

Values and Images Reflected in TV Commercials

THEME: CULTURAL IDENTITIES

LANGUAGE: ANY (SPANISH)

STANDARD(S): COMMUNICATION CULTURES CONNECTIONS COMPARISONS
1.2 2.1 2.2 3.2 4.2

Time Frame:

One class period (45 minutes).

Materials Needed:

- Videotape with at least six current U.S. television commercials portraying various American values
- Videotape with six current Latin American TV commercials that reflect various Latin American values
- Handout for listening comprehension exercise (provided)
- TV, VCR

Description of Task:

Preparation:

Prior to this activity, the teacher should record on videotape a variety of current TV commercials that reflect common mainstream U.S. values (e.g., independence, beauty, economic success, prestige, freedom of choice, etc.). Alternatively, such a task can be assigned to students. A similar videotape of Latin American commercials also needs to be made or obtained. Again, commercials that reflect common Latin American values (e.g., importance of family) should be recorded. These may be taped from cable channels, or videos having commercials can be purchased (see resources below).

Context:

This task assumes that students have explored common cultural themes in magazine advertisements and commercial advertisements.

Level:

Novice-High

Purpose:

To identify U.S. and target culture images and cultural values portrayed in TV commercials

Communicative

Function(s):

Referential: Understanding descriptions; hypothesizing; interpreting information; comparing and contrasting things

Imaginative: Discussing an advertisement

Language Structure(s):

Imperatives; descriptive adjectives; persuasive language

Cultural Aspects:

Exploration of cultural images/values used in advertisements to persuade audiences.

Modalities:

Listening

Speaking

Writing

NOTES

They will know most of the basic vocabulary used in the commercials as well as the imperative form.

The purpose of the activity is to have students compare cultural values by first becoming aware of their own perceptions of themselves and then by exploring their perceptions of Latin Americans (Kramersch, 1993). Commercials provide a powerful means of making such comparisons (Martin, 1995).

Pre-listening:

The teacher begins by showing students six U.S. television commercials portraying various American values. They should prepare to discuss the following questions (which are written on the board) after viewing the commercials:

- What kinds of images are used in the ads to persuade American audiences?
- What American values are evident from the images in the ads? (e.g., beauty, success, prestige, money, belonging, fame, etc.)
- Do you think that Latin Americans have the same values as Americans? (Students should be asked to recall what they learned after exploring magazine ads from various Latin American countries.)
- Would the images portrayed in American commercials persuade Latin American audiences? Why or why not?

If necessary, a review of imperative forms can occur prior to the listening activity.

During Listening:

The teacher distributes the handout and plays six Latin American TV commercials one at a time. Each commercial should be viewed three times (Shrum & Glisan, 1994). The first time through, the TV screen should be covered with a towel or paper, so that students are only exposed to the audio portion of the commercial. Inform students to listen for the name of the product and to jot down words (including imperative forms) that they hear on the handout.

The second time through, show students the visual only by turning the mute on. Students are to verify what products are being advertised and to look for persuading images, which they should record on the handout.

The third time through, allow students to view the commercial in its entirety with audio and visual. Students are to note additional language and/or images that are used to persuade Latin American audiences on their worksheets.

This three-stage process should be repeated for each commercial. Students are to provide as much detail on the worksheet as possible.

Post Listening:

Students share their completed worksheets with a partner and discuss the impressions they had. Then, the whole class discusses the points that the students were supposed to identify in the commercials. The teacher may ask the following questions to guide the discussion:

- What products were advertised in the commercials?
- What words did you hear in the commercials?
- What images or language was used to persuade consumers?
- What do the commercials suggest that Latin Americans value a great deal?
- Do you believe this same value is as important in U.S. culture? Is this value evident in the U.S. commercials?
- Do you think that the Latin American commercials would have the same impact if they were translated into English or would the images used need to change to persuade members of the U.S. culture? Why?
- Which was your favorite commercial? Why?

Assessment:

The handouts that students complete act as an assessment of listening comprehension. Informal assessment can be done throughout this entire lesson while monitoring class discussions. The teacher should also walk around the room to scan the worksheets as the students are filling them out. The teacher should ask herself or himself the following questions:

- Are the students making an effort to answer all the questions?
- Are they demonstrating comprehension of the listening material? (ie. Are they filling out the worksheet correctly? Are they answering the discussion questions adequately?)
- Are the students participating in the discussion?

Extensions:

Suggestions for adapting the task for various levels:

For beginning levels: Instead of writing words on the handout as they view the commercials, students can circle words they hear on a handout containing lists of words (prepared ahead of time by the teacher). Most of the discussion can occur in English.

For advanced levels: The discussion can occur primarily in the target language. Students can be asked to design and perform their own TV commercial which is to be geared toward Latinos in Minnesota.

Other extensions:

- Commercials from the U.S. and the target culture that advertise the same product (e.g., McDonald's or Coca Cola) can be compared/contrasted.
- A similar activity involving cross-cultural comparison can be done with magazine advertisements.

Cultural extensions:

Small groups of students can be assigned to explore a particular value as reflected in a variety of products in the target culture (e.g., the importance of family can be explored in advertisements, literature, music, idioms, etc.). These groups can then report to the class.

References and Resources:

Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Martin, E. (1995, April 6-8). "Linking multilingual advertising to foreign language teaching." Paper presented at the Annual Eastern Michigan University Conference on Languages and Communication for World Business and the Professions.

Shrum, J. L., & Glisan, E. W. (1994). *Teacher's handbook: Contextualized language instruction*. Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.

- Suggested Commercials taped from *Univisión* (these emphasize the importance of family in particular):
 - Mazola
 - Mission Tortillas
 - Vicks Vaporub
 - McDonald's
 - Mazda
- TV Commercials in French, German, and Spanish can also be purchased from Teacher's Discovery (1-800-TEACHER).

Reflections:

Cultural Images and Values in TV Commercials

	Write the name of the product being advertised	Jot down the words you hear, including imperative verb forms	Make a list of images or other words that are used to persuade the audience
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			

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