

PROVERBIAL SAYINGS IN ADVERTISEMENTS

FOLKLORE AND MEDIA

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There are many different "proverbial" definitions, Wolfgang Mieder, in his book Proverbs Are Never Out Of Season, conducted a survey from fifty-five various people to find out how the folk would define a proverb. Most of the responses stated that a proverb must contain a wisdom; however, some felt that a proverb was only a "short expression known by many people" (18-22). Rudolph E. Habenicht stresses that there is a difference in highly colloquial phrases and a true proverb. He states that a true proverb must "epitomize wisdom or admonitions" (Hahenicht 65).

But, unlike the true proverb, conversational genres are small, relatively fixed and traditional forms of expression used in everyday conversation. These include jargon and slang; special language; taboo words; and intensifiers (like "dead as a doornail") (Schoemaker 40-41).

The advertisements found in Fortune Magazine, July through September, 1993, show how conversational genre, rhyme, song and proverbs are expressed by advertising in the media. In my ten ads, seven were forms of folk speech or conversational genre, one was a form of a proverb, one was a children's nursery rhyme, and one was from a song.

In The Dictionary of Proverbs (71), "Bread and Butter" refers to the sustaining of life. Hanson's ad is telling the folk that road construction is a bother or a "jam" to the traveler, but it is Hanson's way of earning their "bread

and butter." The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Intel used a "star" to catch the consumer's attention. After all, a star did lead the wise men to the baby Jesus (what better way to lead the folk to buy the product than by a star). The EPA's ad of "Star Light, Star Bright" is more or less telling the folk to say a little prayer (or wish) for the environment. "Catch a Rising Star" is derived from the well known song, "Catch A Falling Star." The next line of the song says to "put it in your pocket and save it for a rainy day." Thus, the consumer reads the headline of the ad and thinks of putting the money saved (from purchasing an Intel PC) into his/her pocket.

I found that the following 70% of ads were forms of conversational genre: "Any time, Any Place, Any Where," "No Squawk Talk," "Torque (talk) Of The Town," "Always Put Your Best Foot Forward," "Take The Plunge," "Go The Extra Mile," and "Old Dog, New Tricks." All these phrases are used by people to "spice up" a phrase and increase its impact or persuasive power (Schoemaker 40).

Although none of the ads mentioned the name of the product in the "proverbial" headline, proverbial phrases were employed as attention-getters. Mieder states in his article, "Proverbs in Advertising" (from the book by Dundes and Mieder, The Wisdom of Many), that proverbs are used in advertising because "their familiar sound creates a feeling of positive identification and trustworthy authority" (312).

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