

LEARNING ITALIAN THROUGH TV ADVERTISING

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1. Introduction: Why TV Ads?

Television commercials have provoked a mixed response from critics throughout the history of the medium. They have significantly contributed to the widespread view of TV programming as an unimportant manifestation of lowbrow culture, yet they have also attracted the attention of major cultural critics. On the one hand, TV scholars such as Toby Miller note how in Western societies TV spectators' distracted and casual viewing has often been associated with the effect of commercial breaks: "[V]isuals would reinforce a message that could be understood in another room or while doing chores—the volume would go up when the commercials came on" (2010, 70). On the other hand, though acknowledging the distracted and disinterested mode of viewing that accompanies television in general and TV advertising in particular, cultural critic Raymond Williams has convincingly argued that television and television advertising are sophisticated cultural forms that deserve scholarly analysis: "The apparently disjointed sequence of items is in effect guided by a remarkably consistent set of cultural relationships: a flow of consumable reports and products, in which the elements of speed, variety, and miscellaneity can be seen as organizing: the real bearers of value" (1975, 105).

The primary questions that guided my research during my fellowship at the Berkeley Language Center in the fall of 2012 focused on how to employ these sophisticated cultural forms—TV commercials—within the foreign language classroom at all levels of linguistic competence. My thesis is that TV ads are uniquely useful authentic materials in learning language and culture, at both the formal and the content level. At the formal level, they are short and complete narratives, which makes them ideal for class use. At the content level, they provide a privileged point of entrance for cultural analyses through their rich network of global and local references—feature films, songs, TV shows, novels, poems, and newspapers, as well as other advertisements.

Specifically, I argue that the use of TV advertising in foreign language teaching entails four major advantages. The first is brevity, by which I mean TV advertising's quality of combining minimal duration with a sense of narrative completeness. As Guy Cooks writes, TV commercials are "mini-dramas which compress a large number of narrative elements into a very short space of time making use of highly skilled and stylized acting" (2001, 53). The value of such brevity must be understood in light of the broader discussion about the use of authentic materials in the foreign language classroom. One of the main problems with showing feature films, for example, is the limited time available to the language teacher and the students both within and outside the classroom. As Mark Kaiser observes, there are multiple elements to be taken into

account both in showing selected clips taken from a feature film and in screening feature films in their entirety during a language course. On the one hand, Kaiser notes how the selection of the video clip allows students to focus on the specific details of a scene, rather than scattering their attention throughout a film that typically must be shown over the course of multiple classes.¹ On the other hand, he points out how the selective process of choosing one clip consisting of one scene out of an entire feature film can disorient students and require extra work for narrative contextualization.²

The Library of Foreign Language Film Clips hosted by the Berkeley Language Center at the University of California, Berkeley, is an effective resource that allows foreign language instructors and students to watch single clips from feature films, series of clips from a single film or multiple films, as well as films in their entirety, depending on their pedagogical and instructional needs.³ The use of TV commercials in the foreign language classroom that I am proposing here is consistent with the BLC's pedagogical approach to the use of authentic audiovisual materials, and it constitutes one possible evolution in the direction of the televisual medium. Like the clips edited and tagged in the BLC Library, TV commercials tend to be short and designed to prompt multiple viewings, allowing students to develop close-reading skills. However, like the longer feature films, TV commercials also entail a sense of narrative completeness at the formal level, which is often lacking in an individual clip from a film.

A second useful quality of TV advertising is its familiarity. Due to the pervasive presence of advertising in American culture, students are accustomed to TV commercials, as most of them have been significantly exposed to them throughout their lives. Students understand this specific type of communication and know what to expect from this audiovisual experience—that is, the persuasion to buy a specific product or service. As Cook claims, the most popular, yet not necessarily the most accurate, definition of advertising is based on its persuasive function—that is, compelling people to buy a product or service: “Many people decide, when faced with the problem of defining the word ‘ad,’ and trying to distinguish ads from similar discourse types, that the crucial distinguishing feature is function, because this is always to persuade people to buy a particular product” (2001, 9–10). In this respect, the familiar recognition on the part of the viewer is twofold, as it relies both on the reassuring pleasure of narrative closure as well as on the confirmation of his or her interpretive expectations about the message: buy it!

¹ Kaiser writes: “While there are instances when viewing an entire film is preferable (after all, there are courses and textbooks built on a film curriculum of six to fifteen films), the difficulties of doing so support the use of shorter clips from films, commercials, and TV productions. More specifically, the use of clips offers instructors a clear advantage in that students are able to focus on one scene in depth and explore the language of the clip and the various components of visual semiotics (dress, setting, gesture, facial expressions, color palette, etc). In other words, clips afford a close ‘reading’ of a scene. In addition, there are numerous pedagogical benefits to the use of film clips. The quantity of language is more manageable, the clip can be replayed multiple times in class, or the clips can be put on a learning management system, thereby giving students access to clips as homework assignments” (2011, 234).

² Kaiser observes that “while there are certainly clear advantages to the use of clips, there are disadvantages as well. Isolating a specific scene from a film decontextualizes it and some interpretive meaning is lost. Scenes in a film are often in dialogue with one another: conversations echo earlier conversations, or the juxtaposition of scenes is often used to create meaning. As is the case with great works of art, something is lost when a part is torn from the whole (2011, 234).

³ For a presentation and discussion of the activities and services provided through the Library of Foreign Language Film Clips, see Mark Kaiser's above-mentioned “New Approaches to Exploiting Film in the Foreign Language Classroom” (2011).

The third aspect is intertextuality. As Claire Kramersch notes in her analysis of a Coca-Cola commercial for the American market, TV advertising is “full of allusions to animated films and implicit quotes from other commercials. [...] Different cultural signals intersect with others, thereby acquiring a new value” (1994, 216). Cook also reinforces this point by defining advertising as a “parasitic” discourse that heavily relies upon and draws from other visual, musical, and linguistic discourses—feature films, songs, articles in newspapers and magazines, novels, poems, and other advertisements (2001, 33–34). The high degree of intertextuality in TV advertising is particularly useful, as it encourages language instructors and students to bridge the gap that often separates language and culture courses in foreign language departments by providing highly accessible and easily recognizable authentic materials that encourage critiques and discussions of cultural and societal issues.

The fourth quality that makes TV ads particularly useful within the foreign language classroom is their potential cultural specificity. In a global market, certain brands adjust their ad campaigns according to the cultural specificity of the receiving countries, while others do not. The difference is determined by the nature of the brand and item in question. Mark Hermeking suggests that while ads about durable and technological products (laptops, tablets, smartphones, digital cameras, and the like) tend to be globally standardized, ad campaigns about nondurable goods, such as food, are often adapted to the cultures and societies in which they circulate. Hermeking takes online advertising as his case study, but the argument holds true for advertising in general: ads “representing global brands of non-durable low-interest products reveal an even higher degree of cultural adaptation” (2005, 208). In the foreign language classroom, this means that students can be exposed to mixed cultural narratives, which can be globally standardized in terms of their brevity, completeness, and rhetorical goals, but also tailored to the local specificity of the target culture, as is the case with food products. Students may find some of the intertextual references in culturally adapted ads challenging or frustrating. According to Kramersch, this can be a positive outcome, as students can thus become aware of the lack of meaning or relevance that certain popular citations and references might represent for them as foreign language learners. In other words, they can develop an awareness of their own linguistic and cultural limitations and develop strategies for coping with them over time.⁴ To illustrate the effectiveness of using TV ads in the language classroom, in the following pages I will discuss a didactic unit consisting of two lesson plans on food advertising, which I tested in a senior colleague’s Italian 4 course in October 2012 at the UC Berkeley campus.⁵ As I worked for two days with the students of that course, I adjusted my didactic materials to make them consistent with the existing syllabus. In this respect, this lesson plan also provides an example of how to integrate TV advertising as supplementary materials within an already established Italian syllabus.

⁴ As Kramersch writes, “What we should seek in cross-cultural education are less bridges than a deep understanding of boundaries. We can teach the boundary, we cannot teach the bridge. We can talk about and try to understand the differences between the values celebrated in the American Coca-Cola commercial and the lack or the existence of analogous values in its Russian or German equivalent. We cannot teach directly how to resolve the conflict between the two” (1994, 228).

⁵ I owe a debt of gratitude to senior lecturer Annamaria Bellezza for inviting me as a guest lecturer in her course to test these pedagogical materials.

2. The *Lasagne Emiliane Barilla* Commercial

For this didactic unit I chose Barilla, a global company operating on multiple continents and one of the most famous food brands in the world, to see how it adapts its TV ads to different receiving countries. I considered two distinct TV ad campaigns for the same brand, one for the Italian domestic market, which conveys a reassuring message about the traditional Italian family, and one for Barilla's largest and most relevant foreign market, the United States, which exploits a more thrilling image of Italy as a romantic fantasy for American tourists. Comparing and contrasting these two different narratives provided stimulating ways to stir discussions about national cultures, national stereotypes, gender roles, and the broad cultural genealogies on which TV ads rely.

On the first day we discussed a Barilla ad from 2009 designed for the Italian market, *Lasagne Emiliane Barilla*, in relation to contemporary representations of the Italian family at the dinner table.⁶ The senior instructor in charge of the course had just introduced and analyzed an Italian feature film, Sergio Castellitto's *Non ti muovere* (2004), which explores changes in gender roles and the modernization process from the rural and large family of the past to the urban and mononuclear one of the present. My choice of the *Lasagne Emiliane Barilla* campaign, which focuses on a captivating image of the contemporary Italian family, was thus easily integrated into the course thematically.

The Barilla commercial for *Lasagne* features the famous Italian singer Mina in the voiceover. For several generations of Italians from the 1960s onwards, Mina has represented the perfect balance between classical sobriety and provocative transgression, tradition and innovation, women's emancipation and family values.⁷ Mina's voiceover in the ad proves essential, as she has the cultural authority and familiar presence to convincingly suggest that, through the purchase of the *Lasagne Emiliane Barilla*, it is possible to find a solution to the problems, anxieties, and desires provoked by the recent changes in the structure of the Italian family.⁸ While students were not aware of the importance of Mina's public persona in Italian history, which necessitated a brief introduction and discussion in class, they were absolutely acquainted with the advertising practice of having a media star sponsor a product or provide a testimonial for a brand. Mina's stardom prompted them to understand the specificity of the Italian case within the established framework of global practices in advertising.

In the commercial, Mina's voiceover guides the spectator through a montage of various images of the fragmented contemporary Italian family—young couples, single fathers, mononuclear groups of father, mother, and one child, and rebellious adolescents—climactically leading to the final scene in which a large, happy family is eventually reunited around the dinner table where the *Lasagne Barilla* are ready to be served. Mina's voiceover reads as follows:

⁶ The ad can be viewed online: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GcEQd7sNGo>. Last accessed on February 15, 2013.

⁷ Among the numerous biographies and studies published on Mina's role in Italian history and culture, which explore in detail her delicate balance between tradition and innovation, at least two are worth mentioning: Romy Padovano's *Mina: I mille volti di una voce* (Mondadori 1998) and Gianni Lucini's *Mina: La sua vita, i suoi successi* (Sonzogno Editore 1999).

⁸ For a sociological discussion of the modernization of the Italian family, see Franca Bimbi's works, in particular "The Family Paradigm in the Italian Welfare State (1947–1996)" in *South European Society and Politics*, 1999.

It is our point of departure: it's family. Sometimes it protects you, and sometimes it encourages you. Sometimes you can't wait to have one, sometimes you don't want one at all. You might think you would go farther on your own, but it's when you are there with your loved ones that you realize that a person needs roots in order to really feel free. (*Lasagne Emiliane Barilla* 2009, translation mine)⁹

The montage of images shown during Mina's voiceover begins with an establishing shot of the commercial's theme: two images of the Italian family as popularly imagined in the past: big and close-knit. The very first image is a synecdoche, a row of underwear and socks hanging from a line outdoors to dry, clearly belonging to a large family. Then there is a cut to the actual family, which includes a young father, a young mother, one child, a grandfather, and a grandmother. A sequence of images showing smaller groups and individuals follows, suggesting that these smaller groups form isolated fragments of a family. Mina's lines, which connect the various images, support this idea. In Mina's words, family is acknowledged as an institution that serves to support the individual yet is also capable of frustrating him or her. It is only with the final image of the recomposed family (a return to the theme of the initial establishing shot) that these tensions are resolved through the purchase and consumption of the Barilla product.

Before meeting in class, I assigned the students three pre-class activities to prepare for our discussion. First, I asked them to read the online article "Gli italiani a tavola" (Italians at the Dinner Table), about the recent changes in Italian eating habits, which indicates new trends corresponding to the modernization of the family and can be quickly summarized as follows: less eating together, less time spent on cooking on an everyday basis, more ready-made meals, and more meals consumed outside the home, often at "ethnic" restaurants.¹⁰ This article provided the necessary and informative background on which we built our group discussion. Second, I asked them to watch the Barilla TV ad through a link I provided and to think about to what extent it confirms or complicates the trends discussed in the article. Finally, I asked them to re-watch a specific clip from *Non ti muovere* through the BLC's Library of Foreign Language Film Clips, which depicts the sad dinner of a modern unhappy couple—namely, the two Italian protagonists, Timoteo and Elsa.

Once in class, I began our warm-up by asking students whether they were familiar with or bought Barilla products and what ideas they associated with that brand. That led us to the question of what the article they had read could tell us about changing habits in the Italian diet. I then showed a grid of categories applicable to any TV commercial, which I wanted them to keep in mind and use to analyze the Barilla ad (Figure 1). The categories are adapted from Cook's analysis of advertising as a discourse genre (2001), as well as from Hermeking's examination of global and local advertising (2005).

⁹ È la nostra linea di partenza: è la famiglia. A volte ti protegge, a volte ti incoraggia, a volte non vedi l'ora di averne una, a volte nessuna. Pensi che da soli si arrivi più lontano, ma quando sei lì in mezzo ti accorgi che per sentirsi davvero liberi bisogna avere radici. *Lasagne Emiliane Barilla: la gioia di stare insieme.* (*Lasagne Emiliane Barilla* 2009).

¹⁰ The article is available on line: http://www.consumatorenews.com/004421_italiani-a-tavola-cosa-si-compra-e-cosa-si-mangia Last accessed on February 14, 2013.

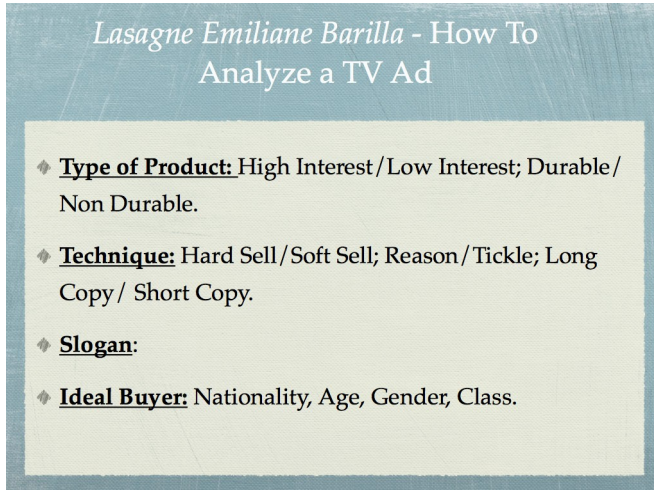


Figure 1

I have already mentioned Hermeking’s general distinction between durable high-interest products and nondurable low-interest products. To this categorization I added Cook’s classification by advertising technique. According to Cook, “hard selling makes a direct appeal” while “soft selling relies more on mood than on exhortation and on the implication that life will be better with the product” (2001, 14–15). Also, reason ads “suggest motives for purchase,” whereas tickle ads “appeal to emotion, humor, and mood” (2001, 14–15). Further, long copy and short copy refer to the length of the ad, depending on the medium in which it circulates. Finally, I included in the grid the identification of the slogan as the key message the ad conveys (in this case “The Joy of Being Together”), and the historical/cultural contextualization of the ad in terms of its ideal spectatorship. These constitute the basic elements for a critical understanding of the specific techniques at work in any given TV ad, which differentiate it from other media narratives (the feature film, for example).

After going over the grid with the students, we watched the Barilla ad together. I then divided the class into groups of four and asked them to fill out the grid and eventually return to our collective discussion with their findings. During the peer-work phase, I showed a slide with images from the commercial organized as a sequence of stills (Figure 2). Students later told me that they found this visual rendition of the commercial very helpful in conducting a close reading, as it further supports the idea that in TV ads every detail is necessary and is there for a reason.



Figure 2. *Lasagne Emiliane Barilla* (2009). Courtesy of Barilla.

During the discussion, several students observed that the final reassuring message partly contradicts what they had read in the informative article “Gli italiani a tavola” and reshapes the social problem of the Italian family’s fragmentation: despite the modernization of the family as an institution, the tradition of being together at the dinner table can still be revived through the Barilla product. From this conclusion, they formulated a first attempt to understand how TV advertising engages with current social concerns and anxieties to transform them into pleasurable and comforting narratives. Also, several students proposed that the ideal buyer would be a middle-aged woman who could identify with the youngish grandmother we see at the center of the composition in the final meal. This grandmother figure can also be associated with Mina’s voiceover, as students rightly assumed that because Mina was already famous in the sixties, then the Italian grandmothers who buy Barilla today were probably among the young fans of the Italian performer at that time.¹¹

Following this activity, we connected our analysis to the narrative of *Non ti muovere*, which the class had thoroughly discussed in the previous weeks of instruction. The clip I had asked them to re-watch through the BLC’s Foreign Language Film Library shows a modern, lonely, and unhappy couple sitting in a fancy minimalist living room and eating “ethnic food”—chicken curry. In the scene, the fragmentation and reduction of the Italian family to the lonely mononuclear couple is associated with the modernization of culinary habits—eating dishes from other national cuisines. The scene provides a rather stark contrast to the large, lively Italian family of the commercial. The juxtaposition of the two distinct yet contiguous media narratives engendered a stimulating conversation. Some students noted how the contemporary Italian family is depicted in a much bleaker and darker tone in the film than in the TV commercial, as the site of cynical and selfish interests and much unhappiness. In other words, the analysis of

¹¹ It is worth noting that Mina had already performed in a TV commercial for Barilla at the very beginning of her career in the 1960s. In that commercial from 1967, she sings one of her songs, “Taratata,” appears in person in front of the camera, and plays a much more sensual and ambiguous character. The commercial as a whole has a meta-communicative twist, as we see a fictional TV troupe participating in the advertising narrative, which supposedly represents the TV production apparatus. The video is available on YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=obucaJJ9p_c. Last accessed on February 15, 2013.

the TV commercial enabled a better understanding of the feature film. Other students claimed that the Barilla commercial presents a deeper level of complexity than the feature film because it hints at the tensions inhabiting the contemporary Italian family indirectly and ambiguously, through the relationship between Mina's evocative lines and its symbolic images, which are open to multiple interpretations and therefore richer in meaning. Cook confirms this latter point when he examines advertising in light of its "formal ambiguities" and "formal complexity" (2001, 139), which are comparable to those of poetry.

3. The *Tortelloni Barilla* Ad for the American Market

On the second day in class, we focused on branding and selling Italian-ness in the United States by examining the Barilla TV campaign that launched the *tortelloni* product on the American market. The goal of this final part of the didactic unit was to develop critical awareness about the images of Italy as a romantic and escapist fantasy for American tourists, as developed by Hollywood cinema and appropriated by Barilla, among other brands. By exploiting these images, Barilla sells much more than just pasta to American consumers: it sells a romantic fantasy of journeying to Italy through food.

The *Tortelloni Barilla* commercial aired on the major American cable networks in 2003. The protagonist is a young white woman, most likely American (we see that she is holding a guidebook in her hands whose title reads "Italy"). The woman walks through an outdoor market in an Italian city and inadvertently bumps into a handsome Italian man who is doing some grocery shopping. They apologize to each other and, as they separate, their sustained eye contact suggests that romance is in the air. Then there is a cut to the next scene, in which the same American tourist is at a restaurant with her friends, chatting and laughing amicably. In the restaurant's kitchen, the man we first saw in the street is now cooking and preparing meals: he is the restaurant's chef. As he sees her from the distance in the dining room, he chooses a pack of *Tortelloni Barilla* from the shelf and pours them in the boiling water of a pan. In the final scene of the commercial, shot from the point of view of the young American woman, the cook himself brings the *Tortelloni* to her table, served in a beautifully decorated dish. Then there is a cut to Barilla's slogan for this campaign: "Barilla: The Choice of Italy." Interestingly, the commercial does not include any spoken dialogue, just evocative images accompanied by an operatic aria sung by Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli, "Mille lune, mille onde."

Before meeting in class, I again assigned students some pre-class activities to prepare for our conversation, asking them to read a brief journalistic article about Hollywood's fascination with Italy entitled "Star e cibo italiano: that's amore."¹² I also made available to them and asked them to watch the trailers of two Hollywood films from different eras that recount the stories of foreign women in Italy: Ryan Murphy's *Eat Pray Love* (2010), starring Julia Roberts, and William Wyler's *Roman Holiday* (1953), starring Audrey Hepburn. Both films include significant scenes in which the foreigner in Italy gains a sense of agency and pleasurable freedom through a combination of romance, food, and drinking. Finally, I made available to them and asked them to watch the *Tortelloni*

¹² The article is available online at <http://www.italiaatavola.net/articolo.aspx?id=25620>. Last accessed on February 15, 2013.

Barilla ad for the American market.¹³

Once in class, as a warm-up I asked students to share their impressions and expectations about *Eat Pray Love* or *Roman Holiday*, limiting themselves exclusively to the trailers they had watched.¹⁴ A discussion on Hollywood cinematic imagery about Italy and on national stereotypes followed. Students naturally integrated what they had learned from the article I had given them on Hollywood's long fascination with Italy and Italian food into this discussion.

Before watching the *Tortelloni Barilla* ad together, we went over the grid we had already used the previous day to discuss the Barilla ad for the Italian market (see Figure 1). We then watched the commercial, and I asked students to work in groups of four and use the grid to analyze the ad. During this peer work, I showed them a slide including stills of the salient scenes from the commercial to facilitate their close analysis (Figure 3).



Figure 3 *Tortelloni Barilla* (2003). Courtesy of Barilla.

After the peer work, we returned to our collective discussion and shared the ideas of the smaller groups. According to several students, the ideal buyer of the *Tortelloni Barilla* commercial is a young, independent American woman who identifies with the protagonist of the story. Some students also linked the advertising narrative and the two trailers we had watched to other relevant Hollywood films, including Audrey Wells's *Under the Tuscan Sun* (2003) and Woody Allen's *To Rome with Love* (2012). These observations allowed us to expand the scope of our analysis and connect the commercial to a long genealogy of romantic fantasies about Italy produced by Hollywood at least since the "Hollywood on the Tiber" phenomenon of the 1950s.¹⁵

¹³ The trailer of *Eat Pray Love* can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cm7E81pVsiM>. The trailer of *Roman Holiday* can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GzCG6lpFUw>. The *Tortelloni Barilla* TV ad can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u44Zb1-OF5k>. Last accessed on February 15, 2013.

¹⁴ For a discussion of how to use and analyze the trailer as a form of advertising in the foreign language classroom, see Jessica L. Sturm's "Using Film in the L2 Classroom: A Graduate Course in Film Pedagogy," p. 252.

¹⁵ For a detailed analysis of the Hollywood on the Tiber phenomenon, see the volume edited by Richard Wrigley, *Cinematic Rome* (Troubador 2008).

Finally, students highlighted the similarities and differences between the two ads we had examined over the two days of our didactic unit. They argued that the two TV ads rely on different national stereotypes as well as on distinct expectations about gender roles in the two cultures. In one case Barilla proposes a conservative image of the expanded Italian family as a collective identity that protects and takes care of the individual. In the second case, the same brand is associated with the idea of independence, free choice, romantic adventure, and, ultimately, individualism. In their comments, some students emphasized how the two slogans are most effective in conveying these two different messages: “The Joy of Being Together” in the former, which prioritizes the collective subject of family over the individual, and “The Choice of Italy” in the latter, which underscores the pleasures of individualism.

As a follow-up to this discussion, I suggested to the instructor and the students of Italian 4 a series of possible activities that would allow students to further work on TV commercials and Italian language and culture. For example, I proposed that they could take an American TV ad that they particularly liked and rewrite the script as if it were destined for the Italian market, or vice versa, take an Italian ad for the Italian market and rewrite the script for the American market.¹⁶

4. Some Suggestions on How to Use TV Ads in the Foreign Language Classroom

The use of TV ads as authentic audiovisual materials in the foreign language classroom offers several advantages: brevity, familiarity, intertextuality, and cultural adaptability. TV ads can be used in language courses of all levels, from beginning to advanced. In beginning language courses, they can be used to introduce, explain, or recap specific grammar points in entertaining ways—for example, by reviewing the comparative and superlative through comparative advertising. In an upper-division course, they can be used either as supplementary materials or as core materials for discussions addressing specific themes and topics across media and arts.

I would like to briefly summarize my suggestions on how to incorporate advertisements into the curriculum, based on my semester-long research at the BLC. First, given the high degree of intertextuality in TV ads, it is crucial to provide students with background information and context that allow them to engage comfortably with the larger cultural genealogies at work (for example, the article about changes in the patterns of the contemporary Italian family). Second, it is helpful to provide students with a grid of categories that enable them to produce a formal analysis of the TV commercial in question. Formal analysis is essential, as it allows students to think critically about the similarities and differences between the specific genre of TV advertising and other contiguous media narratives (such as feature films). Third, in choosing the TV ads, the instructor should take into account the variable of cultural adjustment. Pedagogical activities should therefore focus on the adaptability of the commercials across national cultures, for example by asking students to rewrite the script of an ad originally designed for their C2 in their C1 or vice versa.

TV commercials are flexible, easily accessible, and manageable authentic materials that enable foreign language instructors and students to think about specific themes and

¹⁶ Jane Sherman’s *Using Authentic Video in the Language Classroom* (Cambridge UP 2003) includes a variety of similar activities and constitutes a very helpful resource for the language teacher.

social issues within multiple media narratives. Not only do they constitute an ideal tool for bridging the gap between language and culture courses, but they are also useful for developing critical media literacy through foreign language learning.

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