba xæmir-dændan Saviz* (clean teeth with Saviz toothpaste), plays a similar role as in (2b) and (3a) in establishing a causal-conditional relation between *p* and *q*. It was also mentioned in advertisement 2 that in Persian *ba* is associated with the meanings of both help and guard. So *ba* in advertisement 4 implicates the following:

- (4) a. Have clean teeth with the help of Saviz / as a result of Saviz
- b. Protect your teeth with Saviz.
- c. If you want clean teeth, use Saviz.
- d. Since you need clean teeth, use Saviz.
- e. You will not have clean teeth if you do not use Saviz.

This suggests that it is the language which builds up such constructions rather than the external world. I shall give another example from the post-revolutionary times in which the advertiser endeavours to establish similar associations between products and consumers. Advertisement 5 contains some cosmetics products. It is a bilingual text, Persian and English, which does not need translation.

- (5) a. Pleasure & Freshness With B.B.K. Beauty Product
- b. Cosmetic Products:
  - Various cosmetic lighter creams with different scents.
  - Variety of shampoo containing coconut oil.
  - Variety of hair conditioners with different scents.

The only part which was not translated is the phrase on the label hanging to the plate of products. It can be translated as “possessing [won] an appreciation plate for high quality”. The important point of advertisement 5 is the sentence *Pleasure & freshness with B.B.K beauty products* can be construed as follows:

Advertisement 5



- i. Have pleasure & freshness with the help of B.B.K (pronounced as *bæbak*)
- ii. If you want pleasure & freshness, use B.B.K
- iii. Since you want/need pleasure & freshness, use B.B.K
- iv. not p then not q

This example also indicates that the propositional relations in the consumer needs help and the company gives the help to the consumer are linguistically constructed and they do not map the actual world.

Another point worth mentioning in relation to

advertisement 5 is that it is an entirely bilingual text. We can expect to observe a bilingual text on the boxes or tubes of products such as 1, 2 and 6 in both periods, but to see the whole text written in two languages, as in ad 5, is rare. This suggests that the product has an international status by virtue of using an international language, English. It would not be unreasonable to say that this meaning (international status) is linguistically built up. Apart from its international status, English has been considered a prestige language

carrying its symbolic values.

Advertisement 6



Advertisement 6 from the post-revolutionary period provides another example to support the argument that advertising discourse not only reflects social reality, it also constructs social patterns. Advertisement 6 illustrates a tube and box of toothpaste. The text on the box and tube is both in Persian and English. The illustration of the box and the fact that it is bilingual may indicate the international status and high quality of the product. A twig of flowers is also located beside the toothpaste. The translation of the ad is as follows from (6a) to (6c). The English

text on the tube and box is as in (6d).

- (6) a. Why foreign products?
- b. Golpasand gel toothpaste with German Blenax formula containing Hidrotedsilka and fluoride sodium for the protection of tooth enamel, health and prevention of cavities.
- c. Golpasand gel toothpaste means you do not need foreign toothpaste.
- d. Toothpaste Golpasand with Fluoride Gel Gum Health fights Gum Disease and Decay.

We see it begins with a rhetorical question *Why foreign toothpastes?*, which is ambiguous meaning either: i) why do you/I use foreign toothpaste? which implies you/I do not have any reason for that, or ii) why dont you/I use foreign toothpaste?. The context, in particular the slogan *because of Golpasand gel toothpaste, you do not need foreign toothpaste*, excludes the second reading. The sentence *why foreign toothpastes* presupposes that people use or prefer foreign toothpaste and the advertiser does not deny this social fact, but she/he is attempting to

#### Advertisement 7



change this perspective in favour of a new perspective.

Advertisement 7 is the last example which I want to look at. I mentioned earlier that, unlike the other examples, it does not belong to the category

of hygiene and cosmetics. In fact, a comparison between the representation of women in both periods triggers the selection of this advertisement. Since advertisers are not normally allowed to use the picture of women for the purpose of selling goods in the post-revolutionary era, I have to be content with this movie advertisement which has used the picture of a woman to construct social reality.

Prior to any discussion, it would be appropriate to present an English version of the verbal text of advertisement 7.

- (7) a. dæ-ha hezar hæm-sær-i ke æz film-ehæmsær  
 ten-s thousand spouse that from movie Hamsar  
 didæn-kærde-ænd, migoyend:  
 seeing-did-they, are saying:  
 'Thousands of people, who have watched Hamsar, say:'
- b. in sær ægær hæm-sær ne-dasht  
 this head if spouse didnt-have  
 tu zendeg-ish lezzetne-dasht  
 in live-her/his joy didnt-have  
 'Human beings would not have any joy in life if they did not have a  
 spouse.'
- c. ælbete kæmi dærde-sær ke dare  
 of course little pain-head that have-it  
 'It has, of course, a little trouble!'
- d. æmsær film-i øz medi fæximzade  
 Hamsar movie-a from Mehdi Fakhimzadeh  
 'Hamsar<sup>13)</sup> a movie [directed] by Mehdi Fakhimzadeh'

In advertisement we see a man on the left and a woman on the right, the suggestion is that they are a couple; this reading is reinforced by the name of the movie *Hamsar* which means spouse.

The syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations of the picture are rather fixed, since it is impossible to have the woman on the left and the man on the right. Since the man is looking at the woman and the woman is looking at the man, to change the order would imply that they are not on speaking terms, and this would contradict their happy and smiling

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13) It should be noted that although *Hamsar* literally means spouse, in this context it refers mainly to the wife rather than the husband. The movie is about a couple who work in the same company, the husband is the deputy of the company and his wife is an ordinary staff member. A few events take place, and his wife is appointed as the director of company by the board of directors. She demonstrates that she is a qualified director and more successful than men. The movie constructs a new image of women in Iranian society, it depicts that not only there is no differences between women and men but also women may possess a better potential for management/social tasks than men.

faces. Regarding the paradigmatic relation, people do not expect to see a naked and unveiled man or woman in the post-revolutionary era in Iran because of institutional constraints.

It appears that an association between pre- and post-revolutionary times with directive modernity and religious modernity exist respectively. This means that in the pre-revolutionary period modernity mainly meant westernisation, but in the post-revolutionary time modernity does not necessarily mean westernisation. As the advertisement shows, a woman can play a modern and active social role (e.g. actress) while maintaining her cultural facets (eg. Hejab meaning Islamic dress code).

The image of a man who is holding a teapot and a cup, pretending to pour tea into the cup may also imply the notion of Islamic modernism in the post-revolutionary era in Iran. In the pre-revolutionary period, it was commonly believed even by many educated people that men are destined to work outside while women are destined to work inside the home. But this picture is challenging these social norms and attempts to construct a new world view. So it states that this division of work (outside work for men and inside work for women) is not valid in the modern Islamic Iran; men and women have equal rights in both arenas, as the literal meaning of *hæmsar* (same-head) conveys. In other words, the concept of *hæmsar*, the two pictures of equal size,<sup>14)</sup> and the way of looking at each other indicate the way in which the advertiser wants people to conceptualise the existence and relationship of wife and husband.

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14) To place the woman on the right side and the man on the left side of the advertisement is culturally significant. It is culturally believed that the right side has always priority / higher status over the left. This notion of right and left can be traced back to stories about ancient kings in Iran. They used to have two ministers: right and left hand ministers. The right hand minister had a higher position than the left one. By placing the woman on the right hand, the advertiser is challenging social facts/norms in which women have lower positions than men. Also, the choice of right and left is not religiously neutral, the right hand has been highly respected.

#### 4. Concluding remarks

By analysing three advertisements from the pre-revolutionary period and four advertisements from the post-revolutionary era, I have argued that advertising not only reflects social realities but it constructs social realities as well. The role of mirroring and structuring social realities has been observed in both periods. For example, it has been shown how advertisers take advantage of the causal-conditional patterns of language to construct a helper/protector - helped/protected relation between the product and the consumer. Since the majority of advertising discourses, regardless of whether it is pre- or post-revolutionary times, aim to achieve this goal, it is reasonable to expect that advertising in both eras will have a similar genre, since both express the same general ideology - to persuade people to buy products. We have also seen that, although the pure textual or genre analysis is useful for identifying the general purposes of the discourse, it is inadequate to reveal certain social and political meanings surrounding the text.

The general structure of advertising for mirroring and constructing social realities can be construed as follows. First, if the existing social realities parallel the aim of advertising, the advertiser endorses these as social facts, as has been acknowledged by Fairclough (1989, p. 36). It is also true that advertising discourses simply reflect certain social norms which have been taken for granted, as in advertisement 1, which shows women have less important social roles than men. Secondly, if the existing social norm does not parallel advertising objectives, the advertiser endeavours to challenge in order to change, the current perspective in favour of a new ideology. For example, advertisement 3 is challenging the view that women cannot be active and energetic during menstruation, or advertisement 7 attempts to change the social view that women should work only in the home. According to Bourdieu (1991, p.169), “[the dominant] discourse is a structured and structuring medium tending to impose an apprehension of the established order as natural (orthodoxy) through the disguised (and thus misrecognised)

imposition of systems of classification and of mental structures that are objectively adjusted to social structures”.

As far as the comparison between pre- and post-revolutionary advertising is concerned, the pre-revolutionary examples tend to represent primarily western ideologies which do not recognise local cultural factors. One of the main reasons for this phenomenon must be that in pre-revolutionary times the majority of commercial advertising came from international companies rather than local companies. Alternatively, as mentioned earlier, it was because of directive policy of westernisation in Iran in the pre-revolutionary time. Moreover, the advertiser deliberately ignores the local social norms in order to construct a new ideology since the selling of that product requires that particular ideology. In contrast, the advertisements in the post-revolutionary era attempt to construct social realities mainly particular to Iranian society.

Another point is that all images of women depicted in the pre-revolutionary discourses do not mirror a social norm, because the majority of women used to wear the veil even in the pre-revolutionary era. However, the advertiser wanted to construct images of modern and successful women in that way. It is also true that advertisement 7 does not reflect the actual reality since in Iran many people believe that women and men are not equal - in my view, many people still think that men are superior to women. In short, advertising is not a perfect mirror image of social reality. According to Leiss et al (1990, p. 216), “advertising does not merely reflect reality. Although they draw materials from everyday life, they select them carefully; much is included, but also much is omitted”. Thus, it reflects certain social norms, it constructs certain social realities and it also leaves certain realities unsaid.

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