

Research on the Pragmatic Presuppositions of Classic Advertising Discourses in Mainland China

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Abstract: As a special communication activity, advertising plays an important role in social life. This paper will analyze the classification of pragmatic presuppositions and their functional strategies in applications of classic advertising discourses. On the one hand, pragmatic presuppositions enlighten the designers of advertisements to create more effective advertisements that are more easily accepted by consumers, so as to achieve the best publicity effect of advertisements. On the other hand, pragmatic presuppositions of advertisements also help consumers to objectively identify different types of advertisements on the basis of rational consumption.

Keywords: Advertising Discourses; Advertising Applications; Pragmatic Presuppositions

Introduction

The term presupposition was first proposed by the German logician Frege, who pointed out the concept of presupposition in *On Meaning and Reference*, and explained that there is an obvious presupposition in any proposition (Frege, 1948). The proposition "Kepler died in misery." presupposes that there is such a person as Kepler in the world, and of course, in the negative form of this proposition, this presupposition remains unchanged. Presuppositions are mainly divided into semantic presuppositions and pragmatic presuppositions. The former is considered from the meaning of the proposition itself and the truth-value conditions, and is out of context. Levinson made the following definition of semantic presupposition, if sentence A presupposes sentence B semantically, then sentence A is true, and sentence B is also true; if sentence A is false, sentence B is still true (Levinson, 1983). However, in the actual application of language, linguists have found that it is difficult to get rid of the influence of context in the study of the presupposition, and the intention of actual communicative discourse also changes with the specific context. Therefore, pragmatic presuppositions are gradually dominant, becoming the appropriate conditions that need to be met to implement a speech act and to make a sentence have the necessary social penetration (Yu, 1996). Presuppositions present their content as information already included in the shared knowledge or common ground (Strawson, 1971). Advertising discourse contains a large number of pragmatic presuppositions, and its novel and interesting language can always successfully cater to consumers, so as to achieve the purpose of marketing. The function of pragmatic presuppositions is used with major persuasive functions systematically (Lombardi, 2016). According to the classification of pragmatic presuppositions and functional application in classic advertising discourse, this paper will further analyze the pragmatic mechanism as a special communication method, which is more convincing, thereby attracting and stimulating consumers to increase consumption.

1. Characteristics of Pragmatic Presuppositions in Advertising

Pragmatic presuppositions include two major characteristics, felicity and common ground (Levinson, 1983). Common knowledge is the common information that both the speaker and the hearer are very clear about. If one party expresses doubts about it, it will be difficult for both parties to complete accurate communication. Levinson believed that the appropriateness of language makes sentences suitable under the conditions of communication, showing the inseparable relationship between semantics and context, and emphasizing the important role that context plays in the process of communication. In addition to the two major characteristics of pragmatic presuppositions, Chen further proposed three other characteristics of pragmatic presuppositions, including individuality, subjectivity and concealment (Chen, 1998).

Individuality is a unilateral act of speaking by the speaker without consultation with the hearer. The pragmatic presupposition only exists relative to the speaker before the hearer receives the information (Zeng, 2012). Subjectivity is the subjective assumption of the speaker with an assertive nature, and the discourse itself does not have formality and correctness. If a proposition is a pragmatic premise of the speaker in a particular context, the proposition is what the speaker himself conceives or believes (Stalnaker, 1974). In explaining the subjectivity of pragmatic presuppositions, Leech pointed that pragmatic presupposition refers to what the speaker takes for granted when speaking (Leech, 1981). Pragmatic presuppositions are often not directly expressed, and the hearer is often prone to take the speaker's unilateral words as true. Here is an example given by Chen. A: Have you ever beaten someone? B: No. A: Then

have you ever been caught stealing other people's things? B: No. No, I never stole anything from anyone. Through this example, we can understand the concealment of profound understanding of pragmatic presuppositions. When B answered "no", he also indirectly acknowledged the hidden presuppositions in A's discourse. If there is no supplement to the latter sentence, B will fall into the trap of the hidden pragmatic presupposition put by A.^[1]

When asked the real value of pragmatic presuppositions of advertisements, Vallauri said "If advertisements contain positive exaggerations about ourselves they can be very convincing" (2021, p.18). Precisely grasping the above-mentioned characteristics of pragmatic presuppositions, advertising discourse enhances the persuasive power in the process of consumer communication, pulling in the psychological distance with consumers and further promoting the increase of consumption, so as to achieve the purpose of marketing. Based on the consumption psychology of consumers and the specific application of pragmatic presuppositions, domestic scholars roughly divide the pragmatic presuppositions in advertising discourse into the following categories, including fact presuppositions, belief presuppositions, state presuppositions, behavior presuppositions (Chen, 1998), emotion presuppositions and effect presuppositions (Zeng, 2012). Through the collection of classic advertising discourses in mainland China, combined with the classification of pragmatic presuppositions in advertising discourse, this paper explores the specific application of pragmatic presuppositions and discourse strategies in advertising.

2. Application Strategies of Pragmatic Presuppositions in Advertising

Fact presuppositions in advertising discourse are frequently used by advertisers. From the origin of advertising, providing factual information of commodities to promote production is also the basic reason for the emergence of advertising (Chen,2003). Starting from the actual situation of the product and seeking truth from facts to describe the relevant information of the product, it is powerful to improve the reliability of the advertising discourse itself.

Advertisement 1: Why are all my tires Dunlop? (Dunlop Tires)

This advertisement is presented to the audience in the form of a question sentence. The advertisement is presupposed with such a message that my tires are all Dunlop brand. By stating such a fact, the consumer may ask why all the tires he uses are Dunlop but I don't? If consumers are just about to change tires at this time and are worried about which brand to choose, the factual statement of this advertisement will persuade consumers to try this brand to a great extent. Consumers often do not go to the field to inspect the quality of the tires. The strategy of fact presuppositions captures the psychology of consumers, aiming to persuade consumers to buy the products promoted by advertisers.

Advertising discourse often starts from consumers' emotional identity and value judgment, guiding consumers to think and reconstruct their own consumption beliefs through propaganda words in advertisements, so as to make consumers' emotional attitudes consistent with what is advertised in advertisements. Belief presuppositions enhance identification with advertised products by changing consumer attitudes.^[2]

Advertisement 2: American product, local price. (DELL Computer)

Advertisement 3: Take the Hong qi sedan and take the Chinese road. (Hongqi Sedan)

American computers have always made it difficult for Chinese consumers to choose because of their excellent performance but high price. Although domestic and foreign computer manufacturers continue to integrate into the market, the US computer has also completed several price cuts, but people generally still think that US-brand computers are too expensive. This advertisement of Dell tells consumers that Dell computers are not only authentic American products with guaranteed quality, but also the price is the same as other computers in China. This advertisement changes consumers' impression of American computers from high-quality but expensive to high-quality and cheap. Advertisement 3 presupposes those domestic consumers prefer to drive foreign cars, and this advertisement of Hong qi has re-established the image of domestic cars, and the quality of domestic cars can also be trusted. This advertisement has inspired consumers' confidence in domestic cars, reviving their patriotic feelings during consumption, and breaking through the stereotype that foreign cars are better than domestic cars.

The state presupposition is a description of the state after the consumer has used the product in the advertisement, including the unsatisfactory state before using the product and the ideal state after using that. Through the description of subjective words, the audience can be convinced that the product will bring them a completely different consumption experience before and after using it, and the purpose of promoting the product has been achieved.

Advertisement 4: For fear of getting angry, drink Wang Laoji. (Wanglaoji Herbal Tea)

This advertisement presupposes the mental state of people who used to get angry. The appearance of Wang Laoji helps to get rid of such troubles, and there was no longer such a concern as to worry about getting angry. Through the changes in the psychological state of consumers before and after the appearance of Wanglaoji, consumers who are worried about getting angry can accept Wanglaoji, so as to achieve the purpose of advertising.

The behavior presuppositions in advertisements can be divided into three categories (Chen,1998). The first category is the behaviors that consumers are unwilling to do in the past. The second category is that consumers emphasize immediate behavioral needs, and the third category is behavioral presuppositions with special advertising features. Examples involving the latter two categories are mainly analyzed here.

Advertisement 5: Where there is a road, there is a Toyota. (Toyota Automotive)

This advertisement presupposes that as long as there is a road, there will be cars, and wherever there are cars, there will be Toyota cars. It aims to emphasize that Toyota cars are trustworthy all over the place.

Advertisement 6: Always imitated, never surpassed. (Unified Instant Noodles)

When the pragmatic presupposition of this advertisement is made, the product has been imitated by other manufacturers of the same type. As the founder, the quality of the product cannot be questioned. The advertisement also implies that consumers should

distinguish themselves, not to buy fake and inferior products, but to look for genuine products, indirectly convincing consumers that the products are high-quality and genuine products.

The emotion presupposition of advertisements often stimulates the emotional resonance of the audience by using implicit words or creating a touching story background. On the premise of publicizing with the theme of the advertisement, through the touching description, consumers are moved to hear it, and even cry, eliminating the neglect and doubt about the advertisement itself, and truly accepting the product from the heart.

Advertisement 7: Behind every surprise, there is an unspoken sentence— I love you. (Vipshop)

Advertisement 8: All careful planning is for love. (Alipay)

Although this advertisement of Vipshop does not mention the advertised products, it is well connected with their business scope. It has helped consumers recall buying gifts for loved ones secretly, resonating them emotionally. Advertisement 8 is linked to the specific functions of Alipay, pointing out that money is carefully calculated for the sake of love, so that the audience feels that being loved is greatly happy. It also makes people more aware of the value of love. In the strong emotional atmosphere, the audience is also truly integrated into the advertisement.^[3]

3. Data Analysis

Through the collection of classic advertising words in mainland China in the past 20 years on major web pages, a total of 87 eligible advertisements were collected, including 87 advertisements with pragmatic presuppositions, accounting for 72.50% of the sample. The frequencies of various pragmatic presuppositions in advertising discourse are shown in the following table:

Type of Presuppositions	Fact	Believe	State	Behavior	Emotion	Effect
Number of Occurrences	19	22	7	4	11	24
Proportion	21.84%	25.29%	8.05%	4.60%	12.64%	27.59%
Total Number of Advertisements with Presuppositions	87					
Total Number of Advertisements	120					

4. Conclusion

By analyzing the characteristics of pragmatic presuppositions, this paper shows the classification and application strategies of pragmatic presuppositions in classic advertisements: fact presuppositions, belief presuppositions, state presuppositions, behavior presuppositions, emotion presuppositions and effect presuppositions , revealing the pragmatic discourse mechanism that successfully closes the emotional distance between advertising and consumers, promoting consumers to increase their consumption. As an advertising developer, proper application of pragmatic presuppositions can attract consumers and achieve more effective publicity effects. As consumers, mastering the use of pragmatic presuppositions in advertising can view advertising discourse more objectively, and choose consumption rationally on the basis of rational judgment.

References:

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