

A Study of the Functions of Presupposition in English Advertisements

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Abstract: Advertising is an important social phenomenon in the global economic time and information age. Advertisements exist almost everywhere in our daily life, so they have become an important part of the social communication. Besides, as the soul of advertising, the advertising language has a close relationship with the success of advertisements. Therefore, due to its importance, more and more scholars and experts pay much attention to the research of advertising from various perspectives. Among these numerous studies, the study of presupposition in English advertisement is a newly emerging area in the linguistic field. As a very important topic in linguistics, especially in pragmatics, the presupposition is frequently employed in order to enhance the effects of persuasion in advertisements. So the present study is aimed to analyze the widespread use of presupposition and present a detailed analysis of the functions of presupposition in the English advertisements. At the same time, it is also expected that this study can shed some light on the future research in this area.

Key words: presupposition; advertisement; function; pragmatics

1. Introduction

Advertising prevails in our daily life and contributes a lot to the sales of commodities. Because of the important role that advertisements play in the modern society, a lot of scholars have been making studies on advertising language from different aspects. Among these studies, some scholars chose one of the pragmatic notions-presupposition as the entering point to the studies of advertising language.

Linguists define pragmatic presupposition with different focuses; therefore, they classify pragmatic presupposition from different perspectives according to different linguistic data analyzed. As far as I know, there have not been many academic works entirely devoted to the analysis of the presupposition phenomena in advertising language. Therefore, this article will give a detailed analysis of presupposition phenomena and the functions of pragmatic presupposition in advertising language. It is also hoped that it can throw some light on both presupposition and advertising language and help advertisers create better designing of advertisements in order to achieve their final goal of persuading the potential consumers to buy the products or services advertised.

2. The Historical Studies of Advertisement

As a kind of communication, advertising uses language as the most important means for the communication. Advertising is provided with all the basic functions of language with special emphasis on informative, directive, evocative and expressive functions. In order to persuade consumers to buy the products of a certain brand, advertisers give information about their products to consumers, arouse the consumers' good feelings towards the brand and finally motivate them to buy their products. The process of persuasion in an advertisement is described as to attract attention, arouse interest, stimulate desire, create conviction and get action, as the functions of advertising, American advertisement critic Vance Qakley Pankard points out that many of us are being influenced and manipulated far more than we realize in daily life. As we all know, consumer is the so-called God in economic activities. The center of economic activities is to satisfy the requirement of consumers. Advertisement provides abundant information for consumers, guides and stimulates the requirement of consumers, changes the consuming notion and psychology of consumers, influences the consuming structure and behavior and helps consumers to make proper decisions

In recent years, scholars and researchers have studied advertising language from different perspectives. However, all the studies conducted by these scholars have shown that understanding advertisements is not merely a matter of decoding, so the interpretation of advertisements could be approached from a pragmatics point of view. Therefore, the pragmatics has opened a new way for studies of advertising language.

Among the pragmatic studies of advertising language, some scholars choose one of the pragmatic suggests doing some explorations in this respect by giving just one example to illustrate the importance of presupposition in advertising English. In *The Language of Advertising*, Goddard discusses the properties of pragmatic presupposition and makes further contribution to the subject matter with his classification of pragmatic presuppositions in advertisements. He classifies the pragmatic presupposition in advertisements into four categories: fact presupposition, brief presupposition, state presupposition and action presupposition. He also does a quantitative analysis on the application of pragmatic presupposition in advertising language in order to find out the distribution and frequency of these kinds of pragmatic presuppositions in advertisements. In general, their studies lay good foundation for the following studies in the future. However, the previous studies do not emphasize enough the ways in which presupposition serves the advertising language. In addition, the functions of pragmatic presupposition have not been explored in great detail, so it is still needed to conduct further research on this issue.

3. The Functions of Presupposition in English Advertisement

3.1 To Make Advertising Language Succinct

As we all know, advertising sponsors need succinct language. On the one hand they need to shoulder the advertising expenses, so to make the advertising language as succinct as possible is one effective way to minimize the cost. On the other hand, succinct advertisements

are easy to draw consumers' attention and to memorize. Presupposition is a kind of pragmatic inference so it can make language succinct.

Presupposition contributes to the brevity of language for the following two reasons. First, language has the impossibility of complete explicitness, and so it needs the help of some shared background knowledge offered by presuppositions. Second, presupposition can save words and space.

3.2 Example: Behind that healthy smile, there's Crest kid.

This is an advertisement for Crest tooth paste. In order to comprehend this advertisement, consumers need to combine the information they have already known to interact with new information and to do some speculation and inference. The given information in the following inference: brushing teeth is good for health and the Crest kid has healthy smile and healthy teeth; the Crest tooth paste is also good in quality. As consumers complete their inference, the advertisement impresses them deeply, thus presupposition helps advertisement to achieve the goal of drawing attention. Undoubtedly such a succinct advertisement is quite impressive and persuasive by use of presupposition; otherwise, readers will feel lull or bored.

3.3 To Make Advertising Language Euphemistic

Sometimes language is used to avoid directly mentioning certain things as well as to express them. These certain things are tabooed subjects such as sex, death, religious matters and politics. A taboo is defined as the prohibition or avoidance in any society of behavior believed to be harmful to its members in that it would cause them anxiety, embarrassment or shame. When these tabooed subjects have to be talked about, euphemism is employed to disguise or neutralize the unpleasantness.

As what has been mentioned above, advertisers have to describe the undesirable state or behavior of the consumers which occurs before they use the advertised product. However, these undesirable states or behaviors might be embarrassing or even disgraceful. What's more, almost nobody would like to be humiliated, especially in public. In this case pragmatic presupposition is employed to solve the dilemma, which functions in the same way as a euphemism. So this pragmatic presupposition is used to make advertising language euphemistic.

Example: Look at your hair in the mirror, feel it, run your fingers through it. It's different, special. So you need a shampoo that's special. You need a Rosedale shampoo.....Choose from protein, lime, egg and lemon, herbal medicated, dive oil. Try soon, Rosedale.

By presenting the desirable present state of the hair, the advertiser of this advertisement does not embarrass potential consumers who may have hair problems and are eager to make their hair look special and different. On the contrary, if the advertiser directly asserts to the potential consumers "You have scurf on your hair and your hair is so dry without nourishment", the consumer who really have the problem of scurf will feel awkward and be offended. This might hinder the buying action, which advertisers would not like to see. However, advertisers employ presuppositions to conceal the information that the consumers have hair problem and are worried about their embarrassed and uneasy state.

3.4 To Make Advertising Language Humorous

As we know, effective advertisements should be sufficiently entertaining and persuasive to grab consumer's attention and awareness. Humor can serve this purpose. Many successful advertisements are good cases of great humor. The definition of humor in dictionary is "the quality of causing amusement or something designed to be comic or amusing". Because of the lack of trust in social cooperation between advertisers and the advertisement recipients, humor is employed to help to break down readers' suspicion, to get readers to relax and let their defense down. When the recipients think that an advertisement is witty and amusing, they will accept it more willingly. Humorous advertisements are often more effective in attracting and holding consumers' attention and interest, because the humor in them can put the information recipients in a positive mood and can function as a distraction and thereby it can reduce the probability of the receivers' arguing against the advertisement information.

Example: At sixty miles an hour, the loud noise in the new Rolls Royce comes from the electric clock.(Car advertisement)

One presupposition of this advertisement is "At sixty miles an hour there is a noise in the new Rolls Royce". In addition, an even deeper presupposition contained in the advertisement is that readers share the knowledge that "noise made by a car is not good". The advertisements that reveals the "shortcoming" of the advertised product is quite different from the "high and perfect quality" advertisement model. Because it violates the normal rules, so this advertisement can easily attract the attention of readers. With the development of the advertising information, readers find that the existence of "noise" is quite natural. The "noise" does no harm to the property of the car, but it helps to publicize the high quality of the car. Therefore, humor emerges in the process of readers' understanding of the advertisement.

In sum, the wide use of pragmatic presupposition in the English advertisement has produced various positive effects on the promotion of advertised products or services. Besides, the presupposition performs different kinds of functions in the English advertisements. That is, presupposition makes the advertising language succinct, euphemistic and humorous.

4. Conclusion

The presupposition is used fairly extensively in various advertisements and the percentage of different types of presuppositions differs considerably. Correspondingly the functions of presuppositions in these various advertisements are different. So this study is devoted to explore the different functions that pragmatic presuppositions perform in the English advertisements. Through the detailed analysis and research, it is found that the presupposition is able to make the advertising language as succinct as possible, so in this way the expenses of the advertisements are minimized. Besides, the pragmatic presupposition also enables the advertising language euphemistic, which plays an important role in avoiding producing some unpleasant feelings to consumers. Last but not least, the pragmatic presupposition makes advertising language humorous. Therefore, if the advertisers can make good use of presupposition, they can impress the potential consumers

and arouse their great interest, then their advertised products or services will probably become very popular.

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