

Catchy phrases

Exploiting phonological effects in texts

Introduction

Phonology is the study of the sound system of the language. During this introduction to language study, you are going to build on your existing knowledge from GCSE by looking at how advertisers make use of a wide range of sound effects to enhance their persuasive messages. Start by reading the following famous advertising slogans. Decide which 3 you think are the most catchy, and try to explain what makes them so.

Alka Seltzer Plop, plop, fizz, fizz, oh what a relief it is.	Maybelline Maybe she's born with it. Maybe it's Maybelline.
Bold Better buy Bold.	Pepsi Cola Lipsmackin' thirstquenchin' acetastin' motivatin' goodbuzzin' cooltalkin' highwalkin' fastlivin' evergivin' coolfizzin' Pepsi.
Budweiser Whassup?	Pepsodent You'll wonder where the yellow went when you brush your teeth with Pepsodent.
Canon If anyone can, Canon can.	Pioneer Wait 'til you hear Pioneer.
Elizabeth Arden Seeing is believing.	Qualcast Concord It's a lot less bover than a hover.
Exxon Put a tiger in your tank.	Shell Oil You can be sure of Shell.
Guinness Guinness is good for you.	Smash For mash, get Smash.
Haig Scotch Whisky Don't be vague. Ask for Haig.	Southern Water Making water work.
Hamlet Happiness is a cigar called Hamlet.	Stena Sea Link Ferry affordable.
Harrods Everything for everybody everywhere.	The Mail on Sunday A newspaper, not a snoozepaper.
Heinz Beans meanz Heinz.	Thomas Cook Don't just book it, Thomas Cook it.
Kelloggs Snap! Crackle! Pop!	Timex Takes a licking and keeps on ticking.
KFC Finger lickin' good!	United Airlines Fly the friendly skies.
Le Shuttle The less time aboard, the more time abroad.	Virgin Trains Business brains take Virgin Trains.
Mars A Mars a day helps you work, rest and play.	Zanussi The appliance of science.

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Looking more closely

Develop your understanding of precisely what makes your chosen slogans catchy by analysing which of the following features contribute to this effect.

Aural texture	
Long vowels	The gentle, languid effect of long vowel sounds, eg the cool wave withdrew down the fading beach .
Short vowels	The clipped, abrupt effect of short vowel sounds, eg he smashed his fist down onto the box .
Soft consonants	The mellifluous effect of soft consonant sounds, eg the murmuring pleasure of a lazy stream .
Hard consonants	The harsh effect of hard consonant sounds, eg the furious witch cackled and spat .
Rhetorical devices	
Alliteration	The repetition of the initial consonant sound in words in close proximity eg the bouncing baby .
Assonance	The repetition of the vowel sound in words in close proximity eg the clean sea breeze .
Onomatopoeia	The formation of words which imitate the sound or action designated, eg bang!
Repetition	More than one use of the same word in close proximity, eg “a green thought in a green shade”.
Rhyme	The correspondence of sounds at the ends of pairs/groups of clauses or lines, eg Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall / Humpty Dumpty had a great fall .
Features of connected speech	
Assimilation	The sliding together of two sounds into one in rapid casual speech eg the /t/ and /y/ sounds in don't you know becomes a single sound ie dont cha know.
Elision	The complete loss of a sound in rapid connected speech eg the first /d/ sound is lost in “cardboard box” as we more usually say “ carboard ”.
Rhythm	The pattern created by the distribution of stressed and unstressed syllables in an utterance.
Use of spoken lexis	
Interjections	A word/phrase associated with the sudden expression of emotion in spontaneous speech, eg oh!
Non-standard forms	Words or phrases from slang or dialect are not really phonological features as such, but they can help to give a text a high degree of spokenness.

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Take it further



Complete one or both of the following tasks:

Produce a local radio advertisement to recruit people to your school sixth form, college, youth group, sports club or company. This needs to incorporate a catchy slogan using appropriate phonological features to heighten its impact. Make it as effective as you can for the target audience and purpose. Then produce a short commentary explaining the language choices you made.

Conduct an investigation into the use of phonological features in local radio advertising. Collect 20 consecutive adverts from one local radio station of your choice. Analyse them carefully, and comment on what you find interesting. Present your findings and conclusions in a format of your choice.

Analysis of advertising slogans (some answers)

<p>Alka Seltzer Plop, plop, fizz, fizz, oh what a relief it is.</p>	<p>Onomatopoeic repetition of 'plop' and 'fizz' creates an immediate sensory impression of the sound of two Alka Seltzer tablets being dropped into a glass of water. The spoken interjection 'oh', and the long /ee/ sound in 'relief' that is aurally suggestive of a sigh, both create a sense of spoken emotion that adds to this immediacy. The catchiness of these features is further enhanced by the rhyme of 'fizz' and 'is'. This creates a belief that the product will provide instant amelioration of the effects of too much food/alcohol.</p>
<p>Bold Better buy Bold.</p>	<p>The simple alliteration of the /b/ sound on each of the three short words connects the words closely together into a snappy injunction.</p>
<p>Budweiser Whassup?</p>	<p>This slogan has a powerful sense of spoken immediacy, created by the use of a question used in informal situations as a conversation opener amongst close friends (arguably primarily amongst young working class men). The elision of the /t/ sound is suggestive of rapid casual speech, which helps to make the product seem 'matey' and familiar.</p>
<p>Canon If anyone can, Canon can.</p>	<p>This slogan plays with the similarity of the modal verb 'can' to the brand name 'Canon'. The apparent repetition makes the product sound as if it makes all things possible.</p>
<p>Elizabeth Arden Seeing is believing.</p>	<p>The assonance of the long /ee/ sound, in conjunction with 'soft' consonant sounds, creates a gentle phonological effect that is perhaps intended to mirror the gently transforming effect a quality cosmetic product is intended to have. Understated but subtly memorable – like the make-up?...</p>
<p>Exxon Put a tiger in your tank.</p>	<p>Straightforward alliteration of the 'hard' /t/ sound, combined with the imperative verb form 'put', creates an assertive sound that reinforces the sense of power created by the metaphorical connection of tigers with petrol.</p>
<p>Guinness Guinness is good for you.</p>	<p>This slogan is made catchy by the use of alliteration of the /g/ sound on the 2 key words, a sound effect reinforced by the assertive rhythmic pattern [/--].</p>
<p>Haig Scotch Whisky Don't be vague. Ask for Haig.</p>	<p>The rhyming of 'vague' and 'Haig' makes this memorable, as does the assertive rhythmic pattern [/-/].</p>
<p>Hamlet Happiness is a cigar called Hamlet.</p>	<p>Straightforward alliteration of the /h/ sound clearly connects 'happiness' with the product name. This was a hugely successful advertising campaign, though this arguably had more to do with the witty scenarios presented than the phonological impact of the slogan, as the alliteration occurs on a consonant sound so soft it is barely voiced.</p>
<p>Harrods Everything for everybody everywhere.</p>	<p>The repetition of 'every' with variation of the second part of each key word contributes to the impact of this slogan. It is intended to create an impression of the comprehensiveness of the shop.</p>

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<p>Heinz Beanz meanz Heinz.</p>	<p>The assonance of the /ee/ sound in the first two words, and the terminal alliteration of the /z/ sound, connects the words together into a snappy slogan that has connected baked beans to Heinz for decades. It employs a visual wittiness too, replacing the 's' spelling of the end of the first two words with the /z/ that is actually pronounced in speech; this makes a visual link with the brand name's /z/ spelling ending. This creates the impression that beans belong to Heinz and Heinz only, instead of being a very ordinary product.</p>
<p>Kelloggs Snap! Crackle! Pop!</p>	<p>The onomatopoeic effect of the words in this slogan are designed to create a sense of the exciting immediacy of pouring cold milk onto a bowl of Rice Crispies. This sense of excitement is reinforced by the use of exclamation marks.</p>
<p>KFC Finger lickin' good!</p>	<p>Another slogan that uses exclamation marks to indicate that the words are to be said with emotion – again the excitement of eating the product. This slogan also intends to capture the relaxed matey-ness of casual eating with its use of the non-standard spoken form 'lickin'.</p>
<p>Le Shuttle The less time aboard, the more time abroad.</p>	<p>This slogan is made catchy by its use of the rhymed words 'aboard' and 'abroad', its contrast between 'less' and 'more', and its repetition of 'time'. These phonological effects combine to create an impression of intelligent time saving that mirrors the company's relatively sophisticated (and expensive?) image.</p>
<p>Mars A Mars a day helps you work, rest and play.</p>	<p>The rhyming of 'day' and 'play' helps to make this slogan catchy, but its enormous success is perhaps better accounted for by the very widely recognised jingle that accompanies the slogan. Nonetheless, the rhyme creates an impression of a carefree life in which there is always time to play. I'm off to buy one now....</p>
<p>Maybelline Maybe she's born with it. Maybe it's Maybelline.</p>	<p>As noted previously, this works because of its repetition of 'maybe', suggestive of all sorts of possibilities that will accrue to a woman who uses these products, reinforced by its assertive regular rhythmic pattern [/--].</p>
<p>Pepsi Cola Lipsmackin' thirstquenchin' acetastin' motivatin' goodbuzzin' cooltalkin' highwalkin' fastlivin' evergivin' coolfizzin' Pepsi.</p>	<p>Very similar to the KFC slogan in its attempt to sound 'cool' and 'matey' by using non-standard spoken forms in which the final 'g' is dropped. This is reinforced by its running together of nouns and verbs to suggest the speed of casual speech. This is designed to make the consumer think they will be one of the gang if they drink Pepsi.</p>
<p>Pepsodent You'll wonder where the yellow went when you brush your teeth with Pepsodent.</p>	<p>Delightfully catchy in almost a childish nursery rhyme way, with its incorporation of an unusual product name into a rhyme that is wittily satisfying in its cleverness, its strongly foregrounded alliteration in the first phrase of the /y/ and /w/ sounds, and its iambic rhythmical pattern [- /]. Witty and amusing, or horribly old-fashioned – like the users of this product?</p>
<p>Pioneer Wait 'til you hear Pioneer.</p>	<p>'hear' and the ending of 'Pioneer' rhyme, emphasised by the rhythmic balance of the two parts, and linking sound to the product. Simple, a bit obvious, but neat.</p>

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<p>Qualcast Concord It's a lot less bover than a hover.</p>	<p>Witty rhyme of 'bover' and 'hover', drawing on the non-standard form of 'bother' spoken by Cockneys and speakers of Estuary English. This gives the product a very down to earth, 'no-nonsense' kind of sound that is what every homeowner wants from their lawnmower – trust me on this!....</p>
<p>Shell Oil You can be sure of Shell.</p>	<p>The alliteration of the /sh/ sound links the product to the concept of certainty, which is presumably of great importance to petrol buyers, though I can't honestly say it's something I've ever worried about...</p>
<p>Smash For mash, get Smash.</p>	<p>Rhyme of 'mash' and 'Smash' makes it crystal clear what 'Smash' is...</p>
<p>Southern Water Making water work.</p>	<p>Alliteration of the /w/ sound connects the 'product' to the concept of functioning, presumably in a bid to make people realise that there is some kind of process involved in water treatment and to make the consumer feel they are not actually getting ripped off every time a water bill lands on the doormat. It also creates a clever little phonological echo of the word 'waterworks', which is what Southern Water is.</p>
<p>Stena Sea Link Ferry affordable.</p>	<p>'ferry' replaces 'very' in a witty play on the sounds of the words designed to make the consumer feel positive about the company, and to create an alliterative link through the /f/ sounds to enhance the catchiness of the slogan.</p>
<p>The Mail on Sunday A newspaper, not a snoozepaper.</p>	<p>Witty internal rhyming of 'news' and 'snooze' makes the paper seem intelligently light-hearted. Clever, even if it ignores their frequently rabid journalistic attitude to key issues of social policy.</p>
<p>Thomas Cook Don't just book it, Thomas Cook it.</p>	<p>The rhyming of 'book' and 'Cook' help to make this catchy, but the dominant feature in this is the assertive rhythmic pattern [/-] of the two balanced clauses. It also cleverly uses the company name (a proper noun) as if it were a verb.</p>
<p>Timex Takes a licking and keeps on ticking.</p>	<p>Nice catchy rhyming of 'licking' and 'ticking' top create a sense of a no-nonsense watch that will survive everyday life. Though the Timex slogan indelibly ingrained on my mind is not this one but "Tick-a-tick-a-Timex".....</p>
<p>United Airlines Fly the friendly skies.</p>	<p>Alliteration of the /f/ sound connects flying with the concept of friendliness, not my highest priority when taking off, but obviously a positive value for some people. Also assonance of the /ai/ sound in 'fly' and 'skies' adds catchiness.</p>
<p>Virgin Trains Business brains take Virgin Trains.</p>	<p>Alliteration of /b/ sounds immediately flatters business consumers with intelligence, then connects them through rhyme and assertive rhythm [/-/] to this train company. There is perhaps also a suggestiveness of the sound of a train on the tracks in this rhythm?....</p>
<p>Zanussi The appliance of science.</p>	<p>Rhyme. Clever play on meanings of 'appliance' – application, as well as a domestic machine.</p>