

REGISTRAL FEATURES OF FILM ADVERTISING IN  
INDIAN ENGLISH

The recent developments in Institutional linguistics have led to a growing realization that the concept of a whole and undifferentiated language is not functionally useful for many linguistic purposes<sup>1</sup> and that the study of sub-languages and registers deserves greater scholarly attention than ever. It is particularly so when the descriptive, pedagogical and stylistic purposes are involved. This clearly indicates a shift of emphasis from the "universalistic tradition" to the tradition often termed as "particularistic" stressing variation and change within a language in accordance with the divergences in communicative situations. The present paper aims at describing and documenting one such restricted language, namely that of film advertising in Indian English.

The Indian film industry, which occupies the first position in the world production of films has contributed in many ways to the evolution of a specific language variety geared to its needs. The present study is restricted to just one context of the industry namely film advertisements in English. The corpus is drawn from the following newspapers: The Hindustan Times, The Times of India and The Deccan Chronicle. The language of film advertising is described primarily in terms of lexical features and stylistic devices. Here in this register we are faced with a situation in which the dividing line between informing and persuading is a thin one. This necessitates the employment of various eye-catching devices and creative use of language that not only serve as vehicle of communication but also please and persuade, and subsequently modify the thought and behaviour of the readers.

It is common knowledge that each register has a special vocabulary, a particular idiom of its own. Darbyshire has rightly pointed out, "The register of the language use is hinted at by the choice of some indispensable words, which must be there, even though there be only a few of them."<sup>2</sup> Thus, some of the

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<sup>1</sup> Catford J.C. *Linguistic Theory of Translation*. London: Oxford University Press, 1965. Butler C.S. and Hartman R.R.K. *A Reader on Language Variety*. Exeter Linguistic Studies, Vol. 1, University of Exeter, 1976.

<sup>2</sup> Darbyshire A.E. *A Grammar of English Style*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1971

words and phrases which peculiarly belong to the register of film advertising in India are as follows: *Hit, Houseful, Matinee, Starring, Starcast, Cinematic, Cinegoer, Adults only, Grand gala opening, Combined week, Free lists, Daily four shows, Entertainment galore, Spell binding action, On area public demand, Plans open.*

It has often been pointed out that vocabulary is "never a very reliable test of dialect"<sup>3</sup> presumably because of the frequent borrowings from one dialect into another. It can however be affirmed that compared to dialect, register registers far greater loyalty from vocabulary. The term *houseful* seems to be embedded in the register of film or theatrical show in India and it cannot be used in any other register. For instance, the board *houseful* cannot be hanged outside a school, hostel, hospital or lodge when no seats are available.

Often when the existing stock of words is felt to be inadequate and wanting, new words are coined. Some of the coinages by film advertisers: *Spell-Binding, Starrer* (as in *multi-starrer*), *Cinematic, Screenful, Mirth quoted, cinegoer, Chiller, Classy (Classy men) Hilarious, Touchy, Escapade* and *Spyrobatics*. Sometimes a common word is given an uncommon meaning not to be found in any dictionary. A case in point is the word *touchy* in the phrase *a heart touchy film*. The normal dictionary meaning of the word *touchy* is "easily or quickly offended" which cannot be applied in the present context. The new coinages are not arbitrary but follow the established patterns of English word-formation and bear witness to the ingenuity of the copywriter. However, many of these creations survive only as nonce words and fail to get into common currency in day-to-day interaction. Sometimes with a view to catching the attention of the readers, the advertisers take liberty with the conventional spelling of words i.e., *Excitement, High-voltage, SSS scream*. The orthographic image fixed on memory by *SSS scream* is decidedly far more lasting than that of the usual *Scream*. Distortion of normal spelling is a common attention-getting device in the language of advertisement.

Film advertising belongs to the category of short-text registers where a mere peripheral glance can suggest the form and the contents of the passage. Here the so-called "chameleon" technique is clearly discernable. The very first line in a film advertisement signals the register:

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<sup>3</sup> Brook G.L. *Varieties of English*, London: Macmillan, 1973.

*See today, See today*  
*Extended! Extended!*  
*Adult Opening Tomorrow.*  
*A Must See For All.*

*Show of Shows*  
*Daily four shows.*  
*All Time Record Smasher.*  
*Hurry! Limited. Run.*

Collocation is yet another feature that characterizes and identifies a register. The number of collocates of a given word varies from register to register. Furthermore, certain collocations are possible in a given register only and not in any other register. This analysis of the corpus of film advertisements revealed no fewer than 39 collocates of the word *week*:

<i>Farewell week</i>	<i>Gripping week</i>	<i>Spell binding week</i>	<i>Houseful week</i>
<i>Popular week</i>	<i>Little week</i>	<i>Terrific week</i>	<i>Romantic week</i>
<i>Super week</i>	<i>Fabulous week</i>	<i>Action week</i>	<i>Lucky week</i>
<i>Steady week</i>	<i>Sparkling week</i>	<i>Solo week</i>	<i>Electrifying week</i>
<i>Scintillating week</i>	<i>Bumper week</i>	<i>Attractive wee k</i>	<i>Superhit week</i>
<i>Applauded week</i>	<i>Combined week</i>	<i>Crowded week</i>	<i>Sizzling week</i>
<i>Holy week</i>	<i>Superspectacle week</i>	<i>Big week</i>	<i>James Bond week</i>
<i>Thrilling week</i>	<i>Smashing week</i>	<i>Fantastic week</i>	<i>Towering week</i>
<i>Smash hit week</i>	<i>Delightful week</i>	<i>Extended week</i>	<i>Adventureful week</i>
<i>Record-breaking week</i>	<i>Highly appreciated week</i>		<i>Uprorious week</i>

It must however be remembered that some collocations in the list have grater frequency than the others. *Smash hit week* or *Houseful week* occurs more frequently than *Steady week* or *Farewell week*. Some of the collocations mentioned above may appear to be rather unusual and even unacceptable but they all have a prominent place in the register of film advertising.

*Hit* is another lexical item occurring frequently in this register. Let us see the ways in which the word *hit* has been made to do so many things in this context:

*Hit music, Sex-hit film, Smash hit week, Hard-hitting, Multiple Jubilee hit of hits, A red hot hit, An evergreen hit, The hottest thing to hit the screen.*

Obviously, the word *hit* itself appears to have been subjected to "hard hitting" at the hands of the advertisers.

Some other collocations and compounds which seem to be uncommon and often bizarre but occur frequently in this register are: *Laugh magic, Family film, Family crowds, High speed danger, The first disaster movie, Razor-edged climax, Diamond rush, Tears and cheers.*

Here an item like *Diamond rush* is a case of registral confusion but it very well serves the purpose of the advertiser. Some other interesting cases of

registral confusion are: *An entertainment truly yours, Tickets selling like hot cakes, Voted by overwhelming majority as the most magnificent motion picture.*

One of the registral features of the language of film advertisement is the multiplicity of ways to describe a single content element that is very common in it. One of such items is the release of a new film, which is invariably *a grand, gala, glittering and glamorous event* and is described in a variety of ways some of which are highly metaphorical: *Blasting opening on Friday* or else *A big bomb full of sensation, action, sentiments and hit music is going to explode on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2004*. A new film is not of the earth, earthly: *Out of the sky comes the screen's most incredible spectacle of men and war*. It is sometimes a revelation, *A romantic melodrama unfolds on the super-curved screen of Archana on 5<sup>th</sup> of November*. Another copywriter announces a new arrival with the words: *Kissing the screen on 28<sup>th</sup> October*.

The film advertisers take great pains in the choice of words. To make their language vigorous they make the utmost possible use of human anatomy. A film is often advertised as *rib-tickling* or *nerve-blasting* epic with *pulse-pounding action* and *spine-tingling suspense*. Or else it is a comedy with *ice-nerves* and *lightning* and with *music that sets your heart throbbing*. A suspense thriller could be anything: *mind-blowing, heart-throbbing, blood-chilling, soul-stirring, hair-raising, breath-taking experience etc.*

Often with a view to producing effect and attracting notice the advertisers indulge in vast use of alliteration: *Finest Family Film, Mammoth Mythological Masterpiece, Soul Stirring Story, Breezy Boisterous Bonanza, Funfare Full of Fantastic Feasts, Dynamic Daring Dashing Drama, Special Summer Surprise etc.*

The writers of film advertisements very often exaggerate things to make them look grander than they really are: *the show of shows, the hit of hits, high on high adventure, galaxy of greatest stars in the greatest entertainer of the year, non-stop laugh-riot comedy, a stampede of action and hilarity etc.*

K. Hudson in his "The Dictionary of Diseased English" calls exaggerations as "symptoms of disease,"<sup>4</sup> but for film advertisers they are the "promise of prosperity" in so far as they confuse and hypnotize the addressees and bring them profit.

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<sup>4</sup> Hudson K. The Dictionary of Diseased English. London: Macmillan, 1977.



It is obvious from the foregoing account that certain linguistic forms and stylistic devices are correlated with the register of film advertisement in English. Some of these forms and devices may appear to be cases of linguistic violation. It should be however remembered that violations in the present context have a constructive role in so far as they produce a special kind of effect on the addressee. The copywriters are well aware that their readers have developed a certain immunity to the conventional modes of drawing attention and hence they go on experimenting with the new techniques of attacking so as to be sure of their target.

It is curious that these features are not so prominently discernable when the same films are advertised in Hindi and most other Indian languages. It is difficult to explain this phenomenon because Indian languages are in no way less prone to the persuasive and figurative style. This may perhaps be attributed to the convention and style of film advertising in the British and/or American newspapers that were adopted long ago by the English newspapers in India. Thus, features of film advertising are not identical in English and Hindi. Furthermore, one way of looking at the language of film advertising is to view it as a complex register in so far as it is the meeting-ground of three registers of commerce, journalism and film, each contributing in its own way to the language under review. This calls for a new and more realistic theory of language variety.

## LITERATURE

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