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## Enchantment Strategies in Polish Radio Commercials: An Ethnographic Approach\*

*Abstract:* The article investigates the linguistic reflection of post-modernist sociological theory (e.g. Campbell 1989; Baudrillard 1979, 1998; Ritzer 2001) in the case study of Polish radio commercials. I assumed that radio commercials are a communicative event of the post-modern society. Furthermore, they a simulated event: a guided conversation, which is imbued, in Eliade's terminology, with the function of *coincidentia oppositorum*. The source of 310 radio commercials serves to single out enchantment strategies in the commercial idiolect, reflecting the seduction, fetishism and the decline of the moral posture of *autarchy* in contemporary society.

*Keywords:* enchanting, magic, hyper-reality, *coincidentia oppositorum*, fetishism, post-modernism.

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

And I decided that I needed less, not more.

“The Residents,” *Commercial Album*.

The paper makes a contribution to a globalization-sensitive sociolinguistics. The reported research analyzes the enchantment strategies as employed in the linguistic layer of Polish radio commercials. It attempts at tracing linguistic parallels with the consumerist phenomena which have been described within the sociological post-modernist theory, e.g. by Baudrillard (1973, 2005), Ritzer (e.g. 2001) and Campbell (e.g. 1989).<sup>2</sup> The main goal of the study is to identify possible areas of imprinting linguistic manipulation into societal structuring.

As stated by Berry–Waldfoegel (1999), “[r]adio signals are pure public goods whose total value to society is the sum of their value to advertisers and listeners” (Berry–Waldfoegel 1999: 189). The impact of radio commercials is usually underappreciated in sociolinguistic research. The scholars usually concentrate on the visual layer of commercials, especially these appearing in periodicals or on TV or on music

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<sup>1</sup> For practical reasons this article includes only the English translation of the copies. All the translations from Polish are mine, MHG. The translation choices had to take into account the fact that there is a gender distinction in nouns in Polish and the ads rely heavily on immanent gender connotations. To accommodate such a discursive technique, I mark the gender of the original in square brackets in the translation.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Ritzer (1997) for the detailed overview and references on post-modernist sociological theory.

programming.<sup>3</sup> The present paper is in the form of a qualitative case study and it aims to provide insights into the social reflection of phrasing implicit in commercials.

The analytical paradigm is based on the tenets of ethnography of communication. To recall briefly, ethnography of speaking emerged as a separate field of enquiry to deal with the questions that could not be answered by linguistics, ethnography, sociobiology or anthropology. The term was coined by Dell Hymes (1962) and denoted investigating communication as an activity in its own right. Accordingly, communication is viewed against the background of a specific culture. The main purpose of ethnography of communication may be stated as “research directed toward the formulation of descriptive theories of speaking (communication) as a cultural system” (Bauman–Sherzer 1974: 6). Viewed from such a perspective, the cultural background comprises the relevant aspects of the organization of communication in social life:

- speech community with its communicative repertoire and code matrix (cf. Gumperz 1962),
- the ground rules for speaking and the context of occurrence of communicative events as well as their components like channel, setting, participants (cf. Hymes 1974a,b for the overview of literature).

Communicative events are the central point of the analysis and their description takes into account the semantic (paradigmatic or syntagmatic) habits of a given speech community, Exemplary communicative events are: *an interview, a sermon, a sales talk*. The first step is thus to establish what counts as a communicative event in a given culture.

I assumed that a radio commercial is a communicative event in a consumptive society. More specifically, it is a sort of a para-event (simulated event), which largely supplanted the subsequent communicative exchange in an actual act of purchasing. Following Hymes I apply the method of paradigmatic contrasts which includes:

- discovering an adequate contextual framework,
- identifying the positions which remain in contrast within such a framework,
- enumerating the dimensions of contrast.

The social foundation for this radio commercials case study is the post-modern sociological theory as elaborated among others by Weber, Ritzer and Campbell. Weber’s research focused on societal factors such as: enchanting, rationalization and disenchanting. These forces are according to Weber contradictory: the rationalization of the post-modernist society entails the destruction of the world which used to be magical. His thought was later developed by Campbell (e.g. 1989). Campbell stressed the importance of individual dreams: dreams can be far more satisfying than the reality. When people, through various means and goods of consumption are able to

<sup>3</sup> For the sociological study on music standardization on the radio entailing the examination of market environments, organizational policies etc. contributing to the study of culture production, see, e.g. Ahlqvist–Fisher 2000; on categorization of ads as a discourse type and the general relationship of social theory and sociolinguistic theory in the realm of consumerism and globalization cf. for example *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 2003 volume 7; Cook 1992. For the semiotic perspective of visual commercials, cf. Eco 1991 [1996]; Kress–van Leeuwen 1996.

satiate their dreams, they feel disappointed because it turns out that the reality cannot rival the dreams. They re-immense into consumerism in the hopes that this time the material reality will withhold the imaginary expectations.

There lies his opposition to Weber's theory: for Campbell, the late-capitalism is a word of fantasy and dreams. Ritzer (2001) has upgraded Campbell's theory by claiming that the 'shrines of consumption'<sup>4</sup> are not only rationalized and disenchanted, but at the same time they must be re-enchanted (Ritzer 2001: 124). In other words, in order for the shrines of consumption to continue functioning and thriving, it is paramount to subject them to the process of the re-enchantment. I follow his line of thought assuming the necessity to enchant the customer, and accordingly, I analyze particular strategies of enchantment which are implicated in the linguistic layer of radio commercials. Furthermore, the paper relies on Baudrillard's (e.g. 1979, 1998) theory regarding seduction and simulation mechanisms.

A caveat is in order here. My research is written in the framework of discourse analysis, in other words, it entails only the sociolinguistic interpretation of the structuring of sample advertising messages. This is the reason why the theoretical part does not tackle the issue of "believers," i.e. the receivers of the commercial texts. This omitted aspect is definitely significant when we envisage the advert as a quasi-religious form within the sacralized sphere of consumption. Any cult presupposes its followers and the enchantment entails its object. What follows, the techniques of 'the enchanters' are to a large extent a reflection of 'the believers' needs and of their weaknesses, which are socially defined (I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for having pointed it out). Nevertheless, I decided to leave this issue open for future research and to concentrate on, undoubtedly intuitive, qualitative interpretation of particular commercial messages.<sup>5</sup>

My study proceeds as follows. The first section describes the data employed in the study and contextualizes the research choices. Section two analyzes the theoretical postulate that consumerism is a contemporary religion. The discussion is meant to justify the adopted paradigm of interpreting the consumerist commodification of language as magical and dissociated from religion. Section three exposes some of the manipulation techniques hidden under the amicable dialogues. I claim that radio adverts are a communicative event of the post-modern society. Yet, they are a simulated event, which tends to supplant the particular speech acts in the setting of buying goods. Section four applies Mircea Eliade's concept of *coincidencia oppositorum* (merging of the opposites) to analyze the mediating function of an ad. The final section determines the techniques whereby ads cater for the societal longing for the detachment from reality: magic.

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<sup>4</sup> The original Ritzer's formulation was 'cathedrals of consumption;' however, I decided to change it into a more conceptually neutral term; 'shrines of consumption' seems to be more suitable.

<sup>5</sup> An exemplary study of radio commercials in US markets from the socio-economic perspective can be found in e.g. Berry-Waldfoegel 1999. The study also subsumes the analysis of listenability to particular stations using AQH (average quarter hour) format.

### Corpus description

The study was conducted in Opole (a town in the south-west of Poland) and the reported research is valid for Opolskie voivodship radio market,<sup>6</sup> that is, the basic scope where regional broadcasts are receivable. Prior to the research, in 2005 I conducted a pilot study to determine the best period for collecting the data. I wanted to establish a lapse of time which would not be too short, not too long, which would be specifically delimited and where I could single out particular launches of advertising campaigns.

The Christmas marketing hype turned out to meet all these requirements. The data for the main study was thus collected for a month starting from 20<sup>th</sup> October 2006 till 20<sup>th</sup> December 2006. That is, I started recording the ads a week before the launch of Christmas advertising campaigns and finished a week after there were not any new additions to the corpus of broadcast ads. The ads were aired for about two weeks more, till about the New Year's Eve, and then they vanished. Altogether, the source for the research includes 310 ads, which subsumes also the variegation within particular lines of ads. For example, a chain of electronic appliances stores launched two groups of about six ads which were thematically connected, although they entailed a substantial variegation in the textual layer. I counted each of such ads separately.

The pilot study also helped me to choose broadcasting stations. As Berland (1990) remarked, “[m]usic programming is not the main commodity produced by radio but is rather the means to the production of radio's real commodity—the audience—to be sold to advertisers in exchange for revenue to the broadcaster” (1990: 183). I decided to draw data for the study from two commercial broadcasting stations (*RMF FM* and *Radio Zet*) of nation-wide scope and three regional commercial stations (*Radio Żłote Przeboje*, *Eska* and *Radio Planeta*). The reasons for deciding on such a selection were as follows. All of the stations under research are nationwide and all can be also listened on-line, which makes them in fact of international scope. The stations aim for different demographic slices, which in totality cover all the possible adult age groups of the inhabitants of the region.

Both *RMF FM* and *Radio Zet* are the most influential nation-wide commercial broadcasters, involved in all sorts of marketing campaigns which largely surpass mere broadcasting. Both are involved in marketing deals with other influential companies. *RMF FM* (<http://www.rmfm.fm/>, on-line version [http://nadaje.com/RMF\\_FM.html](http://nadaje.com/RMF_FM.html)) is the first nationwide commercial station, established in Cracow in January 1990 and owned by the media group BROKER FM. *Radio Zet* (<http://www.radiozet.com.pl/>) started broadcasting in September 1990. The current owner of the station is Eurozet. Both stations play mostly pop music with extremely stable and invariant repertoire, which establishes the target ‘clientele’ as basically both younger and middle-aged people, with the preference for middle-aged listeners.

The stations which I classified as local, are all in fact also nationwide networks of commercial broadcasting stations, with local branches in particular cities. *Radio Eska*, advertised as the biggest in Poland chain of broadcasting stations, has been on air since

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<sup>6</sup> The population of the voivodship is over one million inhabitants, the surface 8535 km<sup>2</sup>.

1990. It consists of 32 local broadcasting stations. Currently it forms part of the radio group Time. The format is CHR (Contemporary Hits Radio), which means that the broadcasts specialize in pop, dance, hip-hop, r'n'b and club.<sup>7</sup> The addressees of the program are thus people under 30. *Planeta FM* (<http://www.planetafm.pl/index2.html>) specializes in electronic dance music (the offer varies from techno to rap), which, *ditto Eska*, makes it the format listened to mainly by teenagers. *Radio Złote przeboje* ([www.zloteprzeboje.pl](http://www.zloteprzeboje.pl)) is a network composed of 18 local broadcasting stations. With its 'credo' implicated in the name, it plays golden hits (oldies) from the 60-ies, 70-ies and 80-ies. The offer is thus a bit more conservative than *Radio Zet* or *RFM FM*, aiming mainly for middle-aged and older listeners.

All of the regional stations maintain the general (franchising) format which is invariant throughout Poland, yet, and that was crucial for my study, the majority of their income is from local adverts. With such a choice, I was able to collect both the local ads and the national ones, and to capture the whole spectrum of offer directed to particular age groups. I excluded from the analysis these broadcasting stations which were partially state-owned, both national (e.g. *Trójka*) and local (e.g. *Radio Opole*). The reason is that they differ considerably in the layout of their offer from the commercial ones (the detailed analysis is beyond the scope of the present paper), although a large portion of ads in fact is repeated.

The starting point for the analysis was the assumption that a 'rational' ad and a rationally efficient ad would be a total opposite of the majority of the commercials in existence (cf. *hard sell* versus *soft sell*, *reason* versus *tickle* advertising). From the practical point of view it might be enough to inform a potential customer in a neutral voice with the neutral prosody, as briefly as possible, where they can buy what product and what its advantages are. That type of a commercial was my 'zero point.' Next I discarded the 'zero point' commercials, which were quite frequent especially in the local broadcasting. 'Zero point' broadcasts included announcements of charity appeals, books, music concert venues and tarot fortunetelling. I also excluded movie mini-trailers, because even if they used extra-linguistic means such as parts of their soundtrack, the structure of the message was contained within the hermeneutical horizon of the film as a communicative event: it did not relate metaphorically or metonymically to hyper-reality. That was the reason why the statistical breakdown into local versus national advertising could not be performed. The majority of local ads, which *nota bene* were broadcast with great frequency, were of 'zero point' type, hence I did not record them.

In the article I avoid citing the generic names of particular services, brands and companies which were advertised so as not to contribute to the commercial impact. Each of the products/companies mentioned is alluded to by X, Y etc. Notwithstanding, the full reference and audio-recorded corroboration is available upon request from the author.

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<sup>7</sup> The commercial 16 formats as used by Berry-Waldfoegel 1999 basing on Duncan's data, are: adult contemporary, album oriented rock, black, big band/ nostalgia, country, contemporary hit radio (top 40), classical music, classic album oriented rock, full service / variety, jazz, news / talk, oldies, religious, soft adult contemporary, Hispanic, and unknown (Berry-Waldfoegel 1999: 192).

### Religion Versus Seduction and Magic: Commercial Hierophanies?

The section is intended to voice my reservations with respect to some of the issues raised by the above adduced sociological research. There is a tendency among sociological theoreticians to call *consumerism* a new religion of a post-modern society. For example, Ritzer (2001: 23f) claims that new means of consumption can be named 'cathedrals of consumption' because for many people they took on a magical if not religious character. Among social theoreticians, shopping centers are often described as places where people go to practice their consumptive religion. It is claimed that such centers have much in common with the religious centers of traditional civilizations (Ritzer 2001: 24, Zepp 1997) and that the rationalized and disenchanted word of capitalism has lost the patience for such magical realms as religion (Ritzer 2001: 122). Ritzer furthermore postulates that almost in the whole world the entertaining aspect (having fun) is one of the most prominent facets of religion. Shopping centers, equally to religious centers, provide places for entertainment (Ritzer 2001: 24).

I submit that this interpretation is incorrect. For sure, the issue of religion from the societal and philosophical perspectives has been widely discussed in the past (e.g. the thought of Ludwig Feuerbach, Arnold Ruge, Frederic Engels, Max Weber, Leszek Kołakowski, etc.) and I would not dare to raise it as a polemic. It might appear, though, that institutionalized religions overtly disapprove of consumerism. For example, Carvajal, a catholic writer, (1998: 582) calls consumerist attachments a "disorderly affection:" the things in themselves are neither good nor bad, they might be even useful. What is problematic is when a man becomes attached to them in a disorderly way and begins to love them in a disorderly way, which results in manufacturing an idol (Carvajal 1998: 583).

Of course, it does not mean I am trying to reduce religious beliefs to their normative consequences (ethical program), falling into Braithwaite's trap. I fully follow Kołakowski (1982) in assuming that linguistic 'sacrum' is not normative in the semantic sense, i.e. it is not possible to completely reduce it to moral values. Neither is it normative in psychological sense, which would mean that people acknowledge myths as if they carried only 'prescriptive' content, nor can religious beliefs be exhaustively described only in terms their function of the regulator of human behavior. All I venture to postulate that such a function is likely to be immanent in the sacrum language. Culture in anthropological sense does not tolerate vacuum; when one type of structures disappears, there is place for another. But, whether is it the dissociation with structural underpinnings, which, among other things, are supplied by religion or, whether it is the consumerism that destroys structure, is a controversial topic.

Let us next analyze the statement that shopping centers are places where people go to practice their consumptive religion (cf. Ritzer *supra*). On the face of it, it seems nothing else but the epitome corroboration of Mircea Eliade's concern that modern society becomes totally dissociated from the *sacrum* and more concerned with the *profanum*. However, I am tracing here the dissociation not inherent in the society but

in the mentality of the researcher who put forward such a hypothesis.<sup>8</sup> I claim that the whole axis of the analysis is wrong: how can we possibly bestow the attributes of *sacrum* (in the sense as elaborated by the unequalled oeuvre of Mircea Eliade) on a shopping mall and further claim that people practice there their religion? That is exactly the incarnation of Eliade's concern: the western world (the theoreticians as well, to make the matters worse), seems to camouflage the *sacrum* and identify it with the *profanum*, effectuating thus some sort of analytical reductionism; *das Heilige* is reduced to *das Profane* (Eliade 1976: 3) (this reductionism will be important later on in my interpretation of the data). The shopping centre, to my judgment, cannot be equaled on any plane with the *sacrum* or with the religion in any professional elaboration. On the contrary, it is the essence of the lack of *sacrum*, and the attachment to *profanum*, although of course it does not mean that there is anything inherently wrong because of that in a shopping centre.<sup>9</sup>

To frame the elenchus on religion versus consumerism, I therefore suggest that any analytical framework of consumerism must draw a clearly defined line between enchantment and religiosity. Religion appears to belong to the sphere of conscious mental effort to seek *sacrum* and inner perfection, to impose order on mental processes. On the other side we might discern the sphere of magic, enchantment and seduction, which rely on entertainment and manipulation and which appeals directly to the subconscious. These "murky depths" often require some sort of intermediation: panacea, talismans, charms, voodoo etc. It follows that the enchantment, magic and seduction emphasize the impotence of an individual to cope with their problems or with the reality, and they seem to reinforce the need for external remedy. The extreme case obtains when an individual is made to believe they have problems or needs in order to become manipulated by a 'healer' (a syndrome of Kowinsky's *hypermarket zombie* might be a somewhat simplified illustration of the above reasoning). We thus arrive at the opposition subsuming individual decision versus granting other person the permission to decide for yourself.

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<sup>8</sup> I am not a pioneer in the procedure though, similar perspective was used e.g. by Gellner. "As it happens, this notion is explored, with unparalleled philosophic depth, by the two greatest philosophers of the eighteenth century, David Hume and Immanuel Kant, both of whom, under the fond delusion that they were analysing the human mind as such, *an sich*, anywhere, any time, were in fact giving very profound accounts of the general logic of the new spirit whose emergence characterized their age" (Gellner 1983: 20f).

<sup>9</sup> Further revelations include the cited statements that 'most religions' rely mainly on entertainment. Yet, even in the most 'stereotypical' orgiastic religious ideas, such as for example the cult of Dionysus, with its *omophagia*, *sparagmos*, *mania*, *enthousiasmos* and *eutheos* (cf Eliade 1976: 252ff), the deity was conceptualized as both the god of fertility and death. Subsuming the multifacedness of this cult as "entertainment in religion" is a gross simplification. Furthermore, the concepts themselves seem to be conditioned by the changing hermeneutical horizon (cf. *concept grow*). Diachronic understanding of the ethics of the systems of beliefs might fall in the trap of clichés. For example, contemporarily 'hedonism' is connoted with indulging in unrestricted pleasure (cf. Campbell 1989 claims that hedonism has supplanted ascetism). Yet, the Epicurean style meant in fact the pursuit of happiness, not pleasure, which could be obtained only through having control over your illusions and through *ataraxia* (inner tranquility). Hence, the contemporary semantic horizon of hedonism does not correspond to its Greek original. The same fate of popular superficiality seems to be in store for 'religion,' judging by the ethical stance of the analyzed sociological research.

Baudrillard (1979) in his study on seduction has arrived at similar opposition, juxtaposing seduction and interpretation in the discourse. If we assume that interpretation is conscious and creative, while seduction is subconscious and guided, we might be agreed that the commercial discourse rules out interpretation and relies mainly on seduction, i.e. on guided and induced interpretation on the part of the potential listener (Baudrillard 1979: 77f). Hence it might be hypothesized that the commercial idiolect subsumes what Baudrillard called *l'horizon sacré des apparences*. In other words, the commercial discourse is a denial of sense: “La *seduction* est ce qui ôte au discours son sens et le détourne de sa vérité. [...] c'est tout cela qui efface la teneur de sens, et c'est cela qui est séduisant, alors que le sens d'une discourse n'a jamais séduit personne. *Tout discours de sens veut mettre fin aux apparences, c'est là son leurre et son imposture*” (Baudrillard 1979: 77f). The seduction of the non-sense is linguistically reflected in the preposterous connotations used in most commercial slogans.

This, in my opinion, is the principal message behind advertising: the distinction between 'sense' and 'nonsense,' the truth and falsity is abolished. Potential customers are imbued with needs and with the conviction that a particular commodity will solve their problems. This is, in turn connected with the decline of the ability to direct one's own decisions and self-reliance: the decline of the moral posture of *autarchy*. In the present article I trace and discuss the particular examples of this process as embodied in the commercial idiolect.

### Simulated Communicative Interaction

*Interactive behavior* is just as empty container, without any immanent meaning, before we have filled it with the assumptions from a given culture. I assumed that radio commercials are an interactive situation in a modern culture. I analyzed thus the commercials as an interlocutory act according to the tenets of the ethnography of communication. In other words, I tried to find out where the seller was camouflaged in the commercial text and where the target, i.e. the customer, was. Two main types of dialogues were singled out. I named the first type *intrinsic dialogues* (soliloquies) and the second, *extrinsic dialogues*. Both types imply the dialogue with the potential consumer. In intrinsic dialogues overtly there might be just one speaker, however, this one speaker assumes the role of both interlocutors of the extrinsic dialogue. Finally, there were *performance* ads, which involved staging up a performance, on the face of it having nothing to do with the target product.

The analysis evokes the impressive function of the speech act: impressing the interlocutor on the level of consciousness (persuasion) or on the subconscious level (manipulation). I simplified the Cook's categorization of participants (1992: 2) to the barely functional, elementary scheme. To wit, Cook states that each participant of the ad is simultaneously a part of the context and an observer of it: “[p]articipants are usually described as senders, addressers, addressees and receivers. (The sender of a message is not always the same as the addresser, the person who originates it.



Neither is the ‘receiver’ always the addressee, the person for whom it is intended” (Cook 1992: 2). I discuss the ads mainly in terms of senders and addressees. The crucial distinction was for me the ethnographic distinction: whether the sender featured as a listener or as a speaker and whether the addressee was hidden in the guise of the speaker or listener.

The interplay of various communicative functions yields the following simulated interlocutors:

- Speaker: Seller
- Speaker: Customer
- Listener: Customer
- Listener: Seller

In other words, the interlocutory role of a speaker and listener are taken respectively by the seller and the customer. The extreme case was when a seller addressed directly the listener, whose illocutionary part was muted. There were two such ads in my corpus:

(1) Gloss: ‘Listener! (vocative), I am talking to you! Put the volume up because I am not going to shout. That is better. Did you know that...(2) Gloss: ‘Hello, can you hear me? My name is Ana, please put up the volume. Are you planning to redecorate your flat?.’

In describing the general structure I also singled out the function which I dubbed *mistogoge* or ‘demiurge.’ Namely, in all the ads under scrutiny which were structured so as to have the coda reminder of the product, it was always the male, distinctively low voice, that channeled the evoked emotions onto the target product. In the transcriptions I note this ‘interlocutor’ as “Dem” (A.K.A. *demiurge*).

Extrinsic dialogues were used mostly in the ads of diet supplements (immunology boosting medicaments, coughing syrups, etc). In fact, all items of this brand of publicity in my corpus used the technique of extrinsic dialogue. Anti-senility medication was the exception: it relied both on the extrinsic and intrinsic dialogue. Let us analyze the exemplary line of ads in the advertising campaign of an anti-senility pharmaceutical.

Gloss: [female voice]: Father, daddy. I have always been my daddy’s little daughter. My father is my friend. Yesterday I remembered thought of how many wonderful holidays we have spent together. I love talking to him, joking. I would like to give him health as a gift, make his heart beat stronger for ever. To have him with us for as long as possible.’ X: the best gift for these you love: health.

Other versions of the publicity line of this ad include the gender reversal of the communicative roles. In this way that the complete line of publicity covers the whole potential possible spectrum of the buyers of X: 1. Women buying X for their mothers (e.g. mum, mummy, she always helps, she’s always there for me’). 2. Women buying X for their fathers, 3. Men buying X for their mothers. 4. Men buying X for their fathers. Here is the ‘male’ version of the ad:

Gloss: [male voice]: Father, daddy, old man, my teacher of life. A friend, he will always listen to me, he will want to help. Now, when he is after 50, more and more often he lacks strength. I would like to give him health so as never to have to miss him. For Christmas I bought him X. [Dem:]: X: the best for my father. And for yours?

As can be seen, the “surface” realization as a friendly monologue hides sophisticated psychological tricks. Different techniques of appeal are used in the case of female and male speakers, different persuasion strategies in the case of buying for mothers and for fathers. To reach the female buyers the emotional aspect is stressed, as well as memories and the possibility to have someone to talk to. For male buyers, the prototype of father as a mentor and someone to rely on is expounded. But the general strategy is the same: first we have the technique of hooking on the listeners’ emotions by the main interlocutor. Then Dem deals with the technicalities, channeling these emotions into the target commodity and finally the first speaker goes on to conclude that X is the best for their parent, closing with the classical expressive strategy in the form of a rhetoric question “And for yours?”

I interpret the conclusion as a somewhat twisted categorical imperative. If the Listener does not buy the commodity X, it will mean that they do not care about their parents, they would not fulfill their duty towards the older generation, which is a coursebook example of stigma and prestige in language. In ethnographic terms, we are quite close to the verbal folk rites machinery. Namely, the verbalization in this ad is about to assume a creative rite function (a spell). Next logical step, in a pessimist scenario, might be a formulation which might cryptically imply “you’re going to be sorry if you don’t buy X.”

The most common technique was, however, an extrinsic dialogue. A typical extrinsic dialogue is structured as follows: A (an alter ego of a potential customer-addressee) states the problem. B (a seller) remarks that they had a similar problem and managed to solve it by the use of the commodity X. By means of illustration, let us inspect a fragment of a coughing syrup ad:

A: [coughing] B: Gloss [female voices] A: [coughing] B: I can hear you too have a cough. A: Yes, a persistent dry one. C: And I am afflicted by a wet cough. B: Have you ladies heard that Number 1 for both dry and wet cough is X? Dem: X has helped millions of Poles.

This is an example of a typical direct listener: seller dialogue. The seller in the guise of the neighbor “in the know” persuades a listener to buy their pharmaceutical and the argument is supported with simulated majority appeal.

Finally, there can be dialogues with the connotation shift. In the discourse theory, the technique is called metonymical semantic shift (occurring within a domain). In this case, there is no problem to discuss at all: both interlocutors are a seller in one:

A: Gloss: A: Good morning, I would like to redecorate my flat. B: And how would you envisage the redecoration? A: Just the standard type: sauna, Jacuzzi, air conditioning. Dem: X (a make of a car): gets you accustomed to higher standards.

In this case, both A and B stage a performance which creates the propitious ambient to shift the connotation to the target product. A sub-set of this technique is the unspoken premise that the possessor reflects the possessed or the possessed affects the possessor (cf. Cook 1992: 10). In the case of visual ads the technique is straightforward: it is enough to show a glamorously looking man or woman in the close vicinity to the target product to get the message through. How can this be achieved

on the linguistic level solely? My research showed three basic strategies. The first has already been discussed (a Jacuzzi ad above): glamorous co-texts shedding their glamour on the text. The ads can also use glamorous texts (dialogues) and finally, paralinguistic means (timbre of voice and intonation).

The timbre of voice is impossible to render in the article, however, let it suffice to say, that it was a frequent strategy. The sex-appeal was staged through intonation, and not only in the lingerie publicity, but also, e.g. in advertising a local pizza house, work in Holland, etc. The following example illustrates the technique of the immanent glamour in the text. The addressers are a car dealer and a female customer.

Gloss: A: [female voice] It's me again. Know what, I think I will take the grayness of the perlit after all. B: [male voice] Right...but you know, I've just sold the grayness of perlit. What is left is the cumulus grayness and polar silver. And, of course, the redness of Jupiter. Dem: [...] The choice of colors and models diminishes each day.

Finally, there can be a negative reflection of the lack of glamour, as in this ad of a local beauty parlor:

Gloss: A [female voice]: It is been so many years and you haven't changed at all! Great hairstyle, complexion, make-up. Just look at me, I'm far from that appearance! Tell me, how do you manage to stay that way? B: [another female voice]. My secret is X, a beauty parlor and a hairdresser.

For men the strategy shows in the failure to impress their lady because they did not buy the commodity, e.g.

Gloss: A: [a male trembling voice]: Tell me, in what respect he is better than me? Why did you choose him over me? Look at me! What is it that he has that I am lacking? B: [female voice]: X always wins. Men's wear only for the true men.

As it became evident by now, the genders of addressees and addressers are carefully pre-planned in the radio ads. There are ads directed exclusively to men and exclusively to women. The techniques directed to women involve small talk, family appeal, libido lifting (beauty parlors). On the other hand, it seems that car advertisements, particularly prolific in December, are directed mainly to a male ideal hearer. For example:

Gloss: There are things which are unique. French wine (year 63) [the sound of a toast], a beloved wife (year 75) [a kiss in the background], car X year 2006 [screeching tyres]. Dem: Sales in X have just started. Is your car over 4 years old?.

The ad (intrinsic dialogue), apart from the stereotyping the male possessiveness, with 'wife year 75' as one of the beloved possessions, also clearly shows what mean age the addressee is: wife year 75 means a wife 31 years old, so the target average male customer can be assumed to be about 35 years old. Along similar lines, the following ad stages up a small talk of three men:

Gloss: A: Can you imagine that she lends me money? And for free, almost for 2 months. B: Well, that's nothing special. Mine pays the gas, electricity and water bills. C: Listen to this, gentlemen: my credit card can do all these things, and, in addition, it [she] relocates the shopping on installments and arranges for the discounts. Dem: You do not need other credit cards anymore.

The beginning of the dialogue leaves the listener in a quandary who the men are talking about, the most immediate guess is: a functional and resourceful wife. The speaker C however, clears out all the doubts: the function of an efficient and resourceful wife blends in with the function of a resourceful credit card for the convenience of male customers.

Finally, the corpus features one more family life stereotype. It occurred in an ad of a chain of kiosks:

Gloss: [the sound of zipping in the background] [a male voice] 'A: Ties, underwear... wait a minute! And where's my deodorant?! And painkillers? And some sweets for the trip!? You've forgotten!! And the taxi in a couple of minutes! [a female voice]. B: Calm down, you can always pop to the kiosk X on your way. Dem: Now sales also in X. X: always close to you.

The ad is grounded on the illicit assumption that it is usually the wife that does her husband's packing (although I am not able to verify whether it a Polish idiosyncrasy or a pan-cultural fact). The omissions are usually charged against her. A simulated pending marital quarrel (e.g. "why didn't you pack your suitcase yourself?") is remedied just in time by the demiurge seller. As a concluding remark we might notice that the ad stereotypes the necessity of buying sweets and painkillers as staple accessories for a trip.

### *Coincidentia oppositorum*

The title of the section is a term coined by Eliade. It roughly means 'the merger of the opposites.' I employ it to denote the primary function of a radio commercial: to collate the opposing forces operating within our society and to achieve the impression of inner cohesiveness and coherence.

Enchanting strategies entail the seduction of the listener, which amounts to seducing the subconscious layer of perception. On the other hand, the appearances of rationality must be preserved to prevent the customer from being on the ball. Within the rational décor, a commercial hides the appeal to emotions, because it is emotions and appeal to stereotypes, not to common sense, that makes a person susceptible to manipulation. As a result, a commercial must be magical for it appeals to our post-modern mentality but at the same time it must be familiar because we long for safety and stability. So we get the oppositions:

Magical–realistic

Enticing–familiar

Extraordinary–informative

Mass produced–individual

Substantive mediation–appearances of autarchy

In the analysis that follows I discuss the strategies employed to cope with these dichotomies.

The first tack might be called 'common appeal' and it pertains to the dichotomy *mass produced: individual*. According to Ritzer (2001), there is a social tension implicated in the *ostentatious lack of ostentatiousness*. Basically, it boils down to the lack

versus the presence of the outward signs of financial affluence. The tension shows as the desire to appear better than others and at the same time, to blend into the framework. However, these preferences fluctuate. From the analyzed corpus it might be inferred that nowadays the urge ‘to be like everyone else’ in terms of the societal status prevails. In practical terms the forces surface as the following motivation: you are supposed to buy a product because in this way you will catch up with everybody else. If you do not buy, you will lag behind. For example, one of the car manufacturers framed their ad in a following way:

Gloss: [a male voice] My name is McEverybodyson, my friends call be Everybody. I work at [purposefully inaudible] [...]. [Dem]: ‘E/everybody’ can afford this car.

Furthermore, some of commercials start with the direct invocation of a nick of a common name: *Kaska, sluchaj* “Katie, listen,” Katie standing for a listener, connoted moreover with the person full of commonsense. Other names featuring in the corpus were *Jasiek* “Johnny” (3 times) which is an epitome of a common name in Poland, as in the ad were the parents discuss: “What shall we buy for Johnny?” Another name on record was Stefan “Stephen.” The name is quite uncommon but the context seems to intend this name as a marked one: it had to start from a particular letter to enhance the adjective: *Sprytny Stefan* ‘Crafty Stephen’ (who knew about the possibility to buy on credit). The same company used also the name Klementyna, (Clementine) which is even more unusual, in the version to reach the female buyers. The only surnames in the corpus are: *Nowak, Kowalski, and Malinowski* which are stereotypically connoted to be the most recurrent and the most Polish names—a sort of a Polish version of Chinese *Chang* or English *Smith*). Similar strategy of blending into the framework was used in the dialogue of a buyer with a seller in the guise of an extraterrestrial, the pun resulting from the juxtaposition of unbounded space for everybody and the possessiveness of the uninformed addressee.

The common appeal is often coupled with the simulated frequency appeal: all of the pharmaceutical adverts and most of the banking ads mentioned the fact that they have helped literally ‘half the population of Poles’ or ‘half the population of Poles have trusted the medicine/bank,’ which leads to quite peculiar simulated consumer arithmetic. Most car dealers’ adverts also stressed the fact that a buyer must hurry because his compatriots are buying out the stock. What follows, the societal ‘peer pressure,’ as evidenced in the results of the analysis, is directed at the negative politeness: the message is to buy because everybody else buys and you will lag behind if you do not buy. Other strategy is that you should buy because many others have trusted the product, hence it is reliable. This shows in the adverts of cars, pharmaceuticals, shopping malls.

At the other end of the spectrum we have the natural tendency of an individual to be unique, to feel like an inimitable and exceptional human being. This is realized through the verbalization of the ‘custom made’ tendency. My corpus shows the following customization locutions:

Gloss: 1. Are you looking for something special for yourself and your family? ‘Check the Christmas tree of X. Everybody can find there something to their taste. Dem: X: you can more. 2. An exceptional offer:

chose the promotions which are best for you. 3. Colorful packages can help you chose custom made options with fast internet 4. Come make your choices while supplies last 5. Super-trendy clothes, custom-made for you.

The thematic break down shows that the “customized” prompts are implicated in the range of: internet access options, clothes, cell phones and sometimes, car accessories. In short, first of all, a seller admits that the potential buyer is unique and individual in their tastes and has the right to a customized service. Once this has been implicitly accepted, the next message is that it is the seller who can cater for such a tendency. What follows, the moral posture of autarchy is manipulated: the plethora of hypothetical whimsies of a buyer is channeled onto the commercial offer of the seller.

The next dyad subsumes the classical enchantment / magical strategy which I call substantive mediation. In practical terms it means that the listener (subject) is convinced that they are boxed into a corner and only a particular commodity can get the trouble off their chests. This seems to be a reflection of classical talisman / magic spell function. The tendency is particularly clear in the adverts of some pharmaceuticals.<sup>10</sup> I will illustrate this strategy on the example of an ad (or a line of ads) of a mild sedative.

Gloss: [a female voice] A: My husband is a champion but I'm the person he describes as “The Mistress of Calm.” Apart from everyday duties of a mother and a wife, there is stress ensuing from the competitions. In stressful situations I have my tested recourse: X . Adam can always rely on the power of my calm. I recommend X: [name of the personality recommending the product]. Dem: Thank you for your trust. We have already helped half the population of Poles in stressful situations. X calms you down quickly, efficiently and durably.

A few comments are in order. First of all, the speaker admits that her husband is a sports champion but she is the champion of everyday life. She describes herself as a mother and a wife. What is mainly implied in the structure of the ad is that she manages to be an epitome mother and wife because of the reliance on the sedative. Within the framework of my analysis it is a simulated dialogue of a producer and buyers (addressees): mothers and wives. The message is this: everyday life is a burden surpassing your strength. However, you will cope with it easily if you resort to the commodity X. From the point of view of social psychology it is a dramatic statement. Taking into account that mother is the highest authority and the exemplar for her kids, the ad reaches for a double objective: the potential client is also the kid: my mother, my role model cannot cope with the everyday life and has to use sedatives to go on, how can I behave in a different way?

The ad has also its “weaker” version, where the mother phones a friend and complains about the unbearable heaviness of being, which, upon inspection, is again nothing else but everyday life routines:

Gloss: A: [a woman in a jittery voice] Hello, Alex? I tell you, nerves from the start of the day. I overslept, kids to school, my hands were shaking from exasperation. Michael is horsing around. I cannot handle it

<sup>10</sup> It must be pointed out here that all of pharmaceuticals in the corpus can be obtained without prescription (the direct advertising of medicines on prescription is done through other means), i.e. directly by an addressee. The ads do not cater for the realm of serious health impairments.

anymore. And you? You sound so quiet, relaxed? B [a female voice]: I bought X, the product you should buy as well. It soothes your nerves perfectly.

Let us notice the subjugation mechanisms in the mediating aspect of the medicine and the commercial seduction: first everyday life is showed to be a source of problems for a mother, then the problems are implied to be beyond her capacity to cope with, and finally the best solution is to be found externally, by following advice of a friend taking the sedative. The 'good friend' is a simulated Seller-interlocutor who convinces an average female listener that there something wrong with her everyday life and then offers to help—a classical enchantment strategy.

The next type of opposition to discuss is familiar: enticing. The strategy of merging them can be exemplified in a following ad:

Gloss: A: [male voice]: At first there was a flash of revelation, [a sound of a thunder in the background], then... I was hit by the price. I was electrified and I sat down paralyzed by the offer. My dear, I had to buy her. Dem: We invite you to our car dealers, where cars sell as fast as lightning. A to B: I can see you also have sparkles in your eyes.

The beginning of the ad introduces a weird climate, with the metaphoric thunderstorm in the background. There is a semantic suspense: the speaker might be discussing a mysterious, enticing or a fatal moment of his life. However, quickly we are "back to the reality:" *Kochanie* "my dear" brings home the message that he is talking to his wife. From the risky, enticing sphere we are landed back to the familiar and safe.

The discussion in the section showed that commercials are a guided dialogue, skillfully structured to blend the opposing forces inherent in the consumerism. Furthermore, amicable and chummy dialogues, especially these broadcast nation-wide, often have interwoven in their structure aggressive psychological manipulation techniques, reflecting the competitiveness of the market.

### Commodity Fetishism and Magic

In a broad formulation, a fetish is a natural object which is believed to be imbued with magical powers. It can also be a thing which has been created by people and which is thought to have power over them. In this paper commodity fetishism is functionally understood as a tendency to manipulate individual's autarchy. From the functional perspective, though, it seems more convenient to speak of 'fetishization' rather than fetishism. The topic is immanent in the publicity and it has come up various times *supra*. The technique shows clearly for example in the following ads:

1. [a male voice] A: Doctor, I am addicted. I dream everyday to have her. She is warm, [she] smells great, and the taste... You too? B: Of course. Dem: X pizza: pizza, which will drive your senses mad.
2. Gloss: [a female voice] I need warmth, I need luxury. I am a woman. Your lingerie will be glamorous from now on. You will not be able to take your eyes nor hands off me.' 3. My carrier is in your hands.

We can see the technique of persuading the listener into addictive postures and to approve of such a posture. I can only follow Baudrillard in stating that 'bliss' has

assumed the status of unconditioned categorical imperative and the basic law in our society. It is immoral to oppose such an imperative. The imperative, however, does not have the Kantian charm of teleology without the *telos* (Baudrillard 1979: 32f). Just as a fetish functions mainly in ‘aboriginal’ societies, the post-modern society might soon have the privilege to achieve the status of one of illiterate cultures conditioning their well-being on the contents imbued on a fetish.

Let us next concentrate on the magical aspect of the commercials. In the analyzed corpus the words ‘magic’ and ‘magical’ appear particularly frequently. The co-text implies that the potential customers connote positively the word ‘magic.’

1. Yes, my magic place [one of local galleries] 2. the magic flowers—the magic of flowers 3. at a magic price 4. this year you can make it [Christmas] more magical 5. the most magical story about Christmas and X was written by... 6. We wish you a magic Christmas: Y, the producer of X. 7. so that children could feel the magic of Christmas 8. the magic mood full of carols.

The full text of (1.)—the ad of one of local shopping centers—is particularly revealing in this respect. It has two versions, one for female and one for male customers. The versions differ slightly: the ‘male’ version emphasizes the efficacy and swiftness of doing shopping there, car park in the vicinity, while the ‘female’ version stresses the possibility to wander and look around, to stop to have a snack. Here is the ‘female’ version:

Gloss: [female voice] my magic spot? I have such one. Everything in one place, in the dead centre of the town. Shops, designer salons, services. Yes, I feel great here. I like looking though new collections and then have something to eat [...] everything is just where it should be. Everybody can find there something to their taste. Yes, this is my magic spot’ Dem: X: your magic spot.

In terms of the enchantment techniques, the text of the ad entails some sort of ambient manipulation: it creates the simulation of the atmosphere of a warm, homely place (the other version of the ad states this explicitly: Shopping Mall X : truly familiar [homely]). The word “buy,” belonging to the level of reality, does not actually appear in the text at all: the place is recommended as a pastime venue, simply to unwind and partake of the immanent magic. Thus, spending time in a shopping centre is camouflaged into hyper-realistic going to a gallery and doing shopping is camouflaged as feeling great in a friendly place. As a result, free-time activities implode into doing shopping.

The corpus shows another technique of enchanting appeal, namely the ‘multiplication’ of simulations. Without mentioning what constitutes ‘a unit,’ a lot of commercials offer to double this abstract basic unit. We have thus a double version of Hegel’s *Volksgeist* which reduces all human experience to a double. To wit:

Gloss: 1. Two independent boards. Two planets 2. Two films on one CD. 3. Now you have in X twice more of everything 4. Megahit “triple x” it is a bravura cinema. It has the effect of a tripe dose of adrenalin. 5. Two times longer: a time-doubler in X. 6. Twice more minutes to any network 7. A: I hear he has split them into three halves. B: But there are only two halves. The third one is not a half. 8. Check the Christmas promotion: two times X. 9. X: A strength of two hearths 10. In Y the pleasure is double because at the loading of our account you’ll get that much for free.

The magical relativity is thus expressed through the positive connotations connected with augmenting the quantity. The strategy is most clear in the ‘triple



adrenaline dose ad:’ what is a unit of adrenaline for a movie? Nobody knows that, yet we are happy to know that whatever it is, we can have a triple of that by accessing the commodity X. Again, the results seem to support Baudrillard’s theories: the hysteric production of reality through the genetic code of media.

The above cited phrases imply that ‘magic’ has contemporarily very positive connotations. I interpret the adduced isotopies as verbalizing the conviction that ‘magic’ is something that we long for, something that is missing from our daily routine and this irreducibly magical something must be supplied by the commercial offer. According to the etymological study of the word ‘magic’ by Pisarkowa (1998: 154), ‘magic’ has originally designated performing some deeds through words, which means enchanting verbally—acting through the magical function of linguistic texts. Magical spells can be in the form of a melo-recitation and they are epitome examples of the performative function of the language. Magical practices are clearly differentiated from liturgical texts, although, it is stressed, they both share the power to create a reality of a different order (Pisarkowa 1998: 155).

It was claimed at the beginning that commercials defy interpretation, just as seduction defies sense and interpretation. Similar conclusions were reached by Pisarkowa (1998) in her analysis of folk magical enchanting *per se*. With the support of Eco’s semiotic theory, she claims that an act of verbal magic, as a performative speech act (and there is no doubt that magic spells are performative acts),

cannot be, by the force of social agreement sanctioning the function of a sorcerer, a spell ‘in the bottle on the sea.’ The interpretation of this text as a performative act and its corresponding contexts is pre-defined, because its performative destination is pre-defined. [...] This object is a formula. Its sense is its particular function. Without somebody’s knowledge about the function of the formula it will not work [...] Paradoxically, it seems that the participants of the act of magic, especially ‘the sorcerer,’ necessarily know this function and are expecting its realization, while the knowledge of the formula itself is, for the rest of participants optional or, unwelcome. Hence, the frequent requirement in different cultures to use a foreign code in the application of magic (Pisarkowa 1998: 157).

What follows, in the magical play, Eco’s hermeneutical semiosis is in both cases (magic spells and commercials) superfluous. Both magical texts and commercial texts defy interpretation and hermeneutical cycle. It is thus important to note that equating consumerism to contemporary religion is going astray. Precisely, my analysis showed that the mechanisms implicated in the commercial impact are closer to the mechanisms on which traditionally enchanting was founded. In other words, the research documented two processes which seem to feed on one another: secularization and fetishization.

### Conclusion

The paper attempted to analyze the enchantment strategies as used in Polish radio commercials. Along the tenets of ethnography of communication it was assumed that such commercials are a communicative event of a post-modern consumerist society. Yet, they are simulated dialogues, revolving around the background of simulated tradition. Furthermore, being a simulated dialogue, they distort Roman Jakobson’s

theory of linguistic communication. The interpretation is inherent in a commercial, yet a commercial is a text in a very special sense: it entails a guided interpretation, so we are let to discover only what we are supposed to discover, nothing else. However, with a reservation that it does not imply that ads 'lie.' Truth and truthfulness criteria largely surpass the thematic scope of the present paper but the crucial thing to point out is that the analysis had nothing to do with axiology or logic of valuations. The ads are a simulation and simulations undermine the difference between the 'true' and the 'false.'

Functionally, it was shown that such a dialogue is to fulfill the task of merging the opposite preferences of the post-modern society. Also, amicable neighborhood talk was shown to hide aggressive psychological tricks and competitiveness of the market. The analysis also brought to light how the strategies of influencing the buyer differ when they are aimed at a female and a male buyer respectively. The analytical axis was magic / seduction / enchantment, which I clearly differentiated from the traditional analysis which envisages consumerism as a mutation of religion.

The enchantment strategies of trick or reason selling, as analyzed and documented in the article, are:

- imbuing the faith in the performative content of an ad,
- imbuing the necessity to buy a particular commodity,
- using a particular register, which is remote from everyday life and is vaguely understood by the listeners,
- manipulating the connotations of tradition,
- hiding the psychological impact under the guise of amicable dialogues (cf. the quote above: only the 'sorcerer' can know what is going on)
- creating levels distinct from reality not surreality but hyper-reality, ruled by the hallucination of concepts as signs,
- skillfully structured selling strategies, reducible to hooking on the listeners emotions and channeling them onto the commodity,
- stating the need for magic and magical aspect of life, which is, in the etymology of the concept, the explicit recognition of the aboriginal roots of the procedure.

The analysis was conducted in the form of 'illustrative quotes' and the study would definitively profit with the statistical deepening of the empirical material. A statistical breakdown might be of merit to establish the distribution of the particular rhetoric and persuasive techniques in the ads. For the purposes of general overview, I singled out six categories, into which strategies in adverts could be tentatively grouped:

1. invitation
2. information
3. persuasion
4. creation of simulated reality
5. metonymy
6. metaphor (e.g. sound effects)
7. asking/giving advice

The first problem with elaborating the statistics was the structure of an ad itself. Almost all ads had a two-partite structure. The first part functionally entails hooking

on the listeners' emotions. This could be done using any of the techniques enumerated supra (covert persuasion). However, it was very rarely the case that only one tack was used. Usually, an average ad made use of minimum three of these categories, intermingled freely. In the "coda" Dem channels the emotions into the particular commodity and this is done through what I called 'overt persuasion:' through imperative like *kup* 'buy,' *odwiedź nas* 'visit us,' etc. or through other linguistic structures. I deemed that the interrelation of these particular strategies—both in terms of statistic modeling and semantic isotopies—definitely merits further research which however would be of purely linguistic nature (semantic/syntactic) and as such it largely surpasses the sociolinguistic scope of the present paper.

Apart from the tenets of ethnography of speech, which were exposed in the introductory part, the paper is ethnographical in meta-communicative sense as well. Namely, *ethnography* originally meant the description and study of societies which were illiterate (this was the line of divergence between sociology, which was supposed to concentrate on literate societies). In other words, ethnography subsumed mainly the study of verbal transmission and ritual transmission, as opposed to written transmission. The crucial difference between the two modes is that text is invariant, while the oral transmission changes and adapts to accommodate the *meritum* (cf. Gellner's *common conceptual currency*) in new milieu. Spoken ads were thus assumed to be a sort of verbal folklore: ephemeral, changing and sensitive to societal, co-textual and inter-textual preferences.

Accordingly, I hope to have made an ethnographic inventory of some items of information about Polish society 2006/2007, which may also be a starting point for subsequent studies. The adopted ethnographical paradigm allowed tracing and enumerating particular enchantment strategies used in the radio commercials. The fact that some of the tendencies of post-modern society can be studied through ethnographical perspective—originally devised for aboriginal societies—might be an empirical corroboration of the irrational bent on the hyper-reality.

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