

“Get your perfect super-attractive hour-glass dream body”: Ideal Body Ideology in Weight-Loss Promotional Emails

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Abstract

The slim and shapely body is often discursively constructed as the ideal body across various media and discourses, the weight-loss discourse inclusive. While the ideological construction of the ideal body has been investigated in news media, advertisements and beauty discourse, its investigation in weight-loss discourse has been neglected in the literature. This study fills this gap by investigating two purposively selected weight-loss promotional emails in order to uncover the ideologies underlying the construction of the body in the emails. The study employed three textual-conceptual tools of critical stylistics, namely naming and describing, enumerating and exemplifying, and implying and assuming. The analysis teased out two major ideologies which influenced ideation in the weight-loss promotional emails. The first is that the fat body is ugly and undesirable and, the second is that the slim and shapely body is beautiful and desirable. These ideologies make the slim body not just the site of power, but also the symbol of power that grants phallic female power to the owner. This implicit construction of the slim body as the possession of power explains why weight-loss products and programmes may continue to amass subscriptions from clients who are desperate to obtain that body power despite the lack of scientific evidence to support many of the claims in the weight-loss texts.

Introduction

The slim and shapely body is usually discursively constructed across various media as the ideal. This, as Kyrölä (2021, 105) argues, is responsible for deeming some bodies desirable, acceptable, or “normal,” others threatening, shameful, or excessive. Young (2005, 53) reveals that the idea of the ideal body is tied to the dominant culture which defines feminine beauty as slim and shapely, thereby pushing women to derive a sense of self-worth from looking “sexy” in the manner promoted by dominant cultural images. Walseth, Aartun and Engelsrud (2015, 2) identify the dominant sport, health and beauty discourses in the society as the major sponsors of these sort of body ideals and femininities. For Nichter and Nichter (1991, 249), ‘the trend toward slimming among women has been influenced by diverse factors ranging from concerns about health to fashion, empowerment, gender subjectification and political anatomy to patriotic duty.’ This, as Featherstone (2011, cited in Hashempour 2019, 90) avers, culminates in the triumph of the thin woman over the fat woman in the twentieth century.

Hashempour (2019, 90) whose study traces the portrayal of women in diet and weight-loss adverts from 1960 to 1989, concludes that while the portrayal of women in text forms may have changed across time, the pressure for women to maintain an idealised body form remains static. This not only explains the reason behind global fat panic but also explains why women are driven by the desire for the ideal body and why weight-loss products and services often target them as ‘the far and away main consumers of diet services and products’ (Boero 2023, 21). For this, Ashwell (1991, 479) opines that there is not a single method within any of the

communication channels which is not used to promulgate advice on the benefits, or techniques, of weight loss.

Previous studies on weight-loss have revealed how advertisements are central to the ideologies being constructed around slim bodies as beautiful and ideal bodies. Nichter and Nichter (1991, 249) submit that advertising plays the role of a "passive imperative voice" (Barthes 1983) which propagates cultivated dispositions that foster slimness as the expressions of style and desire as well as perceptions of self and social relations. Nichter and Nichter (1991, 249) go further to indicate that advertisers discursively employ dissatisfaction and envy as the important ingredients that they build their business of selling body transformation products and services on. As weight-loss advertisements perpetuate the sense of dissatisfaction with one's body and all that the body signifies (Nichter & Nichter 1991), the adverts become empowering agents that push women to achieve a certain beauty standard (Chong 2023, 1). Ultimately, women's desire to acquire the slim and shapely body implies the acquisition of the phallic female power located in the attention that the slit aesthetic of fetishized neck, breasts, stomach, genitals, thighs, calves, ankles (Young 2005, 67) are discursively constructed to command. It is therefore not surprising that women respond to this image with desire, the desire to be that sexy woman (Young 2005, 53).

Locating power in the fetishised body recalls Foucault's (1980, as cited in Nichter & Nichter 1991, 249) stance that 'The function of power is not just to repress and censor. Power is strong because it produces effects at the level of desire and knowledge. Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it.' From Foucault's submission, one may conclude that the various projections of the slim and shapely body as the ideal, feminine, and sexy one in discourses ideologically construct the mediated and fetishised body as both the site and the symbol of power. That is, to have the idealised body is to possess power. While various investigations have been conducted in relation to weight-loss, especially within the fields of health and nutrition, there is a dearth of investigation on the discursive and ideological construction of the ideal body as a site and symbol of power in weight-loss discourses. The aim of this study is therefore to deploy the tools of critical stylistics to investigate the various ways that the ideal body is ideologically constructed in weight-loss promotional emails.

On weight-loss discourse

A significant media space for the advertisement of weight-loss programmes in current techno-savvy age is the email. The email discourse is as much a significant sub-type of computer mediated communication (CMC) as it is an advertisement sub-genre. Olajimbiti and Dada (2024, 112), while noting that email is traditionally for personal and professional communication, reveal that it is now being used for a variety of purposes including marketing. In fact, Lim, Chock and Golan (2018, 1) establish that online advertising of weight loss products (OAWP) plays a substantial role in the use of weight loss products. Connected to this are the facts that the deployment of email for marketing purposes is said to be nearly 40 times more effective than social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter in attracting new customers (Olajimbiti & Dada 2024, 112) and that the email is 124% higher in comparison with other online marketing media such as social media, direct mail, paid search, and online display (Soegoto & Fahreza 2018, 3). For this reason, Olajimbiti and Dada (2024, 112) conclude that

emails are gradually changing from informative to increasingly promotional communication as they adopt marketing strategies.

Promotional emails are a type of email that evoke specific desired customer responses because of the nuances of financial incentives and the use of persuasion (Olajimbiti & Dada 2024, 112). The promotional email thus reflects a significant characteristic of CMC which enables users to create virtual environments, online communities, and virtual relationships around specific interests, companies, brands, or products. One such area of interest is weight-loss. Often, weight-loss promotional emails, much like other promotional emails, employ personalisation strategies such as customers' personal names to create the air of familiarity and trust with prospective clients. That apart, weight-loss promotional emails, as advertisement texts, engage exceptional headlines that capture customers' attention, offer bonuses, and present testimonials and personal narratives of previous users to attest to the effectiveness of the product. It is therefore not strange to find different weight-loss commercials displaying 'before' and 'after' pictures of clients, mostly women, whom they claim to have helped at a particular time in the past to acquire their desired bodies. This is all done to persuade prospective customers to subscribe to their weight-loss programmes or purchase their products.

The foregoing has identified the formal features of weight-loss promotional emails. However, stylisticians are not only concerned with the description of the formal features of texts but are also much more interested in uncovering the functional import of those formal features of the text in order to provide an objective interpretation of the text (cf. Wales 2007, 400). Invariably, the formal features of weight-loss promotional emails have specific functions which they perform. With this, it can be implied that weight-loss promotional emails are strategically crafted texts with specific rhetorical goal(s).

The argumentation in weight-loss discourse is often built on the construction of overweight and obesity as an epidemic that the world currently faces. Monson, Donaghue, and Gill (2016, 2) argue that using 'obesity epidemic' as the terminology for discussing overweight and obesity has the connotation of a fast-spreading disease that threatens everyone. While the World Health Organization (WHO) defines overweight and obesity as an 'abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that can impair health', Tello-Barbé (2024, 1) describes obesity as a complex phenomenon with causes ranging from genetics, stress, medications, to social environments. Despite this, it is a common tradition in weight-loss discourse to capitalise on lifestyle choices as the major cause of obesity. Corroborating this, Mulderrig (2016, 1) submits that the growing concern about obesity is in relation with so-called 'lifestyle' diseases like diabetes, cancer, and heart disease.

Atanasova and Koteyko (2017), in their study on the frames and counter-frames of obesity in British and German online newspaper, find three ways of framing obesity which are: "obesity as a biological problem," "obesity as a societal responsibility," and "obesity as a personal responsibility" with the latter being the predominant framing. The implication, as Atanasova and Koteyko (2017, 3) further argue, is that individuals are ultimately responsible for tackling obesity by making physical activity and food consumption changes. Monson, Donaghue, and Gill (2016, 3) opine that this trend does not only promote the idea that weight is controllable and a matter of purely personal responsibility, but also justifies the stigmatisation of overweight and obese individual. In this line of reasoning, Blaine and McElroy (2002, 351)

reveal that people of weight are usually stereotypically stigmatised as lazy, unattractive, lacking self-esteem and willpower, socially inept, and intellectually slow.

Coincidentally, weight-loss advertisements do not only construct people of weight as undesirable, but they also make weight a personal responsibility. To this end, weight-loss discourse deploys what Lupton (2014, 3) terms the “pedagogy of disgust” which involves commercial public health advertisers employing emotional appeals such as the fear of ill health, disease, disfigurement or an early death as well as shame, humiliation, concern about appearing unattractive or sexually undesirable and disgust to persuade their target audiences to take up or relinquish behaviours and practices. This dichotomous framing of bodies in weight-loss discourse as the desirable versus the undesirable have not received attention within linguistic studies despite the significant multifarious investigations that advertisement texts have generally received in the literature. To fill this gap in the literature, therefore, this study attempts to investigate how the formal features of weight-loss promotional emails are discursively engaged to ideologically construct different body types.

Data and method

To attend to its aim, this study undertakes a qualitative stylistic investigation of some selected weight-loss promotional emails. The personalised weight-loss emails constituting the data for the study were collected by the researchers between May and June 2016. The researcher first signed up to some online weight-loss programmes of some self-acclaimed weight-loss coaches. The personalised emails often contain links which re-direct signees to webpages of the coaches. Such webpages contain more comprehensive versions of the emails or prompt signees to join some dedicated social media groups. Among the different emails, the researchers purposively selected the promotional emails of Coach Olu Aijotan for analysis for three reasons: (i) the emails re-directed signees to webpages which are more public-facing than social media groups of the other coaches; (ii) the promotional emails were sent to the researchers on a daily basis during the period the data were collected; and (iii) the emails were considerably longer and larger than others texts from other weight-loss coaches. The researchers carefully sorted the emails and purposively selected two of the emails for analysis. The two emails are deemed adequate because of their representativeness since virtually all the emails were crafted using the same stylistic and rhetorical strategies.

The data were subsequently subjected to analysis using three textual conceptual tools of critical stylistics namely, naming and describing, exemplifying and enumerating, and implying and assuming. The choice of the theoretical framework was motivated by its adequacy in teasing out the ideological implications of the texts’ formal features.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis in the study is built on three textual conceptual tools of critical stylistics (hereafter CS). Jeffries (2014, 408) explains that she developed CS as a strand of stylistics concerned with ideology especially in nonfiction data in reaction to the rise of critical discourse analysis as an increasingly influential approach to ideology in language. Jeffries (2022, 4) also reveals that in developing CS, the major concern is to develop a systematic way to approach ideation in non-literary texts especially. Specifically, CS aims to bring the rigour and textual focus of stylistics

to the analysis of non-literary texts with a view to identifying the ideological underpinnings of such texts (Jeffries 2014, 417). To this end, Ibrahim (2018, 34) concludes that CS provides the missing link between stylistics (textual choices) and Critical Discourse Analysis which is concerned with how ideologies, identity, and inequality are produced, reproduced and maintained in text, in social and political contexts.

CS 'introduces a set of tools, which, whilst not complete, are nevertheless more comprehensive than any provided in the literature on Critical Discourse Analysis' (Jeffries 2010, 1). With Simpson (1993) being a primary inspiration to Jeffries in developing the framework (Jeffries 2010, 410), CS places great importance on language as representation, as a projection of positions and perspectives, as a way of communicating attitudes and assumptions. Thus, rather than concern itself with the elusive question of the 'truth' of what a text says, the concern of CS is with the 'angle of telling' and the ways in which things are 'made to look' in language (Simpson 1993, 2). On this basis, Jeffries (2022, 7) submits that the pertinent question which the CS framework wishes to answer is: 'What is the text doing?'

The CS framework has ten textual-conceptual functions within its toolbox. With ten tools, CS hopes to give the reader a clear set of analytical tools to follow in carrying out the critical analysis of texts, with the aim of uncovering or discovering the underlying ideologies of the texts (Jeffries 2010, 6). The ten textual tools are thus believed to create and build a particular view of the world or the text world. The textual-conceptual functions share some of the ideas pushed forward by the notion of the textual metafunction in the Hallidayan model of Systemic Functional Linguistics. However, the textual-conceptual functions differ from the textual metafunction in that they are a combination of textual features and the ideational function. The ten textual-conceptual functions and the formal realisations are as listed in the table below:

| S/N | Textual-conceptual tool | Formal realisation |
|-----|--|--|
| 1. | Naming and describing | The choice of nouns to signify a referent; nominalisation; the construction of noun phrases with pre-/post modification to identify a referent |
| 2. | Representing processes | Transitivity |
| 3. | Equating and contrasting | Antonymous/synonymous relationships in the form of apposition and parallel structures respectively |
| 4. | Enumerating and exemplifying | Hyponymous and meronymous sense relations realised by two-, three- or four-part lists |
| 5. | Prioritising | Transforming grammatical constructions: clefting, passive and active voice and subordination |
| 6. | Implying and assuming | Implicature and presupposition |
| 7. | Negating | The construction of unrecognised (Nahajec, 2009) |
| 8. | Hypothesising | Modality |
| 9. | Presenting others' speech and thoughts | Speech and thought presentation |
| 10. | Representing time, space and society | Choice of tense, adverb of time, deixis and metaphor |

Table 1: The tools of CS (Adapted from Ibrahim 2018, 36-7)

Data Analysis

For a detailed analysis of the data, three textual-conceptual tools are selected thus: Naming and describing; Enumerating and exemplifying; and implying and assuming.

Naming and describing

Apart from simply referring to people, creatures, or things, a significant ideological function which the noun phrase performs is to create and characterise referents (Jeffries 2022, 29). The naming and describing textual-conceptual tool concerns how individual texts and their authors choose from the regular resources of the language in representing a view of the world (Jeffries 2010, 16). For this, names and descriptions are not neutral but ideology-bearing. In the case of the selected weight-loss promotional emails, this textual-conceptual function facilitates the construction of a world where slimness is the ideal and fatness is undesirable. The import of this is that names, in the world of a text, may have pejorative or ameliorative connotations. The connotations of names subsequently reflect the nature of the ideology being put forward by the text. Invariably, noun choices do not only refer to something but also show the speaker's opinion of that referent (Jeffries 2010, 20).

In the weight-loss emails, names strategically identify heavy weight as the body problem which the weight-loss programmes being advertised intend to tackle. This strategy ends up creating two types of body sub-fields within the emails. The first one is the sub-field of the undesirable body and the other one is the sub-field of the dream body

| Sub-field | Exponents |
|------------------|---|
| Undesirable body | Body fat, stubborn fat, excess fat, belly fat, over bloated fat laden belly, big belly, cellulites and thigh fat, jiggly fat, back fat, neck fat, love handles, fat thighs, Christian mother arms, etc. |
| Ideal/dream body | a slimmer body, slimmer and sexy body, flatter belly, amazing toned body; leaner, figure 8 sexy body; super attractive perfect hour glass body, etc. |

In all the instances of the exponents of the unwanted or undesirable body, fatness has a pejorative connotation, especially with the use of evaluative adjectives like excess, over bloated, fat laden, and jiggly. The items which create the unwanted body sub-field rhetorically influence the target reader to detest their fat bodies which have been constructed as ugly and unideal so that they may be dissatisfied with the state of their body and thus seek help from the self-acclaimed weight-loss coach. This textual slant connects to what Lupton (2014, 3) terms the "pedagogy of disgust" which involves commercial public health advertisers employing emotional appeals such as the fear of ill health, disease, disfigurement or an early death as well as shame, humiliation, concern about appearing unattractive or sexually undesirable and disgust to persuade their target audiences to take up or relinquish behaviours and practices. The "pedagogy of disgust" is potentially damaging to the sense of self-worth of the target reader because it encompasses the use of disgust as a motivating force which functions pedagogically to position the coach as an authoritative voice disseminating valuable and serious information (Lupton 2014, 3).

Contrary to the negative and pejorative connotations in the words selected to name the undesirable body type, the exponents naming the ideal or dream body have ameliorative connotations. With the positive evaluation in the nouns chosen to name the ideal body, the aim is to influence the target reader to take the slim body as the ideal and seek such a body by subscribing to the weight-loss programmes being advertised. In this wise, both the negative and positive connotations in naming the undesirable and the ideal bodies in the data discursively persuade the target reader to seek the perfect, beautiful, and ideal body that the weight-loss programmes promise to give the client.

There are abundant examples of nominal items that are related to the ideal or dream body. The nominal items are variously used by the coach to differently name the healthy body that will result from subscribing to the weight-loss programmes. Examples of these are *decreased cellulite*, *faster metabolism*, and *improved cholesterol levels* which the coach claims are results of his “science based diet”.

Furthermore, naming is also employed to identify the different weight-loss programmes of the coach as well as to identify the various items that are on the programmes all of which are designed to help the client to accomplish their weight-loss goal. Such items are *The Amazing Weight Loss Nigerian Diet*, *super-simple meal plan*, *The Fat Burner Diet Program*, *This JUMPSTART guide*, *the Super Diet Program*, *the Super Food Diet*, *science based diet*, *my new fat shredding weight loss program*, *a simple but effective weight loss meal plan*, *fat-burning process*, and *cardio and resistance training*. These names establish how modifiers help to further cast ideological meanings upon noun phrases. Thus, adjectives like amazing, super-simple, fat burner, super science-based, fat shredding, simple but effective, and fat-burning are all deployed by the text producer to push forward the “we are different” claim common to adverts and to rhetorically persuade the prospective clients to patronise the service or product.

Pre-modifying nouns with adjectives is a striking stylistic strategy in the weight-loss emails. Ibrahim (2018, 39) reveals that positioning the descriptor element immediately in front of the noun phrase, results in ‘packaging up’ information which is not readily open to debate by the reader or hearer. Ibrahim (2018, 39) further explains that packaged up information produces no propositional content and the information is presupposed instead. Thus, weight-loss programmes such as *The Amazing Weight Loss Nigerian Diet* and *my new fat shredding weight loss program* are presupposed as tried and trusted. In the same way, identifying slim bodies as amazing toned body; leaner, figure 8 sexy body; and super attractive perfect hour glass body packages beauty and desire in the slim body and gives no room for contention.

Enumerating and exemplifying

Enumerating and exemplifying is one textual-conceptual function deployed to ideological ends the selected data to give the impression that the self-acclaimed coach is a highly skilled expert. Presumably, a reader who subscribes to his weight-loss programme has not only made the best decision but is also guaranteed to have the expected result.

The ideological import of the textual-conceptual tool of enumerating and exemplifying is underscored by the fact that they serve the same rhetorical function as isocolon which, according to Nordquist (2020), describes a succession of phrases, clauses, or sentences of

approximately equal length and corresponding structure. Brogan (as cited in Nordquist, 2020) indicates that isocolon, whether as bicolon (list of twos), tricolon (list of threes), tetracolon (list of fours) or a list of more items, produces symmetry and balance in speech and, thus, creates rhythmical prose or even measures in verse. Idowu-Faith (2023, 201) submits that beyond the rhythm which isocolon creates, it is a micro-rhetorical strategy that gives the impression that the text composer has multifarious offers for their clients. This, invariably, makes isocolon a rhetorical strategy that certifies the character and credibility of the text composer and subsequently appeals to the emotion of prospective clients.

- (1) Before I go on, let me show you the weight loss result of some of my clients that I have coached and helped in the past to shred off fat and get their own dream body.

Text 1 is one of the many examples of how the weight-loss coach uses bicolon to enumerate his skill and the results of subscribing to his programme. Embedded in text 1 is the ideology prevalent in weight-loss advertorials where the weight-loss coaches, rather than identify that they are advertising a product and soliciting patronage, present themselves as offering the most needed help to the problem which the client is passionately seeking solutions to.

- (2) This Weight Loss Diet Will Melt Your Body Fat And Give You A Slimmer And Sexy Body In 4 Weeks

- (3) I am absolutely certain that The Fat Burner Diet Program will help you melt your unwanted body fat and give you a flatter belly in just 28 days of you using it.

Texts 2 and 3 are some other examples of how the weight-loss coach uses a two-part list to implicate the problem the prospective client currently has and to present their solution as the results of subscribing to his weight-loss programme. The aim is to appeal to his credibility and persuade the prospective client to take his offer of help.

Another ideological meaning projected in the data through enumeration is that which usually positions the client as being solely responsible for whatever outcome they get from the weight-loss programme. This is evident in text 4 where the coach explains that the life changing his client got is because she listened to his advice and did exactly what she was asked to do.

- (4) The transformation is because she listened to my advice, and did EXACTLY what I asked her to do. **And she got a life changing result from it.**

This import of text 4 is to exonerate the coach from any failure or disappointment that the client may experience after subscribing to the weight-loss programme. By making the client responsible for the outcome of a weight-loss programme is, according to Blaine & McElroy (2002, p. 351), embedded in the legal and cultural perspectives that make weight-loss and lifestyle changes the outcome of heavy-weight people's personal responsibility, hard work, and self-discipline. Foregrounding parts of the text through capitalization and boldface emphasizes

this perspective. Rhetorically, this implies that the coach's character and credibility remain the same whatever the outcome of the programme is.

In text 5, the coach uses a tricolon to imply that the solution to problems the prospective client may be seeking solutions are the results his weight-loss programme offers.

- (5) If you are highly interested in melting fat from your belly and body like butter... and getting a slimmer body and staying young and healthy...this is the most important message that you will ever read.

Jeffries (2010, 70) indicates that three-part are very frequently symbolic of completeness. This, she explains, is because having a list of three indicates that all possibilities have been covered, and the reader/hearer is invited to conclude that the list is, symbolically at least, comprehensive. Beard (2000, cited in Jeffries 2010, 70) also indicates that the three-part list is attractive to the speaker and listener because it is embedded in certain cultures as giving a sense of unity and completeness. On this note, the text projects that all that a client may ever need, as far as losing weight is concerned, can be assessed from the weight-loss programme. Beyond the completeness which the listing ideologically implicates, the elements in the list are arranged in a climatic order to project "an order of increasing importance" such that "melting fat..." is the starting point of the journey that leads to the climax and more important effect of "staying young and healthy". This is also evident in text 6 where the starting point of the journey is "lose weight" and the climax is "get your own amazing dream body".

- (6) As my friend and subscriber, I want to help you lose weight, burn belly fat, get your own amazing dream body just like my other clients that I showed you above.

Text 6, like text 1, also bears the ideology that the coach is offering a help to the client rather than selling a product/service or seeking some kind of profit for himself. This idea is further facilitated by the coach's use of the second person pronoun "you" and the noun phrase "my friend and subscriber" to directly address the implied reader.

Just like the case is in text 5, text 7 deploys a tricolon to push the responsibility of the outcome of the weight-loss programme to the client rather than the coach. This, no doubt, is to maintain the credibility of the coach as a skilled weight-loss coach and expert and persuade the prospective client to decide for the programme.

- (7) Yes, she registered and paid for one of my weight loss program, followed my advice, my daily coaching and lost excess fat.

There are also many instances where the coach employs a tetracolon, that is a four-part list, to discursively and ideologically project the credibility and effectiveness of his weight-loss programme he is inviting the prospective client to subscribe to.

- (8) Make you healthier, stronger, have a burst of energy and reduces your risk of diseases such as type 2 diabetes, heart diseases etc.

- (9) The Amazing Weight Loss Nigerian Diet That Will Help You Melt Off Fat From Your Arms, Thighs, Belly, Love Handles!

While text 8 emphasises the results that subscribers will get from the programme, text 9 reveals the exact parts of the body that will receive this weight-loss solution. Particularising the body parts that will lose weight is therefore a means to projecting the idea of the slit aesthetic of the body (Young 2005, 67) which subsequently accomplishes the image of phallic female power (Young 2005, 53).

Apart from the various enumerating strategies in the data that have been outlined above, text 10 illustrates the use of the exemplifying function in the data.

- (10) Yes, Ada is one of my weight loss client, she followed my weight loss advice, meal plan and workout program was able to shrink her body from 115kg down to 84kg.

This exemplifying function is reflexive of the testimonial discourse that weight-loss adverts usually deploy to a persuasive end. The selected data vastly use pictures, which is outside the focus of this study, to drive home the testimonial discourse by juxtaposing before and after pictures of clients who successfully transform their bodies during the weight-loss programmes they subscribed to. However, text 10 is the logocentric part of the data which exemplifies how one of the clients of the coach named Ada followed the weight-loss advice, meal plan, and workout schedule to achieve a fitter body. By mentioning the name of the client and her precise previous and transformed weights, the coach rhetorically and ideologically appeal to his credibility for persuasive purposes.

Implying and assuming

This textual-conceptual function, according to Jeffries (2010, 93), mirrors one of the main powers of English to use assumption and implication to make ideologies appear to be common sense. With the tool, ideology is cast upon language implicitly through presupposition (assumption) and implicature (implication). Presuppositions, as assumptions which are built into the text, often manifest in texts either as existential presupposition or logical presupposition. Both types of presuppositions are obtainable in the selected data.

- (11) This Weight Loss Diet Will Melt Your Body Fat And Give You A Slimmer And Sexy Body In 4 Weeks
(12) The Amazing Weight Loss Nigerian Diet That Will Help You Melt Off Fat From Your Arms, Thighs, Belly, Love Handles!

The underlined parts of texts 11 and 12 contain existential nouns which are presupposed to exist by virtue of being definite noun phrases. In this way, the proposition in the two texts is that the definite noun phrases have definite and certain results. The ideological package within the noun phrases thus appeals to the credibility of the weight-loss diets to subsequently persuade prospective clients to subscribe to the weight-loss programme.

Logical presupposition manifests in varied ways in the data as texts 13-16 exemplify.

- (13) If you are highly interested in melting fat from your belly and body like butter... and getting a slimmer body and staying young and healthy...this is the most important message that you will ever read.
- (14) You will Never Ever have to shop for *a bigger or plus size dress ever again!*
- (15) Make you healthier, stronger, have a burst of energy and reduces your risk of diseases such as type 2 diabetes, heart diseases etc.
- (16) I know you are HIGHLY interested in running this weight loss program.

Text 13 contains a series of change of state participle verbs in the three underlined participial phrases. These change of state verbs presuppose that an earlier state of affairs will be changed through the weight-loss programme. The logical presuppositions in text 14 are accomplished through the use of iterative words (never, ever, again) and the comparative adjective “bigger”. These presuppose that the client has constantly been buying bigger dresses because of their constantly getting bigger. However, with the programme, the client is assured that such will no longer happen anymore. For text 15, the ideological meaning is embedded in the change of state verb “make”, “have” and “reduce” and the comparatives “healthier” and “stronger” which all presuppose that the propositions do not exist earlier. In text 16, the factive verb “know”, the iterative adverb “highly”, and the direct address “you” all project the assumption that what the implied reader wants is to run the weight-loss programme. The veracity of the assumption can be tested by constructing the text in a negative polarity as exemplified in text 16b in which the proposition “you are HIGHLY interested in running this weight loss program” is constant:

- (16b) I do not know you are HIGHLY interested in running this weight loss program.

Unlike presuppositions which are text-based, easily defined, and verifiable through explicit triggers, implicatures are less straightforward to identify because they do not rely on open-ended range of triggers or structures. Jeffries (2010, 103) explains that implicatures are naturalized ideology based on their violating or flouting the conversational maxims of Grice’s Cooperative Principle (CP). In other words, the implied meanings in implicatures are arrived at through the flout or violation of the maxims of the CP.

- (17) This JUMPSTART guide is what will help you kickstart your weight loss journey on this Super Diet Program.
- (18) This particular guide also give you step-by-step instruction on the first step you MUST take if you want to see rapid eight loss.

The deployment of *jumpstart*, *guide*, *kickstart* in text 17 as well as the deployment of *guide*, *step-by-step*, *instruction*, *first step* in text 18 flout the maxim of quantity as the texts say more than necessary. Readers will process the surface meaning of texts 17 and 18 to be that the weight-loss programmes will guide a prospective client on how to lose weight. However, the contextual tautology resulting from the combination of words in the two texts implies that there

is a significant meaning that the text composer is trying to pass across about the effectiveness of the weight-loss programme. In essence, the implicature in the texts drive the persuasive appeal of the texts by trying to ascertain the credibility of both the coach and the weight-loss programme.

There are also many instances of implicatures that are accomplished through the violation of the maxim of quality. Two of the examples are in texts 19 and 20 below.

- (19) When you eat the delicious super meal in this program consistently, you will burn the fat off, and you'll never worry about the weight coming back ever.
- (20) When you use this program to burn off fat from your body, you will NEVER go back to your old 'big self' and you will NEVER gain fat ever again!

Texts 19 and 20 project one of the unfounded claims that weight-loss advertorials are notable for. While both texts give the impression that clients who subscribe to the weight-loss programme will never gain fat again, Rogerson, Soltani, and Copeland (2016, 1) reveal that Kraschnewski (2011), in his study, reported that weight loss is often difficult to achieve as over 80 % of dieters regain lost weight. In the same vein, Hashempour (2019, 89) reports that in 1988, Oprah Winfrey dressed in size ten jeans and triumphantly dragged a wagon of fat she had lost on a liquid diet onto stage to an applauding audience. Unfortunately, she soon regains the lost sixty-seven pounds within two weeks of returning to real food. Also, another empirical study, Blaine and McElroy (2002, 356) finds that even safe weight-loss drugs do not prevent dieters from regaining lost weight after the drug is discontinued. To Blaine and McElroy (2002, 356), therefore, weight-loss programmes, rather than halt weight-gain, in fact promotes weight cycling where people continually lose, gain, and lose the same few pounds. To this end, the lack of empirical evidence to back the claims of never gaining weight again as projected in texts 19 and 20 ends up producing the implicature in the texts. The implicature however meets the text producer's intension of persuading his prospective clients to subscribe to his weight-loss programmes.

Discussion: Weight-loss emails and implicated body-power ideology

The various deployment of the three textual-conceptual functions in the selected data facilitate two significant body-power ideology: the heavy/fat body is ugly, and the slim body is beautiful, perfect and the ideal. These two body-power ideologies discursively construct the fat body negatively while constructing the slim body positively.

A significant ideology which the weight-loss emails project is that the fat body is ugly, unhealthy, and unideal. According to Mulderrig (2017, 3), the fat body is often discursively constructed as the object of stigmatisation, outrage, and moral panic. Building on Kwauk's (2012) argument, Mulderrig (2017, 3) further explains that by constructing what is 'normal', 'acceptable', 'like us', the discourse positions communities and individuals on a hierarchy of those who are successful, valued, citizens and those who are not. Within Lupton's (2014) concept of pedagogy of disgust, people of weight are constructed as lazy, unattractive, lacking self-esteem and willpower, socially inept, and intellectually slow (Blaine & McElroy 2002, 351). This stereotypic stigmatisation of fat people is observable in texts 21 and 22 which

employ the assumption that the overweight people are unhealthy to ideologically push forward the idea of the overweight body as the powerless body.

- (21) If you are highly interested in melting fat from your belly and body like butter... and getting a slimmer body and staying young and healthy...this is the most important message that you will ever read.
- (22) What if you can feel energised within you, bursting with life and feeling very healthy and can run, walk fast without panting and being short of breath?

By constructing the fat body as lacking energy and the burst of life is naturally weak, it is constricted as a weak and powerless body. Ideologically, such bodies are to be despised while its owners envy the slim body that is constructed to be strong, energetic, and full of the burst of life.

As against the pejorative connotations surrounding the fat body, the slim body is ideologically constructed as beautiful, healthy, sexy, and ideal. Texts 23-26 convey this ideology.

- (23) ... melting fat from your belly and body like butter... and getting a slimmer body and staying young and healthy
- (24) Finally, you can burn up to 9x more fat, lose weight in those places on your body...
- (25) **Make you healthier, stronger, have a burst of energy and reduces your risk of diseases such as type 2 diabetes, heart diseases etc.**

The slim body constructed the way, the client is promised the image of phallic female power for getting on the weight-loss programmes. Texts 26.

- (26) She definitely looks like a model in her 'AFTER' picture.
- (27) What if your over bloated fat laden belly melt off and you go from having a 'big belly' to have a flatter belly that will make you proud to wear any dress of your choice?
- (28) You will look a lot younger and fitter and have a super attractive perfect hour glass figure that will make everyone who walk past you to turn around for a second look.
- (29) In 4 weeks from now, you can strip the fat away from your body, sculpt your own amazing fit body, look drop- dead gorgeous and reaching your weight loss goal
- (30) Give you your sweet sixteen, figure 8 body with a flatter belly that will make you look amazingly younger like a 21 year old.
- (31) You are looking sexier. Those would be the EXACT words your spouse/ partner will say to you when they see your body transformation.

Invariably, by projecting the glamorous model body that stops the show and commands everyone's gaze as the result of the weigh-loss, the prospective client is offered the phallic female power. Unfortunately, this ideologically objectifies the female body for the gaze of the male.

Lastly, another ideology which the emails push forward, and which indirectly connects to the idea of body of power, is that which constructs the weight-loss programmes of having eternal effects on the transformed body. With this, the weight-loss emails imply that whatever weight or fat is lost on the programme will be lost forever, never to be regained. Implicitly, this means that the client will forever have that slim body of power. However, Lim, Chock and Golan (2018, 2) reveal that despite online advertisement of weight-loss products having a longstanding record of potential deception in that they hardly accomplish what they promise to.

- (32) Finally, you can melt fat away from your thighs, arms, and even your belly forever!
- (33) When you use this program to burn off fat from your body, you will NEVER go back to your old 'big self', and you will NEVER gain fat ever again.
- (34) You will never ever have to shop for a bigger or plus size dress ever again.
- (35) Your complaints about your love handles, your fat thighs, Christian mother arms, will be gone forever and become a thing of the past!

Texts 32-35 all construct the permanence of the transformed body as indicated by iterative words like never, never ever, ever again, and forever. Also, the relational clause which ends text 35 projects 'become' as a kind of transformative material process that has an everlasting effect. However, all these, as Nichter and Nichter (1991, 250) argue, typification of unobtainable/unsustainable beauty found in the fantasy of air brushed, body sculpted models of cover girl perfection. The idealised body, Nichter and Nichter (1991, 249-250) argue further, is an ideal exploited by those engaged in marketing by transforming the work ethic from work site to body site and from the pursuit of virtue to the pursuit of beauty as commodity fetishism.

Conclusion

The aim of the study was to investigate two purposively selected weight-loss promotional emails in order to uncover and discover the ideologies underlying the construction of the body in the emails. Using three textual-conceptual tools within the toolbox of critical stylistics, namely naming and describing, enumerating and exemplifying, and implying and assuming, the study teased out two major ideologies which influenced ideation in the weight-loss promotional emails. The two ideologies are: (i) the fat body is ugly and undesirable and (ii) the slim and shapely body is beautiful and desirable. Implicit to the construction of the slim and shapely body as sexy, beauty, and gorgeous is that the slim body is both the site of power and the symbol of power. To have a slim and shapely body is therefore to possess phallic female power. This construction not only stigmatises and stereotypes the fat body, it, in line with Nichter and Nichter's (1991, 249-250) argument, uncovers how we, in the current age, crave for the ephemeral and commodity fetishism located in the beauty found in the fantasy of air brushed, body sculpted models of cover girl perfection. Unfortunately, such mediated and idealised body hardly obtainable/sustainable in the real and tangible world of matter.

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