

Study on Pragmatic Presupposition in Cosmetic Advertisements

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Abstract: Pragmatic presupposition is one of the important language tools. This research uses Taobao application, extracts 150 cosmetics advertisements. Based on the classification of pragmatic presuppositions by Chen Xinren, this paper analyzes and classifies specific cosmetic advertising slogans from four aspects: fact presupposition, belief presupposition, state presupposition and behavior presupposition. The survey shows that the state presupposition appears most frequently in cosmetic advertising language. It is found that pragmatic presupposition is an effective language strategy, which not only makes the advertising language more concise and colorful, but also achieves the effect of euphemism because the concealment of pragmatic presupposition avoids straightforward expression.

Keywords: Pragmatic Presupposition; Cosmetics Advertisement; Function of Pragmatic Presupposition

1. Introduction

With the improvement of people's living standards, cosmetics are becoming daily necessities which are closely related to people's daily life. A saying has said that the love for beauty is common to all men. In the previous study, various studies have already presented the origination of pragmatic presupposition, its definition and how it is used in linguistic fields. Some researchers has studied pragmatic presupposition in advertisements from the perspective of psychology. However, it is necessary to continue researching it because too many new brands or new advertising are endless. It is hoped that the study can give theoretical guidance to both the advertisers and consumers. Advertisers can be more knowledgeable about how to employ the pragmatic presupposition in advertising languages appropriately and skillfully so as to make colorful advertisements. Consumers can identify the underlying meaning of slogans with knowledge of pragmatic presupposition and to be a smarter buyer. What's more, it has important pragmatic function and provides new perspective for related research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The definition of pragmatic presupposition

Presupposition was originally a concept in philosophy. In 1892, Philosopher Gottlob Frege (1892) first put forward the term "presupposition" in his work *On Sense and Reference*. An account for presupposition going that: "If anything is asserted there is always an obvious presupposition that the simple or compound proper names used have a reference." (Frege 69) Later, in the middle of 20th century, an English linguist called P.E. Strawson (1950) had a different opinion. In his opinion, the problem of sentences' being whether true or false is of less importance, and only the statement made through the sentence does. The term "presupposition" is used by him to describe the special relationship of two sentences. Strawson's theory brings presupposition to a new stage: being connected with context. Levinson (1983) divided presupposition into two categories: semantic presupposition and pragmatic presupposition. Semantic presupposition merely considers the internal aspects of the language and exclude actual communication and context. The concept of pragmatic presupposition was first proposed by Stalnaker (1973). He believes that pragmatic presupposition was related to the propositional attitude of speaker. Levinson (1983) defined pragmatic presupposition as follows: "An utterance A pragmatically presupposes a proposition B. A is appropriate only if B is mutually known by participants." (Levinson 205) Foreign research of pragmatic presupposition is advanced. The definition given by Yule (2000) is as follows: "Something the speaker assumes to be the case prior to making

an utterance or a message precondition for the processing of any communication.” (Yule 25)

In China, there have been articles with respect to pragmatics in recent years. Presupposition, as a part of pragmatics, has attracted the attention of many scholars. He Ziran (1997) distinguished the difference between implication and presupposition; Dai Weidong (2002) gave some examples to describe presupposition. The definition of pragmatic presupposition proposed by He Ziran (1987) is most accepted, his opinion can be summarized that pragmatic presupposition is a kind of pragmatic inference, which refers to the prerequisite relationships that are sensitive to context and related to the beliefs, attitudes, and intentions of the speaker (sometimes including the speaker). (He Ziran 68)

2.2 The classifications of pragmatic presupposition

Based on different norms, pragmatic presupposition can be classified differently. According to Yule, there are six types of presupposition: existential presupposition, factive presupposition, non-factive presupposition, lexical presupposition, structural presupposition and counterfactual presupposition.

Many researchers at home have proposed the classification of presupposition. In 1990s, Chen Xinren (1998) divided pragmatic presupposition into four categories in his paper “On the pragmatic presupposition in advertising language”. Based on consumer psychology, such as preference, mental state and value judgement, fact presupposition, belief presupposition, state presupposition and behavioral presupposition are classified and explained. It will be fully discussed in chapter three.

2.3 The characteristics of pragmatic presupposition

In 1983, the characteristics of pragmatic presupposition were proposed by Levinson (1983). According to him, appropriateness and common ground are two basic properties of pragmatic presupposition. According to Chen Xinren (1998), pragmatic presupposition has three properties, they are one-sided, subjective and concealment.

3. Data collection and discussion

The study is made by collecting various cosmetics advertisements which are Chinese or English. Taobao application is the mainly source of advertisements. Selected brands will be classic, comprehensive and those explosion models with high sales. In order to understand the use of pragmatic presuppositions in cosmetic advertising, the distribution and frequency of it, 150 advertisements are selected from different sources such as official website and Taobao application. This chapter will be given to probe into the four types of presupposition proposed by Chen Xinren.

3.1 Frequency and distribution

This survey mainly divides cosmetic ads into shampoo, facial cleanser, facial mask, lipstick, eyeshadow, perfume, foundation, cushion, sunscreen, makeup and makeup remover products. Ranking from Taobao Application are mainly data collection source. Through careful search and analysis, 150 advertisements that meet the criteria were found. Frequency of four kinds of presupposition applied to those advertisements, their influences on consumer attitude and function are research emphasis.

Percentage of used presupposition in advertising texts is just as the following table shows:

Table 1 Percentage of used presupposition in advertising texts

| Types of Presupposition | State presupposition | Fact presupposition | Belief presupposition | Action presupposition |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Frequency | 12 | 5 | 8 | 5 |
| Percent | 40% | 16.7% | 26.7% | 16.7% |
| Total of ads pragmatic presupposition | 30 | | | |
| Total of collected ads | 150 | | | |

From the above table, it can be seen that a total of 30 cosmetic advertisements use pragmatic presupposition. That is about 20% of the total sample. Percentage of types of presupposition used in advertising texts is showed in the following tables: About 20% of the entire sample. The most commonly used pragmatic presupposition in cosmetics advertising is state

presupposition, which accounts for 40%. But it is by no means accident that state presupposition takes up the highest proportion.

3.2 The use of pragmatic presupposition in cosmetic advertisements

Chen Xinren (1998) divided pragmatic presupposition into fact presupposition, belief presupposition, state presupposition and behavior presupposition according to value judgments, emotional inclinations and mental states. The study will discuss them respectively.

3.2.1 Fact presupposition

Fact presupposition refers to presupposition that states a fact, which is irresistible to consumers. From the psychological point of view, consumers are geared to the fact presented to them. People are more willing to believe in things that are within reach. So, no matter what the seller says, they will think it is so! But they don't care too much about the truth of the facts. After all, they feel that this matter has nothing to do with them and does not endanger their own interests, so they take a wait-and-see attitude. For the selling parties, it is obvious that this way of presenting information of their products is beneficial. For example,

- Because You're Worth It. (L'Oreal)

This advertisement presupposes that the product is a good match with the consumer. It is necessary to buy their products because they think highly of both consumers and products, that is to say, only their products are worthy of customers. The buyers are happy to accept this assessment for them and make purchase behavior.

Nevertheless, the authenticity of those intaglio slogan can not be verified. It even bothersome to prove its authenticity.

3.2.2 Belief presupposition

Belief presupposition is also an effective tool. A person's attitude is often easily influenced by world outlook, life beliefs, views on specific things and crowd psychology etc. Consequently, when it is considered bad, it is an attitude of disgust; the opposite is an attitude of support. So the tricks of the advertisers are to change consumers' original concepts. For example,

- The complexion is bright and moisturized. Perfectly naked BB skin, beautiful and natural, just like no makeup. (Maybelline BB Cream)

People have makeup for becoming beautiful unwittingly and we expect others to think that our bare face is like effect after makeup. Natural beauty is never to give up. But cosmetics are add-on to the face, it is difficult to achieve the desired effect that become beautiful with no trace of makeup. Maybelline BB cream is able to help users achieve the almost impossible goal and change their perception that they go so far as to get natural and perfect baby skin by using their production.

3.2.3 State presupposition

State presupposition is to presuppose people's emotional states. Emotions are unstable and easy to change. Generally speaking, it can be divided into two types: "One is the presupposition that is a state that is not ideal in the past, and the other is the ideal state after the presupposition is changed." This category is closer to the factual presupposition, while the difference is that the description of this state is more subjective. Examples are as follows:

- I am happier about myself than I have ever been. Confidence and energy make a woman stand out. (Lancome Three-dimensional Sculpting Night Cream)

The slogan above presupposes that before using the cream, lack of confidence and energy makes me unhappy. Lancome will change this terrible state. Those who are not satisfied with the status will be attracted. However, after buying or using the products of Lancome, it is not convincing that users will be better and stronger in mind right away.

3.2.4 Behavior presupposition

Behavior presupposition is to presuppose the past, present or future behavior of readers or listeners. There are generally

three types of preset behaviors: One is past behavior, which is often what they don't want to do, just like the past state in the state classification. Another type of predetermined behavior emphasizes that the readers or listeners have a certain behavior need in front of them and wants to meet this need. The third type of behavior presupposes that readers or listeners are stimulated by the outside and implement their own behavior. Here are some examples:

- Easily create the perfect makeup effect, Diobel Cushion CC is really a new magic weapon for girls, and the skin can enjoy free breath, choice, Diobel Cushion CC.

The sentence that the skin can enjoy free breath presupposes that their skin was airtight because of wrong skincare. The skin can enjoy free breath presupposes that their skin was airtight because of wrong skincare. Diobel Cushion CC saves your skin and successfully galvanize people taking action to by advertised products.

3.3 The function of pragmatic presupposition in cosmetic advertisements

3.3.1 More concise language

Pragmatic presupposition can simplify the advertising language. Short slogan is better, because a lot of money needs to be invested in advertising making. The mutual knowledge or common ground which is characteristic of pragmatic presupposition can simplify advertising language. At the same time, concise and vivid slogans are easier to be noticed and kept in mind by consumers.

3.3.2 Euphemistic tone

Pragmatic presupposition can make advertising language become more euphemistic and indirect because pragmatic presupposition has the characteristic of concealment. The purpose of advertising is to promote sales, too much straightforward praise about the products may arouse consumer disgust. The characteristic of concealment can reduce the use of exaggerated statements, furthermore, the opportunity to experience and understand the meaning of the slogan will be left to consumers.

3.3.3 Humorous tone

The interesting and humorous effects of advertising language are largely enriched by pragmatic presupposition. Quick-witted cosmetic advertising language will make consumers feel the charm of the product unknowingly. People will keep their eyes open on the product whose advertising slogan makes them laugh happily.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Findings

First, pragmatic presupposition is an effect research orientation. As a kind of linguistic technique, it influences people's thoughts and actions unknowingly. Pragmatic presupposition serves the fulfillment of psychology in cosmetic advertising. In terms of cosmetics advertising language, the use of vocabulary shows some distinctive features of its own. In general, nouns and adjectives are mainly parts of speech used in advertisements.

Second, although the employment of presupposition leads to the persuasiveness and attractiveness of advertising language and persuade consumers to buy their goods, the use of pragmatic presupposition provides a springboard for false advertising. It means that the content of the product promotion does not match the actual quality of the goods or services provided, it will bring a negative influence on consumers' promotion of purchase decisions.

4.2 Suggestions

Designers of cosmetics advertising slogans should use pragmatic presuppositions reasonably and accurately on the basis of ensuring product's quality and effectiveness. They should use these linguistic techniques reasonably. In addition to traditional advertising, now the popularity of short videos and some social media influencers do need to be talked about. For example, beauty bloggers can use the power of pragmatic presupposition in their live stream to make their introduction and recommendations more concise and indirect.

Buyers can learn pragmatic presuppositions, analyze presuppositions in buying and selling, and be smart and reasonable consumers. The efficacy of the product should not be expected to exceed the scope of cosmetics, nor should we believe in exaggerated publicity.

Pragmatic presupposition is a linguistic technique, it is hoped that both scholar and people pay more attention to it.

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