

CORPUS ANALYSIS OF THE MULTI - LEVEL MARKETING PERSUASIVE PHRASEOLOGY

Kamariah Yunus*, Mahani Mohamad*, Radzuwan Ab Rashid* and Zanirah Wahab*

***Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to analyse the multi-level marketing (MLM) persuasive phraseology used by the top MLM companies online. The online texts retrieved from five out of 50 top MLM official websites were compiled in a small and specialised MLM corpus comprising 5812 word tokens. Data were analysed using Laurence Anthony's concordance software (Ant Conc 3.4.4. for Windows 2014). Results from the Word List showed that the five most frequent persuasive words in the specialised corpus are products, business, health, quality, and world, consecutively. Meanwhile, the word products collocated strongly with the words business, quality, and nature. These words function as MLM rhetorical device used to persuade buyers in MLM business website texts. This study contributes to the body of literature by advancing research in MLM communication which is still under-researched.*

***Keywords:** Corpus, concordance, wordlist, frequently used words, multi-level marketing.*

1. INTRODUCTION TO STRESS MANAGEMENT

Network marketing or Multi-level marketing (MLM) can be generally defined as a business strategy or method of selling products directly to customers, as opposed to traditional marketing. It is also usually referred to "word of mouth marketing", "interactive distribution", and "relationship marketing". MLM business is expanding, in which it was found that some big companies, such as AVON, Electrolux, and Tupper ware have turned to the MLM business plan to increase their product sales. Besides, in line with technological advancement in the 21st century, the world has witnessed a revolution of MLM businesses which are operated online.

The use of persuasive words to attract consumers to buy products is one of the important strategies in MLM businesses, especially when the competition with other MLM companies is very intense. They are used as a means of persuasive communication using advertisements as a main platform. Since advertisements play a big role in introducing and enlarging MLM businesses, careful selection of words to 'psychologically' convince buyers to know about the products and eventually decide on purchasing them must be done. The use of persuasive words as a rhetorical function by MLM business people is also urgent as a means of maintaining their business success and longevity.

* Faculty of Languages and Communication, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia

MLM advertisers should “take into consideration of the conative and emotive power of the lexical and syntactic structures [lexico-grammatical phrases or MLM phraseology] they use” (Fomukong, 2016, p. 105) in the websites which represent the phraseology of the ‘discourse community’ that speaks the language (Swales, 1990; Rashid, 2016; Rashid, Rahman & Rahman, 2016). According to Fairclough (1989, p. 207), the positions for consumers are built by “presupposing that consumers need to be or aspire to have certain beliefs, aspirations and financial standards, adopting the cultural view of the language of advertisement”. However, previous research, such as Barhemati and Ahmad (2015) and Fomukong (2016) mainly focus on the negative and positive impacts of multi-level marketing (MLM). There is very limited research on analysing the rhetorical forms of MLM phraseology which are prevalent in MLM advertising texts. This paper aims to fill in the gap by investigating the persuasive phraseology used frequently by MLM advertisers to persuade potential customers through their official websites.

2. CONTEXTUAL THEORY OF MEANING

According to Firth (1957), the meaning of speech events could be derived from the contexts of culture (situational/extra-linguistic). Meanings could also be realised at the linguistic level. The meaning of patterns or collocations could be derived from the environments (contexts) of the pattern in a given text (co-texts) which are recurrent and observable (concordance lines) within a wider context of culture (the community that speaks the language). Thus, in the context of specialised languages, for example MLM language, the meanings and functions of MLM language could be derived from a wider context of culture; that is, the MLM discourse community that speaks the language.

Patterns of text are instances of language use (Yunus, Mohamad, & Waelateh; Yunus, Su’ad, & Rashid, 2016). They are communicative events, not grammatical categories. Therefore, they do play certain functions in the society. This construes Halliday’s (1991, p. 16) statement that “if meaning is function in context, as Firth used to put it, then equivalence of meaning is equivalence of function in context”. The forms of language, such as MLM language do carry specific functions. They are discourse-specific and represent the register of the MLM phraseology. Specialised phraseology which are frequent and repetitive in specialised texts, such as in MLM advertisements, do denote the most frequently used words or phraseology used by the MLM business community.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this descriptive study, the corpus linguistic approach was employed to analyse the data. In terms of research procedures, the advertisement texts updated on five

MLM official websites were retrieved and compiled in a small and specialised corpus, namely the MLM Corpus comprising 5812 word tokens and 1471 word types. The websites opted were Amway, Nature's Sunshine, Shaklee, Herbalife and USANA. These five MLM companies were chosen as they were among the top 50 MLM companies by Global Revenue. Once the texts were retrieved (in microsoft words), they were converted to the plain text. This allowed the texts to be read by a concordancer, namely Laurence Anthony's AntConc (Windows 3.4.4). In order to analyse the most frequently used words in the corpus, the Word List menu was used. The researcher disregarded the function words (e.g., the, a, that), but selected only the most frequent content words.

Besides analysing the most frequently used words in the MLM Corpus, the researcher also examined the collocational patterns of the words. It is very essential to analyse the collocability of the words for this informs us about the functions of the words. Collocation is defined as a word combination of two lexical words, in which the meaning is detected at the syntagmatic (horizontal), rather than the paradigmatic (vertical) level. The collocates of a lexical word usually resides at the immediate environment or the co-text (right or left-hand side) of the Key-Word-in-Context (KWIC). For example, the collocates of the word *products*(KWIC) in the following concordance lines are *finished*, *Nutrilite*, *quality of*, *come-and-go*, etc.

<p>19 nd processing methods, evaluating our finished 20 and efficacy. Every ingredient used in Nutrilite 22 environment. We retail the highest quality of 24 gredients, questionable claims and come-and-go 25 ise business management; our broad selection of 26 are truly transformed. Our premium quality 27 management solutions, our naturally efficacious 28 nature, but rooted in science, our remarkable 29 hoices through natural, nutritionally therapeutic</p>	<p>products to ensure they meet precise products undergoes extensive products and practice the best products, Nature's Sunshine is products points to our commitment products do more than improve products feature the best raw products deliver extraordinary products. What Do You Hope To</p>
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Figure 1. The concordances of *products*

Based on the contextual theory of meaning by Firth (1957), the meanings of collocational patterns are derived from the co-texts (immediate environments) in the concordance lines, and they are indeed derived from the discourse community (the MLM community) that speaks the language (contexts of situation).

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Table 4.1 presents a wordlist of the 10 most frequently used persuasive words found in the MLM Corpus. Based on the wordlist, the word *products* was ranked

the first, followed by the words *business* and *health* which come second and third, consecutively.

Table 4.1
List of the most frequent words in the MLM Corpus

No.	Rank	Frequency	Word
1	11	66	products
2	22	37	business
3	23	36	health
4	26	27	quality
5	32	25	world
6	35	22	nature
7	38	21	people
8	41	20	product
9	44	19	good
10	45	19	have

The fact that these three persuasive words were ranked the highest in the MLM Corpus is related to the concept of MLM business itself (Kenechukwe et al, 2013). MLM business is a type of business which sells health products. The word *health* was repeated frequently as a means of luring consumers to buy them (Kruti & Alan, 2009). Consumers have a tendency to buy products if they are attracted to them. The psychological words used by MLM advertisers often influence consumer behaviours; that is, in making decisions to buy health-related products.

Besides, the fourth, fifth, and sixth most frequent persuasive words ranked in the wordlist are *quality*, *world*, and *nature*. The result is not surprising since the MLM adverts must have employed these three persuasive words to promote their health products. The health products must be of the best quality in the world and natural. These three words are interweaving and interrelated in MLM advertising texts, in which it is used as “an attempt to change attitude by compelling consumers to buy the advertiser’s product” (Kenechukwe et al., 2013).

Figure 2 shows the concordance outputs of the products. As mentioned previously, the phraseology of a specialised language such as MLM discourse can be clearly evidencing in patterns. The word *products* combines strongly with the words *quality*, *efficacious*, *remarkable*, and *therapeutic*. Connotatively, these collocates have positive semantic prosody (Sinclair, 2003); that is, “the discourse function of a sequence”. The most frequent collocation around the word *products* involves a positive outcome. The patterns like these were intentionally designed by MLM adverts to influence potential buyers to try on their products.

25	ise business management; our broad selection of	products points to our commitment
26	are truly transformed. Our premium quality	products do more than improve
27	management solutions, our naturally efficacious	products feature the best raw
28	nature, but rooted in science, our remarkable	products deliver extraordinary
29	hoices through natural, nutritionally therapeutic	products. What Do You Hope To

Figure 2. The concordance results of *products*

Meanwhile, Figure 3 shows the concordance outputs of the word *business*. The figure shows evident that the word *business* collocated strongly with other lexical words, such as *people*, *honor*, *strategy*, and *partners*, as underlined in the following phrases: *a number of business people*, *Amway business honor*, *long term business strategy*, *This business strategy*, and *business partners*. Table 1 shows that the word *business* is the second most frequent persuasive prevalent in the corpus of the five top MLM companies after the word *products*. Therefore, the MLM adverts had to highlight to consumers about the business opportunities they may receive if they join MLM companies. The manipulation of the persuasive words, such as *honor*, *strategy*, and *partner* scan be very successful. Consumers may be influenced to join due to the prospect of being honoured and associated (Yudan & Siyao, 2015).

1.	second is due to a number of	business people seeking too much, leading to
2.	ized and appreciated. Proof is: Amway	business honor is the first multi-level
3.	an inherent component of its long term	business strategy that shapes the value system
4.	the company's vision & mission. This	business strategy also accounts for and is
5.	s executives, managers, employees and	business partners as they engage with the

Figure 3. The concordance results of *business*

Figure 4 illustrates the concordance outputs of the word *people*. Based on the collocational and colligational patterns underlined, we may notice that semantic prosody of the word *people* with other words around it is positive rather than negative. For example, in concordance line number 8, the lexico-grammatical pattern *people seeking the lasting benefits of good health* shows evidence of positive prosody; that is, *lasting benefits and good health*.

7	change lives; and through our products, our	people and our business opportunity, we work to
8	Sunshine is the proven choice for	people seeking the lasting benefits of good health
9	millions of customers every day. And when	people are healthier, lives are truly transformed.
11	idea of earning money by helping other	people feel better truly fuels your inner fire,
12	learned a lot about helping	people reach their goals. Building and maintaining

Figure 4. The concordance results of *people*

5. CONCLUSION

All the five MLM wellness company's websites strategically and frequently used persuasive words, such as *products, business, health, quality, and world* in their advertising texts as a means of persuading consumers. These words are semantically related to the words around them, forming strong collocational patterns. The rhetorical function of the patterns is persuasive, and they are used strategically to persuade consumers. The collocational patterns reveal the persuasive nature of the MLM advertisements. Besides showing the pragmatic function, the semantic prosody all the patterns strongly indicate the goodness of the health products. This study recommends establishing a larger corpus comprising massive data gathered from a large number of MLM advertising texts to investigate both the micro-linguistic and macro-linguistic properties of MLM phraseology.

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