

Sprache & Kultur

Caren auf dem Keller

**Textual structures in eighteenth-century
newspaper advertising**

A corpus-based study
of medical advertisements and book advertisements

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Summary

The linguistic study of eighteenth-century newspaper advertisements has been a neglected area of research due to the unavailability of quantitatively sufficient material. This problem has been overcome, however, with the compilation of the 1.5 million word *Zurich English Newspaper Corpus (ZEN)* a computerised text collection consisting of complete newspaper issues printed in London between 1661 and 1791. This corpus provides not only interesting texts from different newspaper sections (for example domestic news, foreign news or Crown proclamations), it also contains over 3,000 advertisements for numerous products. The current study is an investigation of two product samples taken from a subcorpus of the *ZEN* material, namely 368 medical advertisements and 1,184 book advertisements. The aim of the investigation was to identify typical components that constitute an advertisement in the eighteenth century. In order to understand advertising at this particular point of time, the development of early newspaper printing in England, the establishment of the London press and provincial newspapers, and the growth of advertisements in early English newspapers are discussed in the first part of the study. Particular attention is paid to book and medical advertising.

The second part of the book provides information about the quantitative and qualitative approaches towards the analysis of medical advertisements and book advertisements. Four studies (Leech 1966, Suter 1993, Gieszinger 2001, and Bendel 1998) that contributed to the methodology used are presented in detail in this section.

The main part of the book presents results of the analysis of the two advertising samples, medical advertisements and book advertisements, of the *ZEN* Corpus. Formal features, such as the headline, standing details, signature line, typographic devices, the initial capital, and digits were analysed over a period of 120 years. Additionally, content features such as the space given to the seller, price, or product were also examined. Moreover, the verbal phrases of how books or medical products were sold were studied.

Further, the portion of the investigation which focussed upon medical products looked at the strategic presentation of brand names (realised in eighteenth-century advertising by the repeated use of particular word combinations to increase product recognition). Another unique feature examined in medical advertising was the occurrence of a third person, a witness, who asserts the effectiveness of a product. It was discovered that this phenomenon was not frequent in medical advertisements, despite the attention given to it by Gotti (1994), for example. Interestingly, book advertisements did not contain a reference to a third party. However, they did fall into three clear types, which was not true for medical advertisements.

Whenever possible, other studies were used to compare the English material with German texts. On this point, two studies are of particular interest: the one by Bendel (1998), which is on German advertisements covering the same period of time as the *ZEN* Corpus, and the investigation by Zimmermann (1974), which is on German medical advertisements in the eighteenth century.

The very last section gives an outline of possible future avenues of research facilitated by the recent public release of the *ZEN* Corpus.