# A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS OF GENDER REPRESENTATIONS IN BRITISH AND ITALIAN TV ADVERTISEMENTS

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Citation: Centonze, Laura and Annarita Taronna (2022) "A multimodal analysis of gender representations in British and Italian TV advertisements", in Lucia Abbamonte and Flavia Cavaliere (eds.) *Updating Discourse/s on Method/s, mediAzioni* 34: A116-A141, https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15518, ISSN 1974-4382.

**Abstract**: The present paper illustrates the preliminary findings of a CORECOM-funded project called "The representation of the image of women in advertising: interlinguistic and multimodal perspectives". Its aim has been to identify, analyze and deconstruct semantic asymmetries which continue to proliferate in the field of information and communication, thus perpetrating discursive constructions of stereotyped and discriminating gender identities. Drawing on the most influential contributions to the study of language and gender (Lakoff 1975, Goffman 1979, Cameron 1995; Christie 2000, Lazar 2005, Jeffries 2007, Baker 2008, Mills 2008, 2012, Machin & Caldas-Coulthard 2016), the present research has identified possible pragmatic characterizations leading to the identification of subliminal, discriminating or degrading advertising messages which provide the audience with the image of a stereotyped woman or allusively associated, for example, with an aesthetic canon based on beauty as an absolute value. To this end, the comparison between advertising messages disseminated on the regional, national and international territory has brought out quantitative and qualitative data that have allowed us to define the extent to which the presence of gender stereotypes and sexualization of the female body are occurring in regional and national advertising in relation to some European countries. Reference has thus been made to advertisements in English in both English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries. Consequently, the results of interlinguistic and comparative research have also brought out useful data for the definition of pragma-linguistic patterns characterizing ELF (English as a Lingua Franca; Seidlhofer 2001) in advertising.

**Keywords**: women representation; multimodality; advertisements; stereotype; ELF.

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## *1. Introduction*

This article illustrates the partial results of a one-year multidisciplinary research project entitled "The representation of the image of women in advertising: interlinguistic and multimodal perspectives", funded from June 2020 to June 2021 by CORECOM Puglia[1]. The overall goal of the project was to identify, analyze and deconstruct semantic asymmetries which still proliferate in the field of information and communication, thus perpetrating discursive constructions of stereotyped and discriminatory gender identities in regional and national advertising. In order to address the research aims of the present study, a corpus was compiled with a view to conducting a comparative analysis of female representations in TV advertisements across a wide range of products and services in the English-speaking context. More specifically, the study corpus (i.e. the WOMen in Advertisements, henceforth WOM-AD corpus) collects 120 advertisements (60 Italian and 60 from English-speaking countries) and their relevant metadata that have been examined drawing on the relevance of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA: Fairclough and Wodak 1997; van Dijk 2001). The results of this interlinguistic and comparative research have also brought out useful data for the definition of pragma-linguistic patterns characterizing ELF (*English as a Lingua Franca*; Seidlhofer 2001) in advertising.

The relevance of such a research project lies in the urgent need to prevent and combat the tacit emotional and symbolic violence driven by gender stereotypes in advertising (Capella *et al.* 2010) by recalling the strategic goals of inclusivity, women empowerment and gender equity as strongly advocated by current national and international plans (i.e. the Italian Development Cooperation System, the European Parliament's 2013 Resolution on eliminating gender stereotypes in the EU, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Gender Action Plan II and III, the Istanbul Convention). These urgencies are evoked by the potentially negative effects of using stereotypes in advertising, that is, viewing women as exclusively sexual beings whose purpose is to sexually arouse and gratify men. Due to potential perceptions of women as appropriate targets for sexually aggressive behaviors (Lanis and Covell 1995: 647), differences in gender representation in advertisements have been widely investigated, and a recent study by Stanković *et al.* (2018) has shown men's more dominant role in conveying a verbal message, whereas women are predominantly given a visual role in commercials.

More prominently, differences of stereotypical gender representation in advertisements provide a better insight into their body language, as the findings will show later on in this study. Men are usually portrayed in a laid-back manner, with an attitude of dominance, legs spread apart, looking straight into the camera, illustrating the concept of masculinity, which implies rationality and self-confidence to the viewer. On the other hand, women are usually represented sitting or standing, legs crossed, arms resting on their bodies, thus conveying a

[1] The authors were respectively involved in the project as Principal Investigator (Laura Centonze) and Scientific Coordinator (Annarita Taronna) affiliated with the Department of Education, Psychology, Communication, University of Bari, Italy. For the present study, although the research was jointly conducted by the authors, Laura Centonze is responsible for Sections 3 and 4, whereas Annarita Taronna is responsible for Sections 1, 2, and 5.

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15518

message of their emotionality, even subordination, to the viewer (FemCities Conference 2012: 10). These cues predict the process according to which advertisers as cultural intermediaries engender provocative stereotypes and have become embroiled in a perceptual shift that glamorizes violence against women.

## *2. Theoretical background*

The potentially negative effects of constructing stereotypes in advertising also explain how the study of gender roles has evolved around distinctive research fields closely aligned with current societal and cultural changes (Åkestam *et al.* 2021). More remarkably, since the 1990s Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough and Wodak 1997) and Visual Analysis (Berger 1973; Goffman 1979 Kress and van Leeuwen 1996; Rose 2007; Schroeder and Borgerson 1998) were undertaken to critically interpret advertisements and the symbolic values behind their texts and images. As discussed in more detail in Section 3, a Critical Discourse Analysis approach allows one to explore discourse as a form of social practice that may undermine the relationship between language and power by providing insights into how language is used and the values, beliefs and ideas that underpin its context. By conceiving of language as a medium for interaction, analyzing discursive strategies and pragma-linguistic devices in the construction of stereotypes may facilitate a better understanding of what people do and how structures, strategies and properties of text and talk play a role in reproducing social power relations and resulting inequalities.

The analysis of textual data in the next sections builds up to broader categories, looking for patterns of consistency and variation, as well as relevant discursive features within texts by comparing findings for the British and Italian corpus sub-sections. To this end, as Leech envisioned in 1972, investigating the use of language in advertising can either follow "a prescribed path of advertising clichés" or have the freedom to "deviate from it and from the rules of the language itself" (Leech 1972: 4). Since language, gender and society are three complex and closely interwoven terms, the question of identifying discursive strategies and pragma-linguistic devices reflecting or shaping social life and consequently gender relationships and expectations plays a pivotal role throughout this study. Bearing this in mind, the description of linguistic outputs will be integrated with the analysis of appraisal categories (i.e. engagement, attitude and graduation) elicited through specific examples of ELF in advertising and specially related to the interpersonal meta-function set in terms of hedges (i.e. use of emotional and persuasive lexicon, modality and personal pronouns).

Against this backdrop, it is part of our role as language scholars to "investigate, reveal and clarify how power and discriminatory values are inscribed in and mediated through the linguistic system" (Caldas-Coulthard and Coulthard 1996: xi) because such preferences are not arbitrary, but textual materializations of a writer's or speaker's ideologically laden interests. As a result, the identification of visual and linguistic patterns in the advertisements gathered in the study corpus may help reveal problematic gendered discourses as well as highlight important moments of resistance to them. In particular, the

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15518

visual analysis carried out in this study includes a description of each advertisement with a focus on the main objectifying and stereotyping representational techniques, namely, attention to body parts, representing women as sexual objects and portrayals of women as victims of violence, as highlighted by Schroeder and Borgerson (1998).

Building on this, the proposed analysis enables the visual effects of the images to be tied to discourse by exploring how certain elements of female images become conventionalized and why they may emerge in particular co-texts. It is important to note that our study does not seek to uncover or decode any kind of essential "truth" lurking beneath a gender stereotype in terms of image or text. Instead, it is of interest to this study how visual and discursive effects may serve to persuasively unveil meanings about gender stereotypes questioning how emotional violence against women may be enacted through meaning-making processes of visual representation and pragma-linguistic patterns. The combination of these two approaches can be combined in the theory of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), whose tenets contribute to analyze, interpret and decode how words and images in the selected advertisements act as basic tools for projecting gender misrepresentation in society.

In the light of these assumptions, it is also worth mentioning that gender and multimodality have been recently explored from a critical perspective thanks to Machin, Caldas-Coulthard and Milani's research (2016), which raises questions about the affordances used by communicators in each context of usage and the ideological purposes they are meant to accomplish, so that meanings about gender and sexuality are uncovered. More recently, the pervasive ideologically and ethically questionable nature of advertising has been propelled by feminist thought and remained timely and relevant due to the evolution of gender roles in society that challenge traditional gender-hierarchy structures and raise ethical considerations about female representation in the media (Azar *et al.* 2018; Tsichla 2020; Liljedal *et al.* 2020; Zayer *et al.* 2020).

Although the investigation of gender stereotypes was initiated in the 1960s, today, almost sixty years later, social movements like *#MeToo* and *Time's Up* breathe new life into the conversation about women's sexualization and objectification. Indeed, the exploration of gender portrayals continues to generate thought-provoking findings such as those images of active, confident or sexually powerful women and loving fathers, evident in the advertising appeals of "*dadvertising*" and "*femvertising*" (Åkestam *et al.* 2017; Kapoor and Munjal 2019). The term "dadvertising" is used to describe commodified representations of fatherhood suggesting that "the new ideal masculine man is an involved parent and an emotionally vulnerable partner" (Bukszpan 2016) and appealing to a female audience through gender egalitarianism in service of personal and familial empowerment politics. Hence, men are depicted as being regarded as heroes by their children, devoted fathers, loving husbands, and less often, domestic workers, thus invoking positive responses regardless of people's ideological perspectives on gender. Similarly, the term "femvertising" refers to the evolution of female portrayals in advertising into a new, "sexually powerful" woman who is in control and gets what she wants because she is sexually

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15518

attractive, as opposed to being sexually objectified in order to be looked at or consumed for male gratification.

Although these new gender portrayals have been recently introduced in advertising, the need for regulations on the use of stereotypes has still widely emerged worldwide, and in 2017 the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA)[2], among other authorities, outlined new rules giving advertisers six months to comply with them. In 2019 the ASA also introduced a ban on adverts featuring "harmful gender stereotypes" and those which are likely to cause "serious or widespread offence", as well as "to restrict the choices, aspirations and opportunities of children, young people and adults"[3]. Similarly, in 2018 a survey on gender role stereotypes and the social image of violence was carried out by the Italian ISTAT as part of a collaboration agreement with the National Department of Equal Opportunities, allowing the analysis of cultural models and factors influencing attitudes towards violence against women**.** The agreement[4] provided for the establishment of an Integrated Information System on violence against women, a multiple-source system tracking data on the phenomenon of violence against women in its various forms and allowing the quali-quantitative monitoring of this phenomenon. Though from a narrower and translocal perspective, this study attempts to encourage similar regulations for the multimodal representation of gender stereotypes in advertising advocating for a cultural change and an ethical responsibility that may contribute to deconstructing discursive patterns and semantic asymmetries of power and gender inequality.

## *3. Methodology: an integrated approach*

For the analysis of TV advertisements, we drew on the relevance of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA: Fairclough and Wodak 1997; van Dijk 2001) as it provides a useful interdisciplinary approach for the analysis of both linguistic and extralinguistic textual characterizations. In particular, Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional CDA model clearly defines the different stages involved in multimodal text analysis and is taken as a reference point throughout the study:

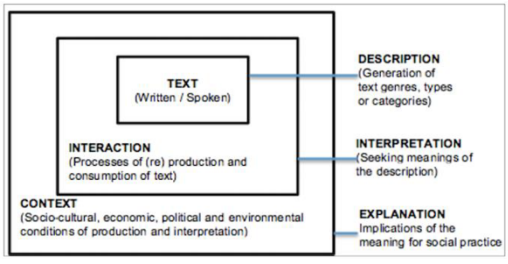


***Figure 1.*** Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional CDA model

[2] The organization administering the UK Advertising Codes and covering both broadcast and non-broadcast adverts, including online and social media.

[3] The report for the Advertising Standards Authority (prepared by Debra Crush and Polly Hollings, Final issue: 13 July 2017) is available online at: https://www.asa.org.uk/asset/A397D8C9%2DF641%2D4EF2%2D948F37E1D20F958F/ (last accessed 3 July 2021).

[4] The agreement is available online at: https://www.istat.it/en/violence-against-women (last access 3 July 2021).

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15518

As can be seen, the model includes three dimensions (i.e. text, interaction and context). Each corresponds to a different level of analysis: *description* (text analysis), *interpretation* (processing analysis) and *explanation* (social analysis). Following this model, the advertising frames were isolated along with their visual elements; related to the processing and social analysis phases, all the information deriving respectively from the 1) production and reception of advertising and 2) the representation (whether stereotyped or not) of the woman's body and image were collected and sorted out by advertising frame (Goffman 1976).

To this end, the categories of gender representation formulated by Goffman describing signals and behaviors relevant in terms of gender will also be examined (*ibid.*: 123) and, more specifically, the following: the *relative size*, or the height of a man as an element that distinguishes and reflects social weight, authority and fame with respect to women in occupational contexts; the *feminine touch*, in relation to the image of a woman touching the outline of an object with her hands and fingers to bring out its characteristics; the *function of employment,* when a man would seem to play an executive role in working contexts, despite the fact that he collaborates side by side with a woman in the workplace; the *family*, whose visual representation may indicate the role played by each of its members; the *ritual of subordination*, or the stereotype of *deference*, which consists of lowering one's gaze or physically prostrating oneself, whereas keeping a high gaze and a straight body is a sign of superiority and contempt.

When analyzing the stereotypical representation of women in advertising, the categories in Plakoyiannaki and Zotos (2009: 1417) were also taken as a reference point. The following table summarizes the taxonomy of their model:

**Table 1.** Stereotypical female roles in advertising according to Plakoyiannaki and Zotos (2009: 1417)

| Category | Description |
|---|---|
| **Women in Traditional Roles** | |
| 1. *Dependency* | 1. Dependent on male's protection; in need of reassurance; making unimportant decisions |
| 2. *Housewife* | 2. Women's place is at home; primary role is to be a good wife; concerned with tasks of housekeeping |
| **Women in Decorative Roles** | |
| 3. *Women Concerned with Physical Attractiveness* | 3. Women in pursuit of beauty and physical attractiveness (e.g. youthful) |
| 4. *Women as Sex Objects* | 4. Sex is related to product; sex is unrelated to product |
| **Women in Non-Traditional Roles** | |
| 5. *Women in Non-Traditional Activities* | 5. Engaged in activities outside the home (e.g. golf, football) |

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| | |
|---|---|
| 6. *Career-Oriented Women* | 6. Professional occupations; entertainer; non-professional; blue-collar |
| 7. *Voice of Authority* | 7. The expert |
| **Women Portrayed as Equal to Men** | |
| 8. *Neutral* | 8. Women Shown as Equal to Men |

According to Plakoyiannaki and Zotos (2009), the "dependent woman" and the "housewife" categories are among the traditional and recurrent representations of women in advertising. The former, unable to make important decisions, depends on her husband, who protects and reassures her; the latter is a woman whose only role is to look after the family and take care of the housework. The woman's decorative roles include the attractive woman and the "woman-object". The attractive woman is constantly in search of external beauty and is in most cases a young woman, whereas the "woman-object" is depicted as a woman in an erotic and sensual sense, in which there is no reference either to the advertised product or to the male audience. On the other hand, non-traditional roles portray the woman engaged in activities outside the household, not only practising sports, but also in the professional realm as a career woman, who has decided to take control of her own life, thus acquiring the professional skills that make her expert in her chosen field. The last category highlighted by Plakoyiannaki and Zotos concerns women represented in a symmetrical relationship with respect to men, therefore with equal opportunities and social roles. For the purposes of the present study, the categories described above were considered and compared with findings for the Italian section of the corpus, thus highlighting any (un)equal representations of women in advertising.

Given the multimodal nature of the discourse of advertising, one cannot avoid considering its textual features as combined with its visual elements in order to determine its message and, most of all, how any stereotypical representation is rendered and perceived by the audience. For this reason the theoretical background has been integrated into the approach offered by Appraisal Theory (Martin and Rose 2003) to investigate linguistic features in the study corpus and, in particular, any stereotypical use of language. Appraisal theory is strongly related to discourse-semantics and represents a cognitive-functional model for the evaluation of the language being employed. In particular, for our study we will focus on a specific aspect of appraisal theory related to the so-called attitude system, namely, *Affect* (resources for expressing feelings), *Judgment* (resources for evaluating character and behavior) and *Appreciation* (resources for evaluating the worth of things and phenomena). Figure 2 below illustrates how Affect, Judgment and Appreciation are interconnected in expressing emotions in relation to text:

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15518

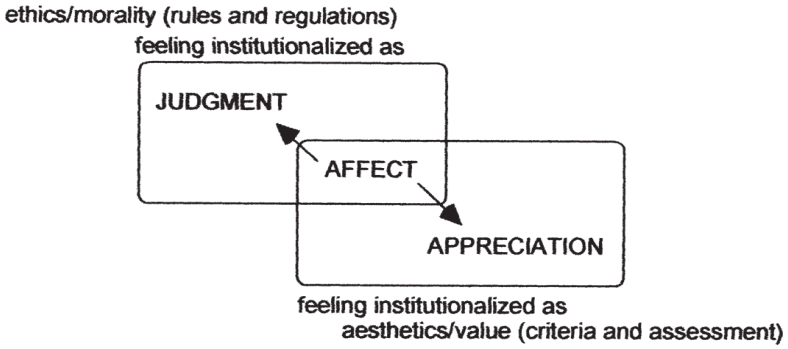


***Figure 2.*** Affect-Judgement-Appreciation relationship (adapted from Martin and Rose 2003: 174)

In line with Martin and Rose's (2003) scheme illustrated above, where *Affect* refers to the different linguistic resources for expressing emotions and feelings, the transcripts of all the British advertisements in the study corpus were transcribed and sorted out for both women and men. This also allowed for the identification of *Judgment* and *Appreciation* patterns, respectively, as instances for social esteem/sanction and how social phenomena are valued according to social conventions.

In addition, English as a Lingua Franca (ELF: Seidlhofer 2001) is here taken into consideration as *the* language by means of which worldwide companies operate and carry out marketing campaigns outside their local environment. In relation to our analysis, the notion of ELF inevitably has to be taken into account for two main reasons: 1) because the people involved in the advertisements often belong to different lingua-cultural backgrounds due to their origins and thus their use English for mutual understanding, and 2) for the potentialities that English as a common language certainly has for the marketing campaigns of a product together with the power of reaching different people around the globe.

## *4. Corpus and findings*

In order to address the research aims of the present study, a corpus was compiled with the aim of conducting a comparative analysis of female representations in TV advertisements across a wide range of products and services in the English-speaking context.

The study corpus, i.e. the WOMen in ADvertisements (henceforth WOM-AD) corpus, collects 120 advertisements (60 Italian and 60 from English-speaking countries) and their relevant metadata. One has to specify, however, that whilst the selection of TV advertisements for the English corpus section was deliberately made for the purposes of the present analysis, the Italian selection criteria for TV advertisements were predetermined by CORECOM Puglia in the preliminary stages of the research, which makes the two corpora rather heterogeneous in their nature. In addition, due to the rather low quality of the recorded audio files for the Italian section of the corpus, the whole process of linguistic annotation predominantly concentrated on the retrieval of any stereotyped linguistic forms occurring in the advertisements. Notwithstanding this, the different selection

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criteria for the two sub-corpora did not affect any aspect of the analysis, whose methodology is entirely shared by both sections. Indeed, the Italian section of the WOM-AD serves the need for a comparative analysis with advertisements from English-speaking countries and will play a pivotal role in the discussion of the findings.

Drawing on the integrated approach illustrated in the previous sections, the study has first aimed at highlighting frequencies for each of the categories proposed by Plakoyiannaki and Zotos (2009) by analyzing each frame multimodally, in all their visual and linguistic elements, in search of stereotyped representations as well as instances of *femvertising* (Rodríguez Pérez and Gutiérrez Almanzor 2017; Varghese and Kumar 2020; Elhajjar 2021). Afterwards, a selection of distinctive frames taken from the WOM-AD will be analyzed (Section 5).

### 4.1. General information on the WOM-AD corpus

From the 60 video files for the English section, 273 advertising frames were extracted[5]. Tables 2 and 3 respectively represent the absolute values (n) and the percent values (%) of the distribution for the advertising frames. In this section, we report the data for both the English and the Italian sections of the study corpus, although for the purposes of our analysis we will consider the English section, whereas the Italian will be used for the sake of comparison in the *Discussion of Findings* section.

**Table 2.** Advertisement frames in the WOM-AD corpus

| **Advertisement frames** | | |
|---|---|---|
| | ***n*** | **%** |
| English section | 273 | 68.25 |
| Italian section | 127 | 31.75 |
| Total | 400 | 100 |

As regards the advertised goods and services in the English section of the study corpus, most of them concern body care and cosmetics (25%), followed by food and shopping (20%), technology (15%), health (10%) and sports and leisure (8.33%), and to less common categories, such as jewelry/fashion and cars, animals, desserts, furniture and finally training.

[5] Sources for EN advertisements: https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/marketing/top-campaigns-the-50-best-brand-adverts-of-2020/651468.article; https://www.forbes.com/sites/avidan/2020/12/10/the-best-ads-of-2020/?sh=66f0a81c7dcd (last accessed 3 July 2021).

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15518

**Table 3.** Products and services in the WOM-AD corpus (EN)

**Goods and services in the WOM-AD corpus (EN)**

| | ***n*** | ***%*** |
|---|---|---|
| Cosmetics/body care | 15 | 25 |
| Food/shopping | 12 | 20 |
| Health | 6 | 10 |
| Animals | 2 | 3.33 |
| Desserts | 2 | 3.33 |
| Sports/leisure | 5 | 8.33 |
| Jewelry/fashion | 3 | 5 |
| Cars | 3 | 5 |
| Training | 1 | 1.68 |
| Furniture/house | 2 | 3.33 |
| Technology | 9 | 15 |
| **Total** | **60** | **100** |

Furthermore, the distribution of women in the English section of the WOM-AD corpus appears to be rather diversified, with women being more frequent than men in advertisements: co-presence of women appears to be recurrent in the study corpus, whereas the presence/co-presence of men and women appears to be confined to fewer cases. The following tables respectively summarize the findings for the presence/co-presence of women and men as well as their presence in relation to the advertised product in the English section of the corpus:

**Table 4.** Female (co-)presence in the WOM-AD corpus (EN) according to advertised products and services

**Female co-presence in the WOM-AD corpus (EN)**

| | **Woman *(n)*** | **Women *(n)*** | **Woman-Men *(n)*** | **Woman-Man-Child(ren) *(n)*** | **Tot. *(n)*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cosmetics/Body Care | 5 | 9 | 1 | - | 15 |
| Food/Shopping | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 12 |
| Health | 4 | 2 | - | - | 6 |
| Animals | 2 | - | - | - | 2 |
| Desserts | 1 | 1 | - | - | 2 |

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15518

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sports/Leisure | 2 | - | 2 | 1 | 5 |
| Jewelry/Fashion | 3 | - | - | - | 3 |
| Cars | 3 | - | - | - | 3 |
| Training | 1 | - | - | - | 1 |
| Furniture/House | 2 | - | - | - | 2 |
| Technology | 3 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 9 |
| **Total** | **28** | **19** | **8** | **5** | **60** |

**Table 5.** Percentage (%) for female (co-)presence in the WOM-AD corpus (EN) according to advertised products and services

**Percentages (%) for female co-presence in the WOM-AD corpus (EN)**

| | **Woman** *(%)* | **Women** *(%)* | **Woman-Men** *(%)* | **Woman-Man-Child(ren)** *(%)* | **Tot.** *(%)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cosmetics/Body Care | 8.3 | 15 | 1.6 | - | 25 |
| Food/Shopping | 3.3 | 6.7 | 6.7 | 3.3 | 20 |
| Health | 6.7 | 3.3 | - | - | 10 |
| Animals | 3.3 | - | - | - | 3.3 |
| Desserts | 1.7 | 1.7 | - | - | 3.4 |
| Sports/Leisure | 3.3 | - | 3.3 | 1.7 | 8.3 |
| Jewelry/Fashion | 5 | - | - | - | 5 |
| Cars | 5 | - | - | - | 5 |
| Training | 1.7 | - | - | - | 1.7 |
| Furniture/House | 3.3 | - | - | - | 3.3 |
| Technology | 5 | 5 | 1.7 | 3.3 | 15 |
| **Total** | **46.6** | **31.7** | **13.4** | **8.3** | **100** |

The presence and co-presence of women in the English section of the WOM-AD appears to be predominant, with an overall 46.6% and 31.7% respectively for the presence of one woman or the co-presence of women; generally speaking, women appear to be more recurrent in the cosmetics/body care context (25%), followed by food/shopping (20%), technology (15%) and health (10%). Interestingly perhaps, the percentage for the co-presence of woman-man appears to be lower with respect to female presence: this is confined to the contexts of cosmetics and body care, food/shopping as well as to sports and leisure activities. The woman-man-child(ren)

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co-presence is also very low if compared to the other identified categories (only 8.3%) and is found in the food/shopping, sports/leisure and technology categories.

### 4.2. Female roles in the WOM-AD corpus

Drawing on the taxonomy provided by Plakoyiannaki and Zotos (2009), we identified and categorized any stereotyped role emerging from the study corpus. For this specific aim, each advertisement was broken down into frames, since each of them was characterized by the occurrence of more than one role category. In the analysis, 273 frames were identified and sorted out by role. The following table summarizes the findings for stereotyped and non-stereotyped roles within the study corpus:

**Table 6.** Overall female role distribution in the WOM-AD corpus (EN)

| **Female role distribution in the WOM-AD corpus (EN)** | | |
|---|---|---|
| | ***n*** | ***%*** |
| Traditional roles | 65 | 23.8 |
| Decorative roles | 64 | 23.4 |
| Non-traditional roles | 103 | 37.8 |
| Equal roles | 41 | 15 |
| **Total** | **273** | **100** |

Figures for the overall distribution of women in the study corpus show a prevalence of non-traditional roles (37.8% in the entire EN section of the corpus), whereas the frequency of traditional roles and decorative roles appears to be lower and balanced (respectively 23.8% and 23.4% in the study section of the corpus); equal roles (i.e. the instances in which women and men are depicted as having equal opportunities) account for 15% of the study corpus – which is still a relatively high value, if we consider the 41 instances found.

*Non-traditional* roles (n = 103) depict women as active, dynamic and not simply devoted to the household: these are women taking control of their own social life and being successful in their professional careers. Figures 7-12 are frames taken from three advertisements in the study corpus, Wotsits Giants, Clairol Australia and Dove, respectively.

In Wotsits Giants, the main protagonist is a woman who is responsible for awarding the Guinness World Records label. She is depicted in her role of judge and the following close-ups allow us to see her as she performs her leading role, wearing a uniform.

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15518

***Figures 7-8.*** Wotsits Giants Guinness World Records advertisement[6]

Additionally, the language she uses is performative, as can be seen in the transcription of the dialogue in the advertisement provided below:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Man** | **Here at the walkers factory we've been attempting to make the biggest what's in [.] our [.] I think our chances are really good at setting the world record we've been working on this for months so we can make this record on the day we got the team together we made one that was a meter long the team pulled together and said I think we can do better than that we've got to four meters six meters and by the end of the day we're eight meters I'm open today that we can smash eight meters and get away** |
| **Woman** | **(Paulina Sapinska): I've seen a lot of attempts for large food items in my time but I have not seen an attempt for the longest puffcorn** |
| **Man** | so the challenges have been how do we season it and how do we dehydrate it because our current systems would not allow that size fruit |
| **Woman** | **I'm happy to announce that Wotsits Giants has achieved a new Guinness world records title for the longest puffcorn measuring 10 meters 66 centimeters, congratulations, you are officially amazing!** |

If we take a closer look at the turns of dialogue above, the language used by both speakers provides useful insights into pragmalinguistic characterizations in ELF, stereotypical roles along with some deconstructing strategies. By applying Martin and Rose's (2003) Affect-Judgement-Appreciation relationship scheme, we selected the following excerpts:

[6] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwyYRCvIS9o (last accessed 6 August 2021)

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15518

**Table 7.** Lexico-grammatical realization of Martin and Rose's (2003) Affect-Judgement-Appreciation relationship in Wotsits Giants advertisement

| **Man's exchanges (Wotsits Giants Guinness World Records advertisement)** | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Text** | **Item** | **Appraised** | **Polarity** | **Lexico-grammar realization** |
| **Here at the walkers factory we've been attempting to make the biggest** | In/secure | -Paulina Sapinska -Advert audience | + affect | Hedging Verb Superlative |
| **what's in our I think our chances are really good at setting the world record we've been working on this for months** | In/secure | Paulina Sapinska Advert audience | + affect | Adjective Verb |
| **Woman's exchanges (Wotsits Giants Guinness World Records advertisement)** | | | | |
| **I've seen a lot of attempts for large food items in my time but I have not seen an attempt for the longest puffcorn** | Secure | Wotsits Giants employees | + affect | Verb, Superlative |
| **I'm happy to announce that Wotsits Giants has achieved a new Guinness world records title for the longest puffcorn […] congratulations, you are officially amazing!** | Secure | Wotsits Giants employees | + affect | Adjective, Verb phrase |

Emotion is one of the greatest resources speakers have at their disposal in order to convey their feelings, and this is included in Martin and Rose's *Affect* category. As can be seen from the table provided above, there are some differences in woman-man representation in the Wotsits Giants advertisement (Figures 7-8), and this transpires from their use of ELF throughout the advertisement (Table 7). The man appears to be assertive to some extent (with only one case in which he uses a superlative form with reference to his own work, i.e. the biggest [puffcorn]), but he prefers to resort to hedging expressions through the use of verbs in the continuous aspect (*we've been attempting, we've been working, I think our chances are really good*). The stereotyped role of the hard-working man is re-

dimensioned by the woman's dominant role of judge evaluating a man's performance through the use of adjectives and highly performative language to convey – adopting Martin and Rose's (2003) terminology – her Judgment (i.e. *I've seen a lot of attempts for large food items in my time but I have not seen an attempt for the longest puffcorn*) and her Appreciation through extremely positive adjectives and expressions (i.e. *I'm happy to announce that Wotsits Giants has achieved a new Guinness world records title for the longest puffcorn […] congratulations, you are officially amazing!*).

The second example is taken from Clairol and shows a woman who is dyeing her hair on her own, without going to the salon. She is represented in all the different steps that are required, with close-ups of her hair before and after the procedure. In the two frames provided below (Figures 9-10), she respectively shows the procedure she follows to dye her hair and the final result on the right, showing it off with a smiling and satisfied face.

***Figures 9-10***. Clairol[7]

| | |
|---|---|
| **Woman** | **I am going to brave it and colour my own hair with nice and easy 8WR. I have never coloured my own hair before**<br>**Oh I've gone wrong**<br>**Nice and easy** |

Additionally, the language she uses conveys a sense of empowerment and autonomy, as well as ease. First-person pronouns (*I am going to brave it and colour my hair*; *I have never coloured my own hair before*) emphasize this, and the adjectives "nice and easy" (which are also part of the Clairol Nice 'n Easy line) as well as the sentence "Oh, I've gone wrong!" constitute a proof of the informal context in which the easy-going woman operates, without any idealization.

The use of first-person personal pronouns with an interpersonal function (Halliday 1985) clearly helps to establish a particular relationship between the woman who is advertising the product and the target audience who might be interested in trying out the product.

[7] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i63lQHtoRT8 (last accessed 5 August 2021)

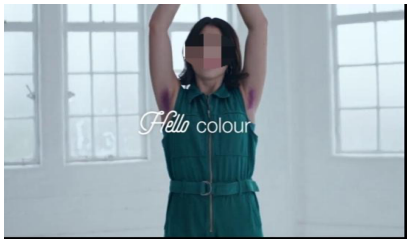
https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15518

**Table 8.** Lexico-grammatical realization of Martin and Rose's (2003) Affect-Judgement-Appreciation relationship in Clairol – woman's exchanges

| Woman's exchanges (Clairol advertisement) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Text** | **Item** | **Appraised** | **Polarity** | **Lexico-grammar realization** |
| **I am going to brave it and color my own hair with nice and easy 8 wr. I have never colored my own hair before** | Secure / insecure | Women interested in dying their hair | +affect | Verb phrase |
| **Oh I've gone wrong!** | Insecure | Women interested in dying their hair | -affect | Verb phrase |
| **Nice and easy** | Secure | Women interested in dying their hair | +affect | Adjectives |

Table 8 exemplifies the use of ELF in relation to the expression of the woman's self-empowerment and combines it with Martin and Rose's (2003) categories. Throughout the short advertisement the woman appears to be self-confident by trying out the product on her own hair: this is rendered through the use of the verb "going to" (*I am going to brave it and color my own hair with nice and easy 8 wr.*), expressing the speaker's intention, and a present perfect simple form (*I have never colored my own hair before*) in order to express the exceptionality of the activity which is going to be carried out. After a moment which includes some uncertainty and insecurity on the part of the woman (*Oh I've gone wrong!*), the advertisement ends up recalling the Nice 'n Easy line of Clairol Australia hair products by means of the evaluative and attitudinal lexis (*nice and easy*) which the woman uses in order to "judge" and provide feedback about the product.

The third example of a non-traditional role is represented by the *Dove* advertisement. This is one of the most striking examples in the corpus as it is dense in deconstructed stereotypes – hence, for reasons of available space, we here report on just two:




***Figures 11-12.*** *Dove* (1)[8]

[8] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ts3CT6IbwUw (last accessed 27 July 2021)

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15518

Here in this advertisement the main topic is the deconstruction of a stereotype feeling of shame related to the underarms. Hence, the advertisement frames are each characterized by the overlays “Hello X” followed by parts of women’s body and personality (e.g. “Hello Me”, “Hello Smooth”, “Hello Style”, “Hello Hair”, “Hello Choice”, “Hello Colour”, Hello Festivals”, “Hello Gym”) and “Goodbye” (e.g. “Goodbye Judgment”), with the final statistical statement that “88% of women feel society promotes an ‘ideal’ underarm” and the final remark “The only thing your underarm shouldn’t be is a worry”. Below is the transcript of the advertisement, which is in contrast with what is stated in the overlays, as can be seen:

| | |
|---|---|
| Man | Introducing new Dove |
| **Woman1** | **Athena's underarms must be flawless**<br>**fixed door causes outrage** |
| **Woman2** | **so what's wrong with these** |
| | **I would love for the ideal underarms to just not exist** |
| **Woman3** | **my hair underarms do not define my womanhood** |
| **Woman** | **I don't cover up anymore**<br>**I love showing my underarms** |
| **Woman** | **you kind of had it and you could be happy** |
| **Woman** | **my touching you don't pitch reflect me** |
| **Woman** | **my team tells me to grow my under arms** |
| **Woman** | **I like my own face** |
| **Woman** | **my dog don't hold me back** |
| **Woman** | **mine you just have to guess** |
| **Woman** | **let me introduce you to business and festival disco** |
| **Woman** | **I think I quite care** |
| **Woman** | **I've always admired people who do their own thing with conviction and confidence** |
| **Woman** | **everyone is normal and everyone is different** |

The lines highlighted represent a monologue that each woman in the advertisement performs as they are staring at their underarms. The transcript’s function is to highlight the contradictory feelings related to the non-acceptance of one’s own underarms (“what’s wrong with these”; “my hair underarms do not define my womanhood”; “I think I quite care”; “I’ve always admired people who do their own thing with conviction and confidence”; and “everyone is normal and everyone is different”. Drawing on Martin and Rose’s (2003) model, we selected instances for lexico-grammar realizations in ELF which reflect, among other things, gender stereotypes or the women’s wish for the acceptance of difference:

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15518

**Table 9.** Lexico-grammatical realization of Martin and Rose's (2003) Affect-Judgement-Appreciation relationship in Dove – women's exchanges.

| **Women's exchanges (Dove)** | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Text** | **Item** | **Appraised** | **Polarity** | **Lexico-grammar realization** |
| **I would love for the ideal underarms to just not exist** | discourage | Women | -affect | Verb phrase + would love |
| **my hair underarms do not define my womanhood** | Secure | Women | + affect | Verb phrase |
| **I think I quite care** | Insecure/Secure | Women | + affect | Hedges |
| **I've always admired people who do their own things with conviction and confidence** | Secure | Women | + affect | Verb phrase Abstract Nouns |
| **Everyone is normal and everyone is different** | Secure | Women and men | + affect | Verb phrase Repetition Adjectives |

The first example *I would love my hair just not to exist* with its negative polarity in terms of affect describes a feeling of discouragement on the part of the woman for the unbearable situation in which she finds herself: not being socially accepted because of her hairy underarms. This feeling is rendered through the use of two verb phrases in contrast with each other: an affirmative/positive one (i.e. *I would love* ….) is then followed by a negative verb phrase (*to just not exist*). The second instance *My hair underarms do not define my womanhood* is rather assertive in its tone, and this is signaled by the presence of a negative verb phrase in the present tense which sounds rather polemic as a statement. The third example is iconic in that it expresses the feeling of insecurity which the woman is undergoing by means of such a lexico-grammatical device as hedging (*I think I quite care*). The last two examples, respectively, *I've always admired people who do their own things with conviction and confidence* and *Everyone is normal and everyone is different* both represent a way of promoting social inclusion through the acceptance of diversity. More specifically, whereas the former sentence makes use of a very positive verb phrase (expressed by the verb *admire* in its present perfect form) and two key abstract nouns (i.e. *conviction* and *confidence*), the latter example is characterized by the repetition of the indefinite pronoun *Everyone* in a sort of logical reasoning in which normality means accepting difference and difference is normality.

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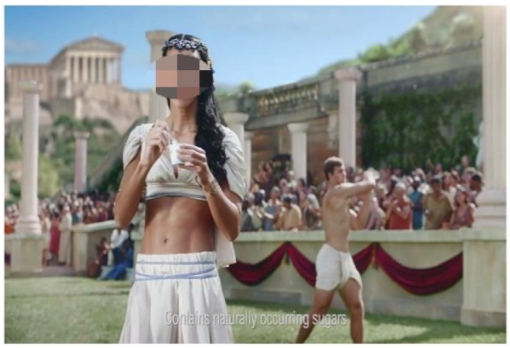
*Traditional* roles (n = 65) in the study corpus include those roles in which the woman is represented as stereotyped in either her canonical beauty or her role within society. The following frames are taken respectively from *Müller* (Figures 13-14), *Dole* (Figures 15-16) and *Dove* (second advertisement, Figures 17-18).



**Figures 13-14.** *Müller*.[9]

In the *Müller* advertisement, the main character is a woman dressed like a Greek handmaid, who is tasting a new fat-free Greek yogurt. At the beginning of the advertisement, she can be seen full-body (Figure 13), but then the focus is redirected to her face and lips, thus relating this close-up to the moment in which she tastes her yogurt to the full. This tasting experience is accompanied by a relatively short sentence, describing the new product and its characteristics through a female voice. It is interesting to note the Müller-Mmm alliteration and, last but not least, the creative use of the Müller brand for coining a new adjective, i.e. Müllerlicious (a fusion of "Müller" and "delicious"). Hence, the unique visual tasting experience is also fulfilled through the creative use of ELF:

**Table 10.** Lexico-grammatical realization of Martin and Rose's (2003) Affect-Judgement-Appreciation relationship in *Müller* advertisement.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Woman** | **Müllerlight Greek Style Luscious Lemon, Mmmmh…. 0% added sugar and still… FAT-FREE! Now that's Mmm…Müllerlicious** |

In the following frames taken from a Dole advertisement (Figures 15-16), we can see a woman and a man talking about their own family issues in front of a camera. Here the role of the woman is being stigmatized, as can be seen in the frame on the right, where she sadly explains how the couple deals with tensions in the family context during the pandemic ("Quaran-Tensions" is a wordplay in this regard) and her husband sitting next to her is actually looking at her, thus confirming what Goffman (1976) refers to as the ritual of subordination, visually blaming the woman for what happens.

[9] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZzToh_ypVA (last accessed 20 July 2021)

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15518

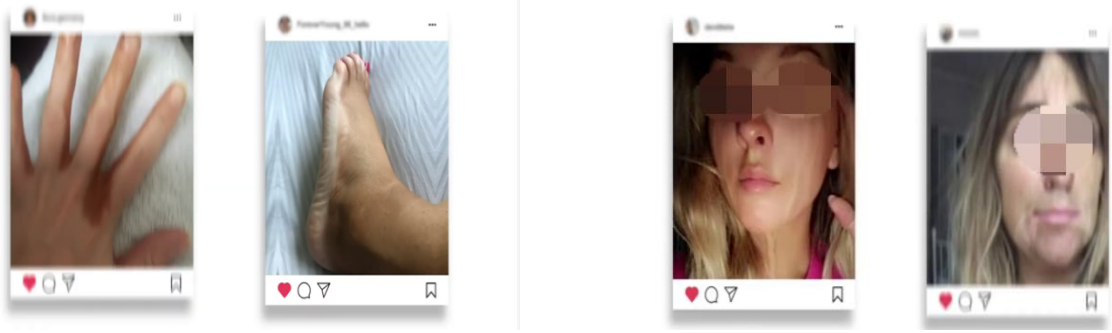
**Figures 15-16.** *Dole*.[10]

The transcription of the advertisement confirms the subordinate role of the woman, who takes on responsibility for the family issues (by using the first-person plural pronoun *we*) and arguments (*Times are stressful, but we are trying not to swear in front of the kids*), with the man only acknowledging it by means of the exclamation "Aaaah! Fruit bowl!". It is interesting to note how "Fruit Bowl" becomes the preferred substitute for swear words in front of the kids (*Guys, what the Fruit Bowl!*).

**Table 11.** Lexico-grammatical realization of Martin and Rose's (2003) Affect-Judgement-Appreciation relationship in *Dole* advertisement.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Woman** | **Times are stressful. But we're trying not to swear in front of the kids.** |
| **Man** | Ahhh |
| **Woman** | So, we use 'Fruit Bowl' instead |
| **Man** | Fruit Bowl! |
| **Woman** | **Guys! What the Fruit Bowl!** What?! We eat a lot of Fruit Bowls. |

Also the second *Dove* advertisement (Figures 17-18) seems to stigmatize the role of women as the only people suffering from physical and mental illnesses, as can be seen from the close-ups of body parts whose selection is represented below:



**Figures 17-18.** *Dove* (2).[11]

[10] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KogKRO9CAlk (last accessed 2 August 2021)
[11] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjXvli8Hbe0 (last accessed 1 August 2021)

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15518

The frames provided above clearly explain the correlation between physical illnesses and the lack of acceptance of one's own body: the two frames provided above are incorporated into Instagram posts with likes and comments, which emphasize even more a stereotyped conception of beauty based upon physical appearance. More specifically, the second frame shows a young woman who is dissatisfied with her skin imperfections and thus compares her current status with an old Instagram picture in which she has put on some make-up and definitely looks more attractive. The transcription which is associated with this advertisement is a concise message uttered by a woman inviting people to evaluate the results of using the new Dove mousse. The announcer-audience relationship is rendered by the use of the second-person personal pronoun *you*, which represents a shift from the visual representation of the Instagram woman to the reality of 'common' women wishing to get control of their own tan.

**Table 12.** Lexico-grammatical realization of Martin and Rose's (2003) Affect-Judgement-Appreciation relationship in second *Dove* advertisement.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Woman** | **Get control of your tan. Introducing Dove Lightweight Fast absorbing mousse. That lets you choose the level of your tan. New Dove gradual self-tan body mousse.** |

*Decorative* roles (n = 64) refer to those contexts in which the woman is being exploited as an ornament or her presence is used as a persuasive strategy for inviting people to buy a given product.

As the purpose of the paper is also to investigate multimodal gender representation from an interlinguistic perspective, it is well worth providing some insights into the Italian section of the WOM-AD in order to describe different female representations and how stereotyped representations are more frequent in either the Italian or the British section. As already stated earlier in Section 4, the heterogeneous nature of the dataset did not allow us to carry out the same multimodal analysis for both sub-sections of the corpus. However, some conclusions can still be drawn. The following table summarizes the results for the Italian section of the corpus, again drawing on Plakoyiannaki and Zotos (2009):

**Table 13.** Female role percentages in WOM-AD corpus (IT) according to Plakoyiannaki and Zotos (2009).

| **Female role percentages in the WOM-AD corpus (it)** | | |
|---|---|---|
| | ***n*** | ***(%)*** |
| **Traditional roles** | 66 | 53.2 |
| **Decorative roles** | 22 | 17.7 |
| **Non-traditional roles** | 26 | 21 |
| **Equal roles** | 10 | 8.1 |
| **Total** | **124** | **100** |

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15518

In the Italian section of the WOM-AD, women predominantly perform *traditional* roles, with 53.2% of the analyzed advertisements, in which they appear as mothers preparing lunch and/or dinner, looking after their children, taking care of daily cleaning tasks and in professional contexts. They are mainly represented as maintainers of the domestic order, confirming a female representation strongly linked to the stereotype of the woman-mother and the woman-wife, as can be seen in the following frames (Figure 20, frames 1-5):

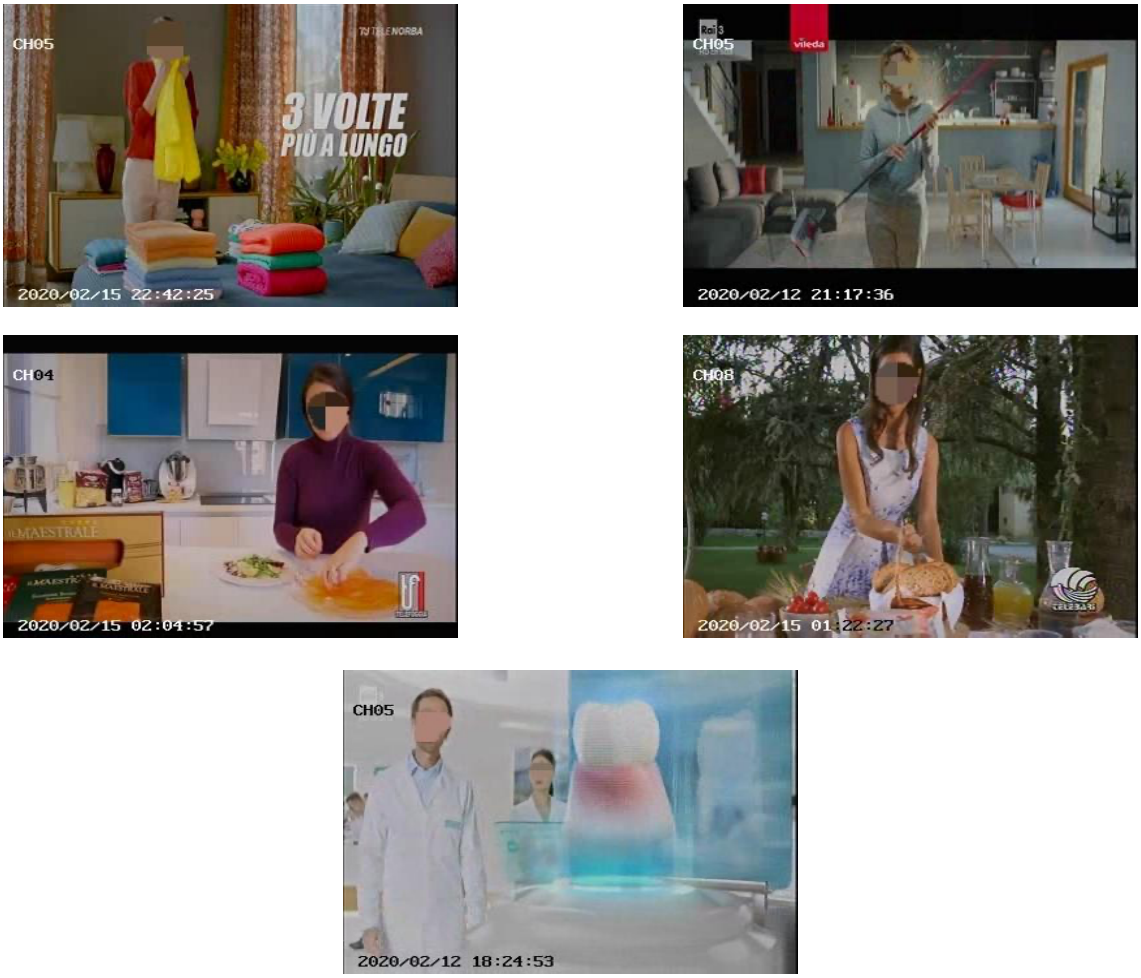



***Figure 20.*** Frames 1-5: Woman in traditional roles: Ace; Dentix; Bakery; Seed bread; Vileda.[12]

Women in traditional roles are generally portrayed first in full, then the focus is redirected to their hands that knead or cut fruit and vegetables. In this context, brown-haired women prevail over blonde women, with generally casual clothes, except for the woman in a professional setting who wears a white coat. As can be seen from the selection of frames 1-5 above, the woman is generally represented indoors and at home (frames 1, 4, 5) or in the garden of her own house in the countryside (frame 3). In all of the frames, the woman is represented in the background, and this becomes even more evident in frame 1, where in front of the woman there are sweaters washed and folded systematically, with the emphasis on the amount of work for which the woman is responsible on a

[12] These advertisements are included in the corpus which was annotated for the CORECOM-funded research project focusing on the image of women in Apulian advertisements (see *Introduction*).

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daily basis, as well as in frame 2, where the doctor in the foreground explains the antibacterial action of the advertised toothpaste, while the woman in the background is observing passively and with a low gaze, thus confirming the Goffmanian function of ranking, which sees the man as the holder of knowledge and responsible for prestigious tasks as opposed to women, who are perennially destined to live in a condition of subordination.

## *5. Conclusions*

The analysis of the WOM-AD corpus has provided data on the representation of the image of women in advertising from an interlinguistic and multimodal perspective and has demonstrated that discursive constructions of stereotyped and discriminating gender identities in the Italian and English advertisements appear to be rather diversified. Specifically, the findings reveal that female roles characterizing the Italian section of the corpus are represented in a more traditional way than in the English section (53.2% vs 23.8%). However, this outcome does not coincide with the percentage of the representation of decorative roles which should be generally aligned with traditional representations of women. In fact, decorative roles in the Italian corpus are unexpectedly less recurrent than in the English one (17.7% vs 23.4%), thus opening the door to different interpretations of the findings. One possible interpretation could be related to the prevalence of cosmetics/body care products in the English section of the corpus (25%), in which the woman is at the center of advertising but displays a marginal role (namely decorative). Another, perhaps more interesting hypothesis emerges if we have a look at the different findings for the distribution of female (co-)presence in the WOM-AD(EN) corpus: women are in fact represented alone in the English sub-section of the corpus (46.6%), whereas man-woman co-presence is very low (13.4%), and men are never represented alone. This perfectly matches with the idea of an overall prevailing non-traditional representation of the woman in the English subsection of the corpus in comparison to the Italian one (21%) and, most of all, with the promotion of women as empowered human beings within society.

Taking a closer look at non-traditional roles, the research findings show that in the English advertisements they are more present (37.8 vs 21%), as well as in the portrayal of equal roles (15% vs 8.1%), thus helping to predict a more respectful representation of gender roles and of the female body. Furthermore, the scant presence of gender stereotypes and sexualization of the female body in the English corpus is also highlighted by such pragma-linguistic patterns as emotional lexis, appraisal categories and devices which appeal to the audience's attention. Crucially, a sense of female empowerment and autonomy, as well as ease, is conveyed by the frequent use of first-person pronouns along with some hedging strategies which seem to reinforce the female protagonist's voice and role in the exchanges with her interlocutor. Among them, one finds the use of affect markers (i.e. superlatives, evaluative and attitudinal lexis) and of assertive and modal verbs expressing the female protagonist's confidence and intention to act as she strives for and against prescribed models. Though not exclusively

https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1974-4382/15518

related to the textual representation of gender stereotypes, it is worth mentioning here that the English corpus also reports some challenging examples of linguistic creativity characterizing ELF in advertising. In particular, the Müller advertisement provides an attractive visual experience fulfilled through the creative fusion of "Müller" and "delicious" that creates *Müllerlicious*. Similarly, linguistic creativity is also displayed by the Dole advertisement which resorts to the wordplay "Quaran-Tensions" by envisioning a potential ritual of subordination in the way the husband visually blames the woman for some family tensions.

Finally, this study has focused on women's representation in advertisements, and on how they are depicted in terms of language and images. However, for future investigation it would be interesting to draw on other challenging data from the results of the whole WOM-AD corpus and to identify 'men' as an analytic variable, comparing how men and women are represented in print and visual advertisements in linguistic and visual terms as compared to women, as well as androgynous, non-binary gender portrayals that attempt to address the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender (LGBT) segment of consumers. These thematic paths may present a new, challenging and virtually unexplored territory for the investigation of gender stereotypes that would surely yield interesting insights.

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