# Persuasive Strategies in Green Sustainability Advertisements: A Pragmatic Study

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## Abstract

The way language is styled and structured is a way to manipulate, thus, a way to capturing hearts. This study investigates the effect of language and in green sustainability protests and advertisements. This is a pragmatic study that examines the language used in green sustainability media and protest advertisements by the use of persuasive language. In linguistics, persuasive language either conveys its message through the use of powerless style or through powerful style. This is known as persuasion, in linguistic studies. Persuasion, in linguistics, is the power of words. Persuasion is using words to communicate ideas in a certain way and makes us think or do something in a particular manner. Green sustainability advertisements are, indeed, linguistic persuasion at hand, using the linguistics of persuasion to manipulate language. The language used by green sustainability advocates is thought of very intensively to influence the audience. They know that language is a powerful tool. It is our means to communicate in getting our message across and negatively or positively influencing others around us.

**Keywords:** Persuasive Strategies, Green Sustainability

## 1. Introduction

Words can create magic! The way we say things can have a great influence on people. Words can lift your spirits high up or break your heart to pieces! This is termed as

the "linguistics of persuasion" in language and linguistic studies, or more precisely in the field of Pragmatics.

Why should a speaker choose to use a certain word rather than using another? This is studied in the field of pragmatics, which deals with speaker intended meaning, speaker meaning and its relation to the context in which it is used or the specifics of culture. Sometimes this has to do with politeness, for instance. Other times with speaker/listener power, on certain other occasions and certain contexts, it may be a tactic that a speaker follows to get her/his message across.

Achieving your goal of successful communication and in order for you to deliver your message effectually, persuasive linguistics becomes handy. When it comes to persuasive language in pragmatics, it has been found that interlocutors may use hedges, tag questions, intensifiers, and other language choices to create powerful messages. This is known as persuasive language which is required in many fields, especially media, in order to get one's message across.

## 2. Literature Review

According to research studies, the persuasiveness of a message depends on four variables. They are, speaker evaluation, control of self, control of others attributions, cognitive responses and message memorability. According to previous research also, "argument quality" directly affects speaker and message perceptions and affects also attitude change. (Hosman & Siltanen, 2006)

The way sentences are structured and the style of the sentence used can do a lot with attitude change and efficient message quality. The manipulation of the language has its influence on listeners. So, using intensifiers, for instance, gives positive effects and influences interlocutors or listeners in a strong way, while using hedges, is seen as a negative persuasion strategy. Using tag questions had an indirect effect on the audiences' attitude.

First of all, hedges are "linguistic expressions employed to express imprecision or qualification in conversation. Examples include: "As far as I know", "I probably don't need to say this, but…" and "I'm not sure if this is clear, but…". (Haung, 2014)

Intensifiers, however, as defined in Cambridge Dictionary are "adverbs or adverbial phrases that strengthen the meaning of other expressions to show emphasis." Examples of intensifiers, on the other hand, are "so", "very" and "extremely". That is why using hedges is seen as a negative persuasion strategy, whereas using intensifiers is seen as a positive persuasion strategy or strong use of persuasive language. In linguistics, persuasive language either conveys its message through the use of powerless style (hedges, hesitations and tag questions) or through powerful style, with the absence of these features. (Holtgraves & Lasky, 1999)

Green sustainability ads use the linguistics of persuasion to manipulate language and, thus, its audience. The language used by green sustainability advocates is thought of very intensively to influence the listener. They know that language is a powerful tool. It is our means to communicate in getting our message across and negatively or positively influencing listeners. (Holtgraves & Lasky, 1999)

According to Holtgraves and Lasky (1999) language has both a "powerful" style and "powerless" style. some features of language, nonetheless, are debatable as whether markers of "powerful" or "powerless" style, such as "politeness".

Language is used to convince and influence. Through the use of words magic can be made. Certain words make us want to buy something or even vote for someone. Certain words when well-chosen can make us feel inspired or moved. This is called the linguistics of persuasion, where language plays a magical role in convincing and influencing people. Words can be powerful! So, what exactly is persuasion? (Smith, 2024)

Persuasion is using words to communicate ideas in a certain way. Persuasion makes us think or do something in a particular way. for example, when you make your friend watch your favorite movie or try a new game, here, we are using persuasion! When we watch ads, listen to religious or political speeches, or even during a friendly debate, persuasion is attended to. Therefore, one can safely say that persuasion is all around us. (Smith, 2024)

Persuasion is the power of words, wherein words are more than just letters juxtaposed one by one. Within the linguistics of persuasion, words have the power to influence our thoughts and actions. But how does persuasion work? (Smith, 2024)

First of all, there is "Emotional Appeal". It is commonly known that one of the strongest ways is by appealing to people's emotions. So, one way to persuade and convince is to appeal to people's emotions. Imagine, for instance you are watching a commercial about an orphan child waiting for a home. The commercial might have images or words that make you feel emotionally attached to that child. The commercial will surely make you feel sorry or sad for that child. This emotional response may lead you to adopt the child or donate for that child or orphanage. There are ads or commercials about animals for instance that may make you emotionally respond in a happy way and make these animals attractive to people. Language, here, is used in order to influence people and encourage the audience to buy those cats or small puppies. (Smith, 2024)

Persuasion is everywhere! It makes us think in a particular way or even do things in a certain manner. Persuasion is more than just letters together strung. So, words can be used to evoke feelings of "happiness", "sadness", or "excitement." Words that appeal to people's emotions can be convincing. Words like "limited offer" or "life-changing experience" may give you the urge to act quickly or can make you feel like you are missing out on something worthwhile.  (Smith, 2024)

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Second of all, persuasion is achieved linguistically through what is known as "Ethos" or "building trust". Here, words have the power to persuade by building credibility. This is likely to happen when one speaks or writes with expertise and authority. We are likely to be convinced when a doctor, for example, speaks about a certain health issue. We are likely to trust their advice more than if it were to come from the mouth of a random person. (Smith, 2024)

Third, we have "Pathos" or "appealing to feelings". Pathos is all connected to emotions. Language that includes stories or situations often triggers feelings and thus is an example of persuasive language. For example, if one were to hear about a community standing together to help people in need, one may feel inspired also to help too. Language that describes feelings and other people's experiences can make a message powerful because it becomes more relatable and impactful. (Smith, 2024)

Words have power! And, when it comes to successful communication through advertising, it is evident that language plays a big role. Here, is where the linguistics of persuasion plays its role. The effective use of persuasive language is apparent wherein researchers provide a framework that is easy-to-use to help marketers and advertisers select the right language to persuade consumers. (Lowrey & Shrum, 2019)

For instance, the persuasiveness of language can be maximized by selecting the correct language. Words and sentences can carry stronger persuasive impact on listeners by using different linguistic devices such as metaphors and rhetoric. Linguistic devices are exploited frequently in advertising. Linguistic devices, therefore, can be used to strengthen any argument. I should say "Language is an influential tool!" (Lowrey & Shrum, 2019)

There are guides to using persuasive language and a framework to adopt when attempting to implement linguistics of persuasion. Recently, there has been considerable research devoted to understanding how certain linguistic devices are to

be used to persuade. Yet, despite the vast amount of information, it is still difficult to make links between the different studies. In setting the framework, the researchers' goal was to facilitate the use of "the right language, in the right way, with the right audience." (Lowrey & Shrum, 2019)

Ruth Pogacar, Tina M. Lowrey, and L.J. Shrum focused on identifying those links between different studies to provide a concrete guide to the existing knowledge in this area.  So, it is said that when it comes to persuasion, it is not just what is said that is important, but how it is said. Putting this in mind, researchers such as Pogacar, Shrum, and Lowrey developed their persuasive language framework. (Lowrey & Shrum, 2019)

Pogacar, shrum and Lowrey set the framework to review research based on the effects of linguistic devices. This framework is, in turn, applicated in the advertising system and in green sustainability ads. According to this framework, linguistic devices were classified according to two dimensions: language complexity and processing mode. These two dimensions ranged from automatic to controlled processing. The framework was used to base research on the effects of linguistic devices. By including the current research in the field, the framework also exposed gaps in knowledge. This persuasive language framework provides a guide to understanding how the audience perceive linguistic devices. Therefore, green sustainability advocated were capable to use language to persuade the audience more influentially.  This framework was used in simplifying the way advocators of a certain cause and advertisers influence their audience. It analyzed the degree of processing effort needed on part of the consumer. So, by studying whether automatic or complex processing is needed and more importantly whether communication needs to be more or less complicated, advocators and advertisers become more persuading.  They become aware of the right words to persuade and influence more effectively. (Lowrey & Shrum, 2019)

As mentioned, the goal of Pogacar et al.'s framework is developing a concrete guide to facilitate the use of the right language, in the right way, with the right audience. This framework was mainly designed for advertisers to use to direct their campaigns. This framework reveals which language devices necessitate more cognitive effort from the audience or targets. So, there are certain linguistic devices that necessitate no effort to process, influencing the audience or targets directly or automatically. Whereas, other linguistic devices, require their audience to be engaged in order for them to process the information adequately and effectively. (Lowrey & Shrum, 2019)

Within this regard, cognitive effort has a key role to play in persuasive language. As Pogacar et al. set out to create their framework, existing research on linguistic devices was analyzed in order to map out how much cognitive effort was to be required for each linguistic device to be effective. Linguistic devices that required the least cognitive effort included pronunciation, processing of numbers, sound repetition, alliteration, rhyme, and phonetic symbolism. Whereas, at the other side of the scale, linguistic devices that required more or heavy cognitive effort from the audience included metaphor, analogy, the use of questions, and syntax. (Lowrey & Shrum, 2019)

According to this framework, language can influence readers strongly and have a big impact on readers by using certain simple tactics. For example, certain simple devices, such as phonetic symbolism, complexity (or not) and numbers. These are persuasive language techniques at hand that can manipulate the audience's perceptions, especially when it comes to advertising, in general, and green sustainability ads, in particular. (Lowrey & Shrum, 2019)

Phonetic symbolism, is one example. Wherein the sound of a word conveys meaning without demanding cognitive effort. Vowel sounds and consonant sounds are both linked with sensory perceptions such as size, speed, weight, and color. So, for instance, low pitched sounds, such as the low pitch sound made by the letter "R"

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conveys "round", "slow", "soft" and "large". Whereas, high pitched sounds, like the sound made by the letter "E" conveys the opposite. Therefore, the cause of green sustainability has implemented such tactics and used them to convey meaning associated with these sounds.  In turn, automatically assigning required information correlating positive or negative meaning to their audience. (Lowrey & Shrum, 2019)

Second is complexity of the language used. When complexity is added to a simple word, this will have an effect on the perception of the message conveyed. By adding complexity to the message, advertisers force the audience to put more cognitive effort, giving the message more attention. So, for example, when naming a certain cause with a name that is harder to pronounce may give it the impression that is more dangerous and novel just by its sound. (Lowrey & Shrum, 2019)

Third we have numbers. Numbers, to be more precise, are perceived to be more accurate and trustworthy. For example, when using numbers that rated by consumers, changes of numbers from decimal values to integer values (e.g. 7.2 to 8) are seen more favorable than when the change is between two integers (e.g. 7 to 8). This is the case with numbers despite the fact that the change in the latter is larger than the change in the former. (Lowrey & Shrum, 2019)

## 3. Methodology

Within this paper a qualitative methodology is followed. Previous researched papers in the area of Linguistics of Persuasion have been analyzed, studied and summarized in this research. Also, Aristotle's theory has been adopted as well as Pogacar et. al.'s framework of the linguistics of persuasion to reach the analysis of advertisements regarding green sustainability and the persuasive language that are used within these ads. Results and data within this paper have been thoroughly reached by the application of Pogacar et. al.'s framework mostly. In this research, linguistic devices were analyzed suggesting that green sustainability ads, included in this research paper, used linguistic devices that required less cognitive effort than other kinds of

ads. This was the case in order to make sure that each linguistic device used was to be effective and fast. Linguistic devices that required the least cognitive effort included pronunciation, processing of numbers, sound repetition, alliteration, rhyme, and phonetic symbolism. On the other hand, linguistic devices that required more or heavy cognitive effort were not used. Data collection included various advertisements, from numerous sources, which were gathered and included, as well as thoroughly analyzed, in this research.
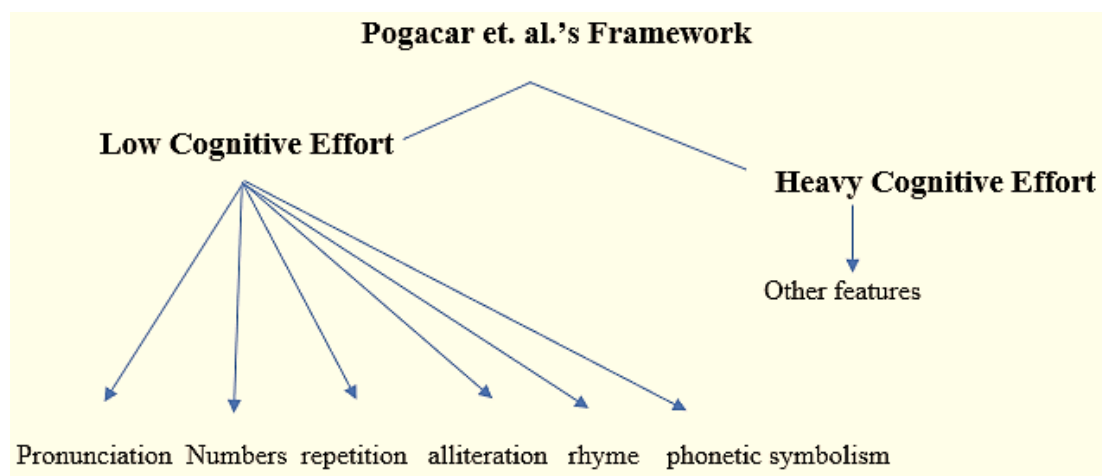


Figure (1): Pogacar et. al.'s Framework of Persuasive Language

## 4. Data Analysis and Discussion

**Advertisement (1): "$127 Billion Fashion Garments as Products of Modern Slavery. Won't Wear Injustice"** was written in upper case letters to catch eyes and grab more attention, thus creating a strong influence. Using the word "injustice" rather than using other words, such as "oppression" for instance to increase desire in justice. Using the word "oppression" rather than "injustice" usually does not have the same influence but may give a perception of exaggeration. Using a positive word as "justice" is an encouragement for readers and listeners to follow that attitude. So, using the word "justice" give strong effect of moral duty. Using the prefix "in" in the

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word "injustice" equals to the opposite of the word, as a result increases the negativity of this action as being "opposite" of "justice". As well, using the word "slavery" gives a quick influence of the offensiveness of this act and its awfulness, as the word "slavery" has an extremely bad connotation to it, especially in western societies, where slavery was just recently battled about a number of centuries away, not more. Using the contraction "won't" rather than modal "will not" to change readers' attitude by creating the perception of quick and fast rejection. This is in order to create the perception that refusal is quick to happen.

**Advertisements (2): "Organic is Still Overproduction"** also uses upper case letters to increase emphasis and catch people's and readers' attention. This is also the case with the third ad and the fourth in the same picture. Wherein capital letters are used to catch eyes and, as stated create emphasis to give perception of its importance, or negativity according to the word used. For instance, "SLAVERY" in the first ad, had a bad connotation to it, just like the word "INJUSTICE" whereas the words "TRULY" and "FAST" and "SUITABLE" in the third ad, written in capital letters, increases positivity and necessitates constructive action, and thus is an encouragement to the audience. Also, the use of the adverb "OVER" in the second ad, in the use of the word "OVERPRODUCTION" increases influence and effect on the audience due to the use of the collocation "over" and "production" to create emphasis also and influence audience feelings and creating a change in attitude. Using the numbers "$127" is an eye-catching number, so if the number "130" was used for instance, it would not get the same reaction. Numbers are also used in persuasive linguistics to create trustworthiness. Short number but grabs attention.

**Advertisement (3): "Any Clothing Produced on a Mass Scale Can Never by Truly Suitable. Not Buying This Bullshit!"** mostly uses words with positive connotations, such as "produced", "mass", "can", "truly", "suitable", and "buying" to positively influence the audience where at the end of the ad, we have negative

description in the words "not" and "bullshit" with the exclamation mark that has the symbol (x) instead of using a dot (.). this can be explained to create a shock in the audiences' reaction leading them to think twice and think intensively. The use of the image (x) in the exclamation mark (!) instead of using the dot (.) is an eye-catching image. Using the positive word "truly" makes the ad more trustworthy, manipulating the audience's feelings. The use of the words "Produced", "Mass", "scale", and "suitable" has a repetition of the /s/ sound to effect audience's perception and create bigger influence. Using the "-Ing" in the word "buying" to give impression of continuity and long-term effect of the refusal of buying in "NOT BUYING". The double use of negation by first using the adverb "NEVER" and then the negation "NOT" to emphasize the fact of the advocates refusal of buying and such issues as fashion and clothing expenditure. Also, "Never" and "Not" have the repetition of the /n/ sound to manipulate and emphasize the perception of rejection and negativity. The third ad in the picture which advocates the words "FASHION = FAST EXTINCTION" also makes use of upper-case letters and their influence of creating emphasis and catching more attention. The use of the /f/ sound twice makes use of the pronunciation sound effects and influence on audience in which they appeal to the audience's perceptions. Making the ad short and simple makes this ad fast effecting because it requires less cognitive effort on part of the audience. The use of multiple adjectives, such as "BULLSHIT", "EXTINCTION", "MODERN", "OVERPRODUCTION", "ORGANIC" and "SUITABLE" to describe and give perception of the negativity of the image and description of the cause of the need of green sustainability cause. The use of nouns "INJUSTICE" and "SLAVERY" and the adverb "FAST" are used in to name the fashion industry as being unfair, unequal and all in all a negative and losing case. The use of the swear word "BULLSHIT" is used after positive words. The use of the swear word, which is a compound word containing both "BULL" and "SHIT" to give the negativity of the fashion industry a double effect and extra influence. The use of determiner "THIS" instead of "these"

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in "NOT BUYING THIS BULLSHIT" to give it fashion industry a one and only one easy to fight case. Using the determiner "THIS" makes it sound a simple to fight case and makes the case more easy to reject. The use of rhyming sound /f/ sound in "FAST" and "FASHION" creates the sound effect which makes "FAST" more persuasive.

**Advertisement (4): "People & Planet Positive"** there is the repetition of the /p/ sound to create emphasis. Also, the rhyming in these three words applies to advocates perception of the word. The /s/ sound is easy to pronounce, not hard and heavy" which gives the perception that the cause of green sustainability is simple, sweet and not hard or difficult. Using the three words in the order in which they are put has also a winning effect. Using "People" then "Planet" then "Positive" to show a certain strategy and order. First step is people joining together creating therefore the second step of the "Planet" becoming "Positive" as the final step. The words put in the order that they, and the relation of order between them gives the image of the necessary steps and its leading outcome. In this ad, it is seen that the words are not all in upper case except for the first letter of every word. This is done because using upper case letters gives the perception of force and extra emphasis. Not using upper case letters in all of the words in this add creates the perception that it is not an over demanding cause. Here, in this ad, the words are positive and carry a positive connotation. The use of the /p/ sound gives perception of softness and simplicity. By combining these words "People", "Planet" and "Positive" and their connotations of positivity, softness and easiness, the ad makes the cause of green sustainability sound easy, simple, and desirable. The ad, therefore, gives the perception of better, quicker and more effectiveness connotations. The use of the symbol "&" also has a similar effect on the audience. The rhyming /p/ sound and its repetition creates the perception of emphasis on the need and necessity of this cause. This ad is easy to process and perceive not requiring much cognitive effort from the audience. This ad is all in one direction not going back and forth. The words are ordered in the same direction

giving the idea that it is a one-way leading issue. This ad makes the cause necessary but not over demanding. This ad is friendly! A special case for persuasion!

**Advertisement (5): "Don't buy this jacket".** This is Patagonia's ad. The environmental cause of green sustainability is a winning cause in this advertisement. The emphasis of using a first word order and a capital letter "D" in "Don't" gives a double effect and emphasis. The use of the contraction "Doesn't" rather than "Do Not" or "Do not" makes the cause sound as if requires quick action on part of its audience. The use of "don't" carries speaker power and, therefore, gives credibility and a winning argument quality. The language used is simple language, requiring less cognitive effort and therefore more effective and influential. This ad makes you feel to be in the conversation. Thus, making the ad influential and more effective. The language in this final ad is short, strong, and to the point. This ad makes the environmental cause of green sustainability sound easy and fun. This ad, therefore, makes the audience feel as if they were in a live discussion. It is also a friendly ad. This ad saves energy for campaigns, advocators of this cause and also on the audience's part too. It is a clever advertisement as with the ones above. Its message and language are persuasive linguistics at hand. The language in it is strong and clear making its message effective. This ad gives the impression that talking about green sustainability does not have to be gloomy and boring! The message here is not "bloom and gloom". Home sweet home!

## 5. Conclusions

Green sustainability ads are, indeed, a very good example of linguistics of persuasion. These protest advertisements manipulate and affect our senses in a very clever way. The language that is used by green sustainability advocates is thought of really carefully to influence the audience. Through studying the language and how it is used to manipulate its interlocutors, we come to understand that language is a powerful tool. Language, indeed, is our means to communicate in getting our

message across and negatively or positively influencing others. Language is our tool that is used, in many various ways, to convince and influence. Again and again, through the use of words we can make magic. And persuasion is the power of these words.

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