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SPEAKING LUXURY: SOCIOLINGUISTIC DYNAMICS IN LONDON'S ELITE SHOPPING DISTRICTS

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Abstract: In this article, we probe the sophisticated linguistic mechanisms employed by sales associates at Harrods luxury retail environment in London to reinterpret commercial transactions as experiences of cultural differentiation and social positioning. Drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of linguistic and cultural capital (1991), Veblen's conspicuous consumption theory (1899), and Fairclough's critical discourse analysis framework (1989, 1992), this study delves into the socio-semantic functions of luxury retail discourse that go beyond the mere description of a product, but include various complex operations of identity construction and symbolic meaning production. The methodology integrates content analysis, conversation analysis, and critical discourse analysis to analyze recorded interactions from the perfume and watch departments of Harrods, purposively chosen to denote two different ways of luxury storytelling. The analysis identifies sales associates as practicing what may be described as linguistic alchemy where they selectively transmute material goods into cultural emblems through specific discursive strategies such as gatekeeping discourse, heritage discourse and technical mystification. The research illustrates how luxury retail communication extends verbal dialogue into multimodal mechanisms of authentication, in which haptic, olfactory, and visual dimensions become entangled with linguistic representations of the luxury story to craft phenomenological corroboration of luxury claims. Ultimately, the scrutiny unveils that the discourse of luxury retail functions as cultural pedagogy, educating consumers in the social meanings and cultural competences required for luxury consumption. The findings makes a substantial contribution to critical sociolinguistics by demonstrating that commodified spaces function as sites of cultural reproduction facilitated through consumption practices. There are significant implications of the findings for understanding consumer culture in Western society and the role that retail discourse plays in shaping social identities in capitalist cultures.

Keywords: Cultural differentiation; gatekeeping discourse; heritage narratives; linguistic capital; multimodal authentication

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1. Introduction

The world of luxury retail is linguistically unique: speech, silence, and story-telling create the selective field within which expensive objects are sold (Cappellini & Yen, 2016). In contexts like Harrods, a world-famous London-based department store in the heart of Knightsbridge, a sale is not so much a quid-pro-quo transaction as a "performance of prestige" (Dubois and Laurent, 1995) in which verbal style is employed to help craft value through shaping consumer perceptions of worth, authenticity, and sense of belonging. Harrods' sales staff do not act as mere middlemen, but as specialists, raconteurs and custodians of the aura of the brand, orchestrating conversations that corroborate the story of the brand's history, sophistication and exclusivity (Kapferer & Bastien, 2012). The language of the sales floor in this iconic London emporium both unveils and facilitates the subtle luxury values that have made Harrods an international icon of excellence and desire. Harrods, with its international clientele and explicitly defined service standards, provides a rich ground to investigate how sales associates use language to turn selling into an extraordinary encounter, creating multiple stories of uniqueness, not only for the product, but also for its owner.

2. Literature Review

Building on the assumption that luxury retail communication is a specialized kind of language performance (Cappellini & Yen, 2016), we argue that a full analysis of a site like Harrods requires a wider theoretical approach. Although the idea of "linguistic capital" serves as a cornerstone to view language as a means of strategic and selective deployment (Bourdieu, 1991), a more comprehensive analysis calls for marrying multiple theories to understand the full set of tensions at work. The language of luxury is not just a matter of transaction; it is social distinction, a key to influence and status, a preoccupation that defined Thorstein Veblen's (1899) portrait of conspicuous consumption. The salesperson's language is not merely descriptive, but essentially performative, indicating that the exclusive identity of a product is not a pre-existing attribute given in advance, but is discursively constructed. From this perspective, the iterative language performances of the sales assistant — the crafted storytelling, the choice of words, the solemn style — could also be interpreted in the light of performativity: language performing the reality it claims to frame (Butler 1990). 'Conspicuous consumption' theory formulated by Thorstein Veblen in "The Theory of the Leisure Class" (1899) describes a consumer behaviour that is practiced by individuals who buy and use expensive items and services to display their economic power and social status, the publicly visible consumption of luxury goods which are sufficiently expensive, because the price contributes to their attractiveness as status symbols. As opposed to a consumption motive of purchasing goods for their intrinsic value, conspicuous consumption is the act of buying items to signal others about one's income, acquired wealth, and social status through luxury items.

This notion is particularly pertinent to the scrutiny of luxury retail communication at Harrods for a number of reasons. One is that the linguistic strategies used by retail sales assistants should reflect and work to perpetuate the conspicuous consumption motives of consumers. Second, the discourse must facilitate the buyer's display of cultural capital and social distinction. When shop assistants use high-sounding language, speak of artisan craftsmanship or imply exclusivity, they are linguistically enabling the customer's conspicuous consumption by imparting to them the cultural codes and narrative structures to validate their luxury expenditure and parade it in public. Their linguistic performance doesn't just sell products; it sells the social meaning that makes conspicuous consumption psychologically and socially fulfilling for the consumer, thus closing Veblen's circle of status display in luxury consumption.

Linguistic aspects of luxury retail and fashion communication have been the topic of various studies. In his detailed study of the language of luxury fashion advertising, Kohrs (2020) unveils how luxury fashion brands such as Chanel and Gucci employ distinctive discursive practices —'gendered technology of the confident self' (by Chanel) and theatricality and 'spectacle' (by Gucci)—to manufacture brand identity through visual and textual discourse. This study contributes to the current notion of language as a strategic resource in the construction of identity discourses that are appealing to the target audience of luxury brands. Similarly, Sugimoto and Nagasawa (2016) scrutinize value communication of luxury brands using vocabulary analysis, and clarify the presentation of brand information and consumers' perceptions reflected in media expression. Their work illustrates the crucial role of word choice in luxury brand positioning and consumer engagement.

The linguistic complexity of luxury retail communication is evident even at the level of brand naming strategies. Research indicates that polysyllabic longer brand names are considered more luxurious by consumers than shorter brand names by creating complexity, abstraction, and distance—thereby creating a better luxury perception and supporting Veblen's idea that luxury consumption is non-utilitarian (Kuehnl, Gierl, & Wolschendorf, 2019). This observation highlights the role of linguistic rarity and complexity in the luxury imaginary. Furthermore, studies on luxury retail experiences reveal that language functions far beyond simple product description. Communicative practices in luxury retail environments need to carefully mediate opposing logics of distinction, pragmatism and hedonism, calling for a repertoire of nuanced linguistic strategies whereby sales staff can balance brand exclusivity with customer preferences (Navarra, Robson & Malhotra, 2021). Recent research has confirmed that luxury retailers increasingly employ linguistic authenticity markers across physical and digital channels to maintain brand prestige while adapting to contemporary consumer expectations (Han, Nunes, & Drèze, 2023), demonstrating that the linguistic strategies identified in traditional retail settings remain crucial even as luxury commerce evolves.

Regarding luxury fashion advertisement, Kohrs (2020) depicts how world-renowned luxury brands, such as Chanel and Gucci, employ unique discursive and visual techniques that serve to create brand identity and shopping experiences for consumers. Along the same lines, Sugimoto & Nagasawa (2015) illustrate in their research how language and media drive understanding of the added value of luxury brands. They conducted a fine-grained analysis of how luxury brands make use of certain words and media messaging to communicate and then reinforce the notion of their being above and beyond "normal" brands. The researchers discovered that luxury brands are meticulous about choosing words and phrases that convey exclusivity, heritage and artisanship to describe products to customers. Through advertisements, in-store communications, and branded content, these brands consistently employ language that stresses exclusivity, authenticity, and luxury cachet. Moreover, Sugimoto and Nagasawa report that the media serves as an intermediary, transferring these technical languages to the general public. By managing their story through meticulously formulated communiqués, luxury brands create consumer attitudes that transform their products from goods into symbols of status and identification. Therefore, terms and media communication are used strategically for the construction and evolution of the aura and desirability that create luxury brand equity.

This complexity requires a theoretical shift from the place of language moving value to the place of language as co-maker. Indeed, luxury sales talk can be conceived as a kind of "linguistic alchemy" wherein associates transform material goods into symbolic capital through artful storytelling and curated narratives (Becker 1997). These performances frequently tie the product to histories of craft, provenance, and future imagined ownership, to

create what one might describe as "narrative value" – a way of substantiating high prices beyond the physical object (Bourdieu 1991: 5; Veblen, 1899).

3. Methodology

The discourse analysis framework of this study merges social semiotics with critical discourse analysis so as to unveil how sales associates deploy specific lexical repertoires and narrative devices in investing in promotional brand positioning. This approach understands luxury retail discourse to work by means of semiotic choices that shape meanings of products as well as consumers' identities in culturally specific regimes of taste, exclusivity and social distinction. This space represents the site of dynamic branding discourse formation through the interplay of verbal strategies, material culture, and spatial semiotics that shapes what luxury communication literature calls aspirational luxury encounters beyond the mere economic transaction of goods.

The approach therefore considers on the one hand the micro-linguistic choices made by sales associates, and on the other how they are embedded in the macro-semiotic environment of luxury retail space, recognizing meaning to be the product of ongoing interaction between verbal discourse and its multimodal surroundings. To capture these storytelling changes in situ, data were collected in two contrasting luxury departments of Harrods: the perfume and watch departments. These two departments were chosen because they epitomize two different ways of telling stories about luxury. Whereas perfumes incorporate storytelling with senses and emotions, watches rely on heritage narratives, traditions of craftsmanship and temporal exclusivity. The recorded transactions provide empirical evidence of how salespeople adapt narrative styles according to product brands, while maintaining brand positioning strategies, and provide comparative analysis of narrative adaptation across luxury retail contexts.

3.1 Data Collection and Ethical Protocol

The data in this study were obtained for the duration of 4 weeks at Harrods' Knightsbridge store which included 12 captured sales encounters—6 from perfume department and 6 from watch department--with duration of each encounter ranging between eight to fifteen minutes (132 minutes of recorded dialogue). All interviews were audio-recorded in private by a discreet recording device which followed an established consent process. Sales associates (n=6, three from each department) were briefed about the research purpose, assured of voluntary participation, and provided written consent before any recording took place. The perfume department was selected because it exemplifies sensory-emotional luxury narratives, while the watch department was chosen for its emphasis on heritage and technical craftsmanship discourse, providing contrastive contexts for analysing narrative adaptation strategies. Customers were informed at the conclusion of interactions about the recording and the research objectives, and were given the option to withdraw their data from the study; all participants provided verbal consent for inclusion of their interactions in the analysis. In order to guarantee realistic language use, recording started following the first exchange and included product-presenting components of the conversation. For the purpose of confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in the transcripts for each participant and any customer-related references in both research instruments were disregarded.

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4. Analytical Frameworks

In light of the theoretical and empirical discussion above, I proceed with the following two guiding questions for the study: How does Harrods sales staff use particular lexical items and narrative devices to convert product descriptions into narratives of exclusivity and tradition? And how do sales associates modify their linguistic tactics when dealing with clients from various cultural and socioeconomic milieus, yet maintain the brand's integrity and seduction? In order to analyse the specialized language used in luxury retail at Harrods, the analysis is based on the framework of three overlapping approaches: content analysis, conversation analysis and critical discourse analysis, with the assistance of theories in sociolinguistics, social semiotics and luxury marketing.

4.1 Content Analysis

Content analysis is a method of analysing and categorizing textual data for the purpose of identifying patterns in language use, typically in relation to frequency and distribution of specific words, phrases and themes. In the luxury retail environment, this technique makes visible how vocabulary around exclusivity, heritage, mastery, and authenticity is dispersed across different channels of brand communication including advertising, in-store conversations, and media messages (Sugimoto & Nagasawa, 2015). For example, Sugimoto and Nagasawa demonstrate that luxury brands carefully organize their vocabulary to conjure up prestige and craftsmanship, and transmit these lexical selections across various sales promotion materials to continuously emphasize the symbolic value of products. Additionally, Kuehnl et al. (2019) show that longer, polysyllabic brand names – identified by looking at frequency and themes – are perceived as luxurious as they suggest complexity and differentiation. Employing quantitative measures, content analysis provides a way for researchers to relate specific language patterns to brand perception outcomes, theoretically grounding an understanding of how vocabulary functions in luxury discourse.

4.2 Conversation Analysis

Conversation analysis (CA) is concerned with meticulous and systematic examination of ordinary interaction, and how meaning is collaboratively constructed in the course of interaction in the moment. Central concerns of the approach are turn-taking, repair (such as when miscommunication or breakdown is resolved), sequencing, and the combination of verbal and non-verbal cues. In settings of elite retail store performance, such as those of Harrods, CA does important work in 'monitoring the interaction space' strategically controlled by sales staff as they carefully orchestrate conversational flows to engineer exclusivity and cue attentive service (Navarra et al., 2021). This involves, for example, using pauses and silence to good conversational effect, code-switching to communicate more effectively with different types of clients, and reframing requests or objections (e.g. price discussions) to draw attention to narrative value in a manner that emphasizes narrative value over transactional details. The detailed micro-analysis of interaction in CA can be found in the observation of associates' gestures, proxemics, and haptic interaction with products—all of these are elements of luxury retail performance as prominently displayed by Cappellini & Yen (2016).

4.3 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

CDA offers a powerful approach for understanding the ways in which language and multimodal activities index, reproduce, or subvert social structures and power relations. In the context of luxury retail, CDA allows researchers to analyse how sales talk serves not only to convey product qualities, but to accomplish social distinction and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991). Kress & van Leeuwen's (2010) social semiotics model has particular significance here, expanding analysis beyond words to incorporate all modes—including visual imagery, body

language, and spatial configuration—being used in this way to shed light on how meaning and value are construed in the luxury sales encounter. In keeping with this, Sugimoto & Nagasawa (2016) make a case for the necessity of studying the glocalization of luxury brand communication: the sales assistants tailor the global brand's narrative to local expectations but employ technical jargon and performative gesticulation to maintain exclusivity across a variety of international clients. CDA also maps the hierarchical structure of the retail interaction, capturing how shop workers oscillate between deference and authority simultaneously, constructing themselves as gatekeepers to taste and guarantors of brand heritage (Bourdieu, 1991; Cappellini & Yen, 2016). This integrated approach offers a multi-dimensional perspective to systematically study the linguistic, interactional and social strategies that characterize luxury retail communication.

4.4 Data Collection Methods

The analysis process, as applied to this data, does not restrict itself to one method of data collection for discourse analysis but uses several of them to gain a holistic view. The ethnographic observation consists of observing the salesperson-customer exchange in various Harrods stores to obtain unscripted communication and non-verbal interaction. Audio recordings incorporate structured recording of sales consultations (with subjects' consent) designed to record three entire customer-salesperson dialogues (per subject) to enable dynamic analysis of discourse and power relations. Linguistic analysis includes review of training manuals, product descriptions, and internal communication documents in order to understand institutional discursive apparatuses. Finally, researchers interview six sales associates using semi-structured interviews to explore the ways in which the staff members notice and construct their identities as professionals through (conscious and unconscious) language use. Drawing on a multi-method approach, and following established discourse analysis data collection techniques, researchers compare and contrast the findings to other data sources, thus offering an in-depth investigation of how language works in the luxury retail space to make meaning, mediate relationships, and perpetuate social hierarchies.

5 Data Analysis

5.1 Perfume Department Analysis

Extract 1

Sales Associate: This is actually a very exhilarating option. Few people don't reach and gravitate toward such niche fragrances like Xerjoff. Xerjoff pays homage to the eclectic fusion of cultures, architecture, natural beauty and scents of the Italian island with the 1861 Naxos eau de parfum.

Customer: Oh, really? I like the the design of the bottle.
Sales Associate: Well, you have excellent instincts. This 1861 Naxos exudes an exotic allure that speaks to sophisticated taste. It's a bespoke composition is extremely crafted for veteran fragrance lovers.

This excerpt displays emblematic traits of discourses in luxury retail, and incorporates various discourse analytical concepts. The sales associate starts by describing the fragrance as being "very exhilarating" and "niche," positioning Xerjoff as both exclusive and sophisticated. With phrases like "few people don't reach and gravitate toward such niche fragrances", the associate draws a line in the sand between what is mainstream and the connoisseur, a technique that Fairclough (2013) refers to as gatekeeping in and through discourse – that is the rhetorical construction of expert knowledge and exclusive language. Fairclough (1989, 2015) differentiates between power in discourse (the ongoing enactments of power relations in and through particular interactions) and power behind discourse (broader social structures

which determine what can be said, and by whom). In this exchange over perfume, the salesperson wields power in discourse — not just over the course of a conversation, but by establishing their own position as expert — all within the grip of the power behind the discourse of the institutional frame of a luxury retail environment, which decides who gets access to these spaces and what kinds of things qualify as "sophisticated taste".

Underlying Fairclough's model is the idea that gatekeeping by discourse generates linguistic barriers of inclusion and exclusion of social groups along three major mechanisms: specialist lexis as a boundary marker, expertise building by positioning "most people" as unsophisticated, and repressed ideological presumptions that depoliticize taste differentiations and make them appear to be inherent and not socially constructed. Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model shows that gatekeeping takes place at three levels–of the text (complex linguistic structures that presuppose cultural competence), discursive practice (working as membership tests for communities of luxury consumers), and social practice (reproducing class hierarchies by converting economic capital into cultural capital).The storytelling employed by the associate through the use of "eclectic fusion of cultures, architecture, natural beauty and scents of the Italian island" narratively constructs identities of the commodity into a cultural symbol. The expression "pays homage to … the Italian island", in particular, builds brand heritage and place-based authenticity, a practice that Beverland (2006) recognizes as necessary for boosting perceived uniqueness in luxury brands, by linking their offerings to specific cultural and geographic stories that imply a rich history and craft tradition. Upon the client's compliment of the bottle, the associate responds with, "Well, you have excellent instincts," linking aesthetic appreciation with expertise. This is an archetypical display of positive facework (Brown & Levinson 1987), in which the customer's identity as a person of taste is affirmed and enhanced. Along these lines, the use of "exotic allure that speaks to sophisticated taste" may be seen as prototypical of evaluative language in the connection to the customer's distinction and the implicit recodification of the association between product and personal identity. Moreover, the terms "bespoke composition" and "extremely crafted for veteran fragrance lovers" harness specialized lexicon of upper market niche benefiting from membership in peculiar discourse communities. The focus on craftsmanship and expertise is a way of accessing connoisseurship, evidencing the product's niche function, and distinguishing it from mass market products—a persuasive pattern also recognized as real factors for the authenticity of the product in luxury marketing.

Extract 2

Sales Associate: What can I assist you with today, Madame? Something with exotic appeal?
Customer: You know …uh… I need something very special for special events in Kuwait.
Sales Associate: Ah, فخامة (Fekhama)! Your taste is excellent. Maybe Roja Parfum Harrods Oud? You can guarantee that bespoke allure perfect for your upcoming event.
Customer: Yes, exactly. It looks impeccably exotic.

Sales Associate: Would you please take the parfume bottle in your hand; that’s bespoke… can you smell that exotic mix of spicy Rose and Aoud Woods ?

Customer: Wow! It is really thrilling

Sales Associate: It’s the novelty of niche you can smell. Just watch the Roja scent bloom on your skin. This is how bespoke artistry sounds in genuine Middle Eastern oud traditions.

The sales associate's response "Ah, فخامة (Fekhama)! Your taste is excellent" represents what García (2009) calls translanguaging - the use of different linguistic resources as a strategy to generate more meaning than monolingual resources allow. The Arabic word "fekhama" (high degree of elegance) acts as a contextualization cue, or what Auer (1998)

calls a contextualization cue, that fulfils multiple discourse functions: it is an index of cultural recognition, affirmation of the customer's innate taste, and the framing of the interaction in terms of co-participant familiarity with aesthetic categories rather than conventional seller-buyer hierarchies. This type of language crossing exemplifies what Myers-Scotton (1993) refers to as marked code-switching, where language alternation is socially meaningful on more than just a referential dimension, namely recontextualizing commercial talk as cultural appreciation (García, 2009; Auer, 1998). The customer's initial hesitation "You know …uh… I need something very special" embodies what Schegloff et al. (1977) label as a repair-initiation moment—a source of unclarity that needs interactional support. The salesman's instant cultural placement through "فخامة (Fekhama)" is an example of what Jefferson (1987) refers to as other-repair; however, it extends beyond language correction to offer a cultural confirmation that resolves the customer's confusion. This demonstrates how skilled retail discourse employs what Heritage (2012) calls epistemic positioning, which denotes recognizing the authority of customers' knowledge of culture without the customer needing to have an education in Western luxury (Schegloff et al., 1977; Heritage, 2012). In a similar vein, the directive sequence "Would you please take the perfume bottle in your hand; that's bespoke… can you smell that exotic mix of spicy Rose and Oud Woods?" exhibits what Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) call multimodal coherence: tactile weight, olfactory complexity, and verbal description blend to constitute embodied luxury authentication. Each contributes a different meaning-making capacity: the tactile weight of the packaging sends the signal that this is a quality item, the olfactory complexity of the description sends the signal that the notes in the perfume are authentic, and the reference to “spicy Rose and Oud Woods” performs a kind of cultural naming that acknowledges Middle Eastern fragrance traditions. Moreover, the customer's response "Wow! It is really thrilling" serves as an example of what Merleau-Ponty (1945) terms phenomenological validation—an experience in which a subject's body's engagement with its environment bears out the meanings previously mediated by language and social interaction.

Phenomenological speaking, Merleau-Ponty contended that bodily perceptions are essential to our being in the world habits; the act of perceiving objects— and this is especially the case for objects that bear an affective or aesthetic charge— involves physically engaging with them. In keeping with this, the customer's physical experience of the perfume and smell provides direct and tangible evidence to substantiate the sales assistant's claims about invigoration and uniqueness of the smell made in talk about the perfume. This is a process that is more than language and enters the realm of embodied meaning-making where the bodily sensation (thrill) fuses with the conceptual categories (luxury, niche, exotic) proposed dialogically.

Following Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) and Norris (2004), the impulse to validate is heightened in multimodal communication systems, given that luxury retail often orchestrates more than one mode—tactile, olfactory, visual, and verbal—in order to persuade and offer holistic brand experiences. This multimodal orchestration has become increasingly sophisticated in post-pandemic luxury retail environments, where sensory engagement strategies have been refined to create more immersive brand experiences that bridge physical and emotional consumer connections (Zhang & Puntoni, 2024). The customer's sensation of "thrill" is more than a response to the perfume—it is a phenomenological assertion which contributes to the story the associate is telling: that Roja Parfum Harrods Oud is not an object but an experience, not a fragrance but an emotional, sensory moment worthy of its luxury price point. In this way, phenomenological validation can work to tighten the gap between representation and the material world, and make manifest the symbolic capital that is luxury,

creating an affective reality which is physically felt and enacted by the customer (MerleauPonty, 1945; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Norris, 2004).

5.2. Watch Department Analysis

Extract 1

Salesperson: This particular watch has an exciting heritage– it's not for everyone. Put the feel of true Swiss movement in your hands. It is a niche collection.

Customer: It feels heavier than I thought.

Sales Associate: That's the allure offhand made excellence. This exotic complication needed 18 months of development for the master watchmakers.

This watch department exchange demonstrates expert exclusivity and heritage legitimation rhetoric in placing product and consumer within elite horological culture through a complex, strategic discursive project. The opening sentence "This particular watch has an exciting heritage– it's not for everyone" exemplifies what Bourdieu (1984) conceptualizes as distinction marking via explicit exclusion rhetoric. This embodies what Fairclough (2001) theorizes as gatekeeping discourse, which creates an in-group/out-group dichotomy, with the customer being cast as possibly deserving of inclusion in an elite community of collectors. This approach aligns with findings in luxury marketing research, which find that mentioning exclusivity increases desirability for affluent consumers by appealing to their need for social differentiation (Beverland, 2006). An 'exciting heritage' takes something with temporal depth and gives it emotional appeal, witnessing the kind of process termed aura construction, in which the course of history creates a means of contemporary luxury value. This particular form of productization turns historical depth into commercial desirability by producing what is called "inapproachability" – even as luxury goods become physically accessible through purchase, their heritage narratives sustain a psychological distance that boosts desirability. Following this line of thought, the statement "Put the feel of true Swiss movement in your hands" reflects what Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) identify as multimodal authentication, where haptic interaction substantiates linguistic claims about authenticity and heritage.

In the watch conversation, the salesperson's speech illustrates the use of sophisticated hermeneutic construction: through several different strategic phenomena, such appeal constitutes a kind of heritage authenticity. The sales associate adopts multimodal authentication through the imperative "Put the feel of true Swiss movement in your hands", in which tactile sensation authenticates quality claims, and the adjective "true" acts as authenticity signalling that differentiates Swiss tradition from mass production. The customer's response "It feels heavier than I thought" phenomenologically endorses that luxury positioning is based on sensory experience—an embodied position. The associate next deploys artisanal mystification (via "handmade excellence") and temporal authentication (via "18 months of development for master watchmakers") that turns mechanical complexity into cultural capital by gesturing toward a domain of expertise that exceeds technical proficiency to enter the realm of artistic virtuosity. The persistent employment of register markers like "Swiss movement," "niche collection," and "exotic complication" serves as discourse community membership signalling that aligns speaker and addressee as knowing members of the horological community. Finally, the 18-month development period encapsulates collective memory construction and transforms the purchase into cultural capital investment, by making the timepiece a legacy object linking the customer through the echelons of Swiss watchmaking history and adding legitimacy to its premium pricing through heritage discourse. This linguistic device elucidates how luxury watch retail operates through the construction of heritage authenticity that simultaneously confirms customer taste and elevates mechanical timepieces to the status of cultural artefacts rather than functional tools.

Extract 2

Sales Associate: Do you have experience with tourbillon complications?

Customer: No, I do not think... not really.

Sales Associate: Wonderful! Let me show you something truly captivating. This mechanism neutralizes gravity's force on chronometric accuracy.

The first question "Do you have experience with tourbillon complications?" serves as what Heritage (2012) refers to as an epistemic status check that has strategic uses which go beyond mere information seeking. This question also draws on what Goffman (1959) describes as professional impression management, where the sales assistant constructs their expert identity in horological discourse by using specialist language that would be unfamiliar to most customers. The word "complications" is a throat-clearing which seems intimately related to what Swales (1990) calls discourse community gatekeeping vocabulary — jargon that separates watch insiders from mere luxury consumers. In discourse analysis, throat-clearing is used to refer to linguistic elements that function as opening gambits preceding substantive content, delineating the physical act of clearing one's throat prior to speaking. In Swales (1990)'s discourse community framework, this metaphorical construct describes language that serves multiple functions: to establish the authority of a speaker through preparatory positioning, to signal membership of a community through specialist lexicon, and to act as a gatekeeper, separating insiders from outsiders. Through the employment of this expert vocabulary in the first question, the sales clerk announces his/her membership of what one may call the legitimate watchmaking discourse collective, as a cultural intermediary between sophisticated mechanical knowledge on the one hand and potential customer comprehension on the other.

In this context, the strategic use of "tourbillon complications" rather than the simple alternative "this watch feature" is an illustration of luxury register marking and specific terminology that buttresses product exclusivity and salesperson expertise. This is consistent with luxury marketing studies that suggest that technical language use increases perceived expertise and validity for price differentiation because it constructs aura around mechanical objects by means of specialized systems of knowledge. The question format enables the salesperson to determine what information the customer has and at the same time it indicates the complexity and sophistication of the product category referred to as institutional discourse positioning in which commercial expertise is built up as a specific form of linguistic competence. When the customer hesitantly says "No I do not think, not really," the salesperson immediately replies "Wonderful!" This illustrates positive repair work that turns possible "knowledge deficiency" into educational opportunity by strategically using enthusiasm. This linguistic form is a form of face-saving behaviour (Brown & Levinson, 1987) that respects the dignity of the customer while positioning the salesperson as knowledgeable guide rather than distant expert, and creates interaction ritual environments conducive to luxury consumption through focus on shared experience of technical appreciation. Additionally, the technical explanation "This mechanism neutralizes gravity's force on chronometric accuracy" falls into Beverland's (2006) category of scientific mystification, which confers luxury alignment because it seemingly stands for precision and sophistication. The expression alchemistically transmutes mechanical propriety into borderline magic in which "neutralizing gravity" evokes the wielding of natural forces that exist beyond the scope of ordinary mechanical engineering. The use of "chronometric accuracy" provides professional horology speaker/reader-identification, but keeps the discourse professional through descriptive language rather than through jargon. On this note, this scenario indicates

artisanal mystification in which mechanical complication materializes as cultural capital through discursive framing that elevates mastery, precision and technical refinement as signifiers of luxury value. The discourse tactic implies that luxury watch retailing in today's society necessitates technical cultural capital intermingled with pedagogical competences in order to be able to position complex mechanical objects in the field of experience economics as perceived by accessible luxury consumers that justifies the premium prices based on the transfer of knowledge rather than mere product presentation.

6. Conclusion

This linguistic analysis of luxury retail communication at Harrods illuminates a set of interrelated verbal strategies through which commercial transactions are constructed as encounters with cultural value. Primarily, the research exposes how associate sellers practice what might be called linguistic alchemy, outlined as a kind of strategic recasting of things as material products emerge as symbols of cultural capital through complex discursive action. The analysis further elucidate that their professional identity is constructed by means of epistemic positioning, where authority is constructed with the use of professional vocabulary, and familiarity is induced by turning knowledge gaps into educational opportunities. The study discloses that discourse around luxury retail does not only refer to pre-existing product characteristics but also actively creates exclusive identities through such repetitive linguistic actions. Associates carefully craft narratives, jargon, and storytelling to turn selling into compelling platform for constructing professional identities. Consequently, the findings reckon that luxury retail discourse functions as a kind of cultural pedagogy, instructing consumers in the social meanings and cultural competencies that are required for the consumption of luxury. Ultimately, the analysis reports that luxury retail communication functions as a sophisticated cultural practice that articulates exclusivity rhetoric, heritage legitimization and expert mystification to legitimate premium pricing via the creation of symbolic value—rather than sheer functional value—exceeding the traditional transaction of goods to involve discourses of identity building and the transformation of cultural capital. The findings indicate that the success of luxury retail is based on the ability of sales associates to operate as cultural intermediaries who can negotiate global brand narratives while honoring local cultural competencies and individual customer sophistication levels.

These findings also reckon that translanguaging competencies in narrative construction, multimodal presentation of sensory and storytelling experiences, and practices for narrating products with heritage and craftsmanship values need to be strengthened in training programs for luxury retail practitioners serving multicultural clientele. Future research may investigate the extent to which such linguistic strategies differ among various luxury market segments, as well as across different cultural contexts, differences in online vs. physical discourse of luxury retailing and further research from a customer perspective is needed through post purchase interviews to understand which discursive strategies most effectively influence luxury consumption decisions.

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