

A TALK ON ADVERTISING

Marquis, while you were talking I looked around this table and saw that (nearly) everyone here wins subsistence through the activity called advertising. Now, I realise that you invited me in the absence, enforced by your sedentary ways, of stuffed tiger heads or other trophies on your walls, a live artist being the equivalent of a dead beast as a social ornament. I will not question your motive because it has given me a chance to do a beautiful and good thing. I should like to entreat all these gentlemen to redeem the strange, bittersweet miracle of their lives, while there is yet time, by giving up the advertising business at once.

Has it ever occurred to any of you gentlemen to examine the peculiar fact that you find bread in your mouths daily? How does this happen? Who is that you have persuaded to feed you? The obvious answer is that you buy your food, but this just states the question in another, less clear way, because money is nothing but an exchange token. Drop the confusing element of money from the whole process, and the question I've posed must confront you bleakly. What is it that you do, that entitles you to eat?

A shoemaker gives shoes for his bread. Well, a singer sings for his supper. Well, a capitalist leads a large enterprise. Well, a pilot flies, a coal-miner digs, a sailor moves things, a minister preaches, an author tells stories, a laundryman washes, an auto worker makes cars, a painter makes pictures, a street car conductor moves people, a stenographer writes down words, a lumberjack saws, and a tailor sews. The people with the victuals appreciate these services and cheerfully feed the performers. But what does an advertising man do?

He induces human beings to want things they don't want.

Now, I will be deeply obliged if you will tell me by what links of logic anybody can be convinced that your activity – the creation of want where want does not exist – is a useful one and should be rewarded with food. Doesn't it seem, rather, the worst sort of mischief, deserving to be starved into extinction?

None of you, however, is anything but well-fed; yet I am sure that until this moment it has never occurred to you on what a dubious basis your feeding is accomplished. I shall tell you exactly how you eat. You induce people to use more things than they naturally desire – the more useless and undesirable the article, the greater the advertising effort needed to dispose of it – and in all the profit from that unnatural purchasing, you share. You are fed by the makers of undesired things, who exchange these things for food by means of your arts and give you your share of the haul.

Lest you think I oversimplify, I give you an obvious illustration. People naturally crave meat; so the advertising of meat is on a negligible scale. However, nobody is born craving tobacco, and even its slaves instinctively loathe it. So the advertising of tobacco is the largest item of expense in its distribution. It follows, of course, that advertising men thrive most richly in the service of utterly useless commodities like tobacco or under-arm pastes, or in a field where there is a hopeless plethora of goods, such as soap or whisky.

But the great evil of advertising is not that it is unproductive and wasteful; were it so, it would be no worse than idleness. No. advertising blasts everything that is good and beautiful in this land with a horrid spreading mildew. It has tarnished Creation. What is sweet to any of you in this world? Love? Nature? Art? Language? Youth? Behold them all, yoked by advertising in the harness of commerce.

Aurora Dawn! Has any of you enough of an ear for English to realize what a crime against the language is that (trade) name? Aurora is the dawn. The redundancy should assail your ears like the shriek of a bad hinge. But you are so numbed by habit that it conveys no offence. So it is with all your barbarities. Shakespeare used the rhyming of 'double' and 'bubble' to create two immortal lines in *Macbeth*. You use it to help sell your Dubl-Bubl Shampoo, and you have no slightest sense of doing anything wrong. Should someone tell you that language is the Promethean fire that lifts man above the animals and that you are smothering the flame in mud, you would stare. You are staring. Let me tell you without images, then, that you are cheapening speech until it is ceasing to be an honest method of exchange, and that the people, not knowing that the English in a radio commercial is meant to be a lie and the English in the President's speech which follows, a truth, will in the end fall into a paralysing scepticism in which all utterance will be disbelieved.

God made a great green wonderland when he spread out the span of the United States. Where is the square mile inhabited by men wherein advertising has not drowned out the land's meek hymn with the blare of billboards? By what right do you turn Nature into a painted hag crying 'Come buy'?

A few heavenly talents brighten the world in each generation. Artistic inspiration is entrusted to weak human beings who can be tempted with gold. Has advertising scrupled to buy up the holiest of these gifts and set them to work peddling?

And the traffic in lovely youth! By the Lord, gentlemen, I would close every advertising agency in the country tomorrow, if only to head off the droves of silly girls, sufficiently cursed with beauty, who troop into the cities each month, most of them to be stained and scarred, a few to find ashy success in the hardening life of a model! When will a strong voice call a halt to this dismal pilgrimage, the Children's Crusade to the Unholy Land? When will someone denounce the snaring allurements of the picture magazines? When will someone tell these babies that for each girl who grins on a magazine cover a hundred weep in back rooms, and that even the grin is a

bought and forced thing that fades with the flash of the photographer's bulb, leaving a face grim with scheming or heartbreak?

To what end is all this lying, vandalism, and misuse? You are trying to Sell; never mind what, never mind how, never mind to whom – just Sell, Sell, Sell! Small wonder that in good old American slang 'sell' means 'fraud'! Come now! Do you hesitate to promise requited love to miserable girls, triumph to failures, virility to weaklings, even prowess to little children, for the price of a mouth wash or a breakfast food? Does it ever occur to you to be ashamed to live by preying on the myriad little tragedies of unfulfilment which make your methods pay so well?

I trust that I am offending everybody very deeply. An artist has the privileges of the court fool, you know. I paint because I see with a seeing eye, an eye that familiarity never glazes. Advertising strikes me as it would a man from Mars and as it undoubtedly appears to the angels: an occupation the aim of which is subtle prevarication for gain, and the effect of which is the blighting of everything fair and pleasant in our time with the garish fungus of greed. If I have made all of you, or just one of you, repent of this career and determine to seek decent work, I will not have breathed in vain today.

- Herman Wouk

About the Lesson

The essay 'On Advertising' articulates Herman Wouk's genuine fears and doubts about today's thriving business of advertising. Commercial advertisements often seek to generate increased consumption of the products which are not actually required and thus induce people to use more things than they naturally desire. He points out very rightfully the pitfalls and the deceptions inherent in advertising that have made it more of a racket than a business. He also condemns the misuse of language in it. Wouk deplores very strongly the social evils and moral degradation that are rampant in the field of advertising.

Herman Wouk was born in New York. He has written essays, novels and plays which have brought him worldwide acclaim. In 1951 he was awarded Pulitzer Prize for his novel *The Caine Mutiny*.

GLOSSARY

subsistence	: livelihood
sedentary	: referring to work done while sitting down at desk
stuff	: (here) fill out the skin of dead animal with material to retain its natural form and appearance for display
redeem	: recover ; get back
bittersweet	: both pleasant and painful
Minister	: (here) Christian priest

street car	: public vehicle on rails running regularly along city streets
lumberjack	: one who cuts and prepare timber
victuals	: provisions
induce	: persuade
extinction	: total abolition
dubious	: doubtful
haul	: amount gained
loathe	: hate
thrive	: prosper
plethora	: excessive; abundance
mildew	: destructive growth of minute fungi on plants, leather, food etc.
tarnish	: diminish or destroy the purity of
yoke	: join
harness of commerce	: control of business
Aurora	: In Roman mythology, goddess of the dawn
redundancy	: state of not being needed
numbed	: be deprived of sensation
offence	: hurt
barbarity	: savage cruelty
Promethean	: daring or inventive (in Greek mythology Prometheus is the person who stole fire from Olympus and gave it to mankind.)
smother	: extinguish by covering
skepticism	: doubt about the truth of something
blare	: a loud noise
billboard	: large outdoor advertising, hoarding
hag	: ugly old woman
scrupled	: hesitated owing to uneasiness of conscience
peddle	: go from place to place with goods for sale
Head(smoothing) off	: prevent a difficult or unpleasant situation from happening
drove	: moving crowd
troop	: come together
stained and scarred	: (here) be dishonoured
ashy success	: hardly any success
heartbreak	: overwhelming distress
vandalism	: deliberate destruction or damage of private or public property
requite	: give in return
virility	: manliness, strength or power
prowess	: a superior skill
prey on	: to hurt or deceive those who are weak
myriad	: innumerable
court fool	: clown in a king's court
prevaricate	: be deliberately unclear in order to mislead or withhold
information	
blighting	: spoiling due to growth of fungi; (here) harming
garish	: showy; gaudy

Activity 1: COMPREHENSION

A. Tick the correct alternative:

1. The creation of want or need where it is not required is-
(a) a useful one .
(b) a mischief
(c) praiseworthy
(d) needed to be encouraged
2. As Wouk looks around the table , he sees almost everyone earning bread through the activity called ---
(a) Washing
(b) Painting
(c) Advertising
(d) Singing
3. 'It has given me a chance to do a beautiful and good thing.' The chance is to request people around him to give up the business of
(a) making clothes
(b) advertising
(c) teaching
(d) preaching

B. Answer to the following questions should not exceed 10-15 words each:

1. What, according to the essayist, is money?
2. What does an advertising man do?
3. In case of which articles greater advertising effort is needed?
4. What is the greatest evil of advertising?
5. What does advertising do to everything that is good and beautiful?

C. Answer to the following questions should not exceed 30-40 words each:

1. Why is Wouk against earning livelihood through advertising?
2. Describe, with suitable examples, the misuse of language in advertising.
3. What is the aim of the occupation of advertising?
4. When does language cease to be an honest method of exchange?
5. How is the work of a person in advertising different from that of others?

D. Answer to the following questions should not exceed 60-80 words each:

1. How does advertising have an adverse effect on the mind and life of the young?
2. Write a note on the element of falsehood inherent in the advertising business.

E. Say whether the following statements are true or false. Write T for true and F for false in the bracket:

1. Advertising is a noble profession. []
2. Language should be an honest method of exchange. []

3. The essayist will be fully compensated if even a single person gives up the occupation of advertising and looks for some decent work. []
4. Language has hardly been affected by advertising. []
5. Wouk deplores the moral degradation in the field of advertisement. []

Activity 2: VOCABULARY

1. The word 'subsistence' means "the state of having just enough money or food to stay alive." Form as many phrases as you can by using the word 'subsistence.' One such example may be 'subsistence wage.'
2. The word 'redundancy' has been used in two different sense in the following sentences –
 - (i) Thousands of factory workers are facing redundancy.
 - (ii) Natural language is characterized by 'redundancy'. Now differentiate between layoff and redundancy as used in (i), and 'verbosity' and 'redundancy' as used in (ii). Confirm your answer from the Oxford Advanced Learners dictionary.

Activity 3: GRAMMAR

Part A

Study the following sentences:

1. So he went to his father and said "Father, to whom will you offer me?"
2. His father replied, "Son, don't trouble me now, I am busy."
3. His father got angry and shouted "I will offer you to death."
4. "Granted", said Yama, "ask your second boon."
5. Then Yama said "Nachiketa, ask of me your third boon."

In the sentences given above, the words within quotations are directly reported. What people actually say is direct speech; they are direct quotations; direct quotations are placed between inverted commas or quotation marks; the first word of the direct quotation is capitalized; the verb of saying or asking is cut off by a comma. Notice that at the end of the sentence the quotation marks are placed after the full stop, comma, question mark or mark of exclamation.

It is not always convenient to use direct speech. In reporting, indirect or reported speech is preferred because it is convenient and clear.

It is rarely that a speech is reported at the same time when it is uttered or the same place where it is uttered. This changed context of Time, Person and Place requires the reporter to modify the original speech. The modifications required for changing the direct speech into indirect speech are broadly of three kinds, to suit the changed context of time, person and place.

No Modification of Tense or Person

Direct Speech

Raman says, "Mohan has passed

Indirect Speech

Raman says that Mohan

the examination."

has passed the examination.

When the reporting verb (the verb in the main clause) is in the present, or future and when the nouns in the noun clause refer to the third person singular or plural, no modification is necessary in tense and person. Only the punctuation marks are changed in the written form. Modifications made are as follows:

Modification in Tense

	Direct	—>	Indirect
1. Present	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> Simple Perfect Continuous </div>	—> Past	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> Simple Perfect Continuous </div>
	Simple	—> No change / sometimes past perfect	
2. Past	Perfect Continuous	—> No change —> No change / sometimes past perfect	
	continuous		

Modification in Person (Personal Pronouns)

The Pronouns of first person and second person are changed according to who the speaker and the listener are. Pronouns of the first person in the reported part are changed according to the person of the subject of the reporting verb. Pronouns of the second person are changed according to the object of the reporting verb. Pronouns of the third person normally remain unchanged.

Examples

1. (a) The woman said to the officer, "I have got a gift for you."
The woman told the officer that she had got a gift for him.
- (b) "Have you come to file a complaint?" The officer asked the young man.
The officer asked the youngman whether he had come to file a complaint.
- (c) "Are you joining us ?," they asked me.
They asked me whether I was joining them.
2. (a) Mohan said to the strangers, "Mayank has killed the scorpion."
Mohan told the strangers that Mayank (had) killed the scorpion.
- (b) The actress said, "I had performed the role of maid servant in three films."
The actress said that she had performed the role of maid servant in three films.
- (c) The scooterist said, "I was driving at a speed of 30km/hr."
The scooterist said that he was driving at a speed of 30km/hr.

We have said that in reported speech present tense changes to past tense (of course when the tense outside the quotes is past). This does not apply when what is said in direct speech either refers to a general truth or is relevant even at the time of reporting.

Example:

Mr. Dev said he was an Indian.

(This is not correct since Mr. Dev is still an Indian)

Mr. Dev felt that competition begins early in life.

(This is better since it is relevant even today)

I thought you were a gentleman.

(This will mean that I now think you are not.)

When reporting statements, questions, commands, advice etc. it is better to mention the way they were said or asked. The connective word "to" is used in commands, advice, etc. and "whether" or "if" in yes-no questions.

Part B

Exercise

(i) Imagine that you were asked the following questions in an interview. Tell your friend what questions were asked. Examples:

(a) How old are you?

They asked me how old I was.

(b) Are you a student?

They asked me whether.....

(a) Can you type?

(b) Have you had a job before?

(c) How long have you been working in your present job?

(d) What are your interests?

(e) What made you apply for this job?

Part C-Language Work

Do as Directed.

A. "Marquis, while you were talking I looked around and saw that everyone here wins subsistence through advertising." (Change the narration.)

B. "Drop the confusing element of money from the whole process, and the question I've posed must confront you bleakly." he said. (Change the narration.)

Activity 4: SPEECH ACTIVITY

Advertising ensures consumer's access to the best product. Advertising, likewise, has become a deceptive device also. Keeping in mind this view, organize a speech activity on the following topic –

‘Advantages and Disadvantages of Advertising’

Activity 5: COMPOSITION

Draw an advertisement depicting the advantages of reading habits. It may be in any form you like.