

A Comparative Study of Chinese and English NEV Advertising Slogans from the Perspective of High/Low-Context Culture

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Abstract: Contextual culture plays a crucial role in cross-cultural communication as the background cultural environment of language. American anthropologist Edward T. Hall's high and low contextual culture theory, is the most influential and representative. When we look at advertising culture through the threshold of high and low context culture, we will find noticeable differences in the expressions of advertising slogans in Chinese and English. Chinese advertisements are subtle and indirect in their expressions, while English advertisements usually use natural and active language. This paper intends to analyze the cultural differences in context to compare the differences between Chinese and English advertising slogans in different cultural contexts and the deep-seated cultural reasons.

Keywords: High/low context culture; Advertising culture; New Energy Vehicle

Introduction

With the continuous improvement of people's consumption level, more and more advertising slogans have entered people's view. The advertising slogans of new energy vehicles in China and the United States present significant differences. As an essential part of cultural communication, the reasons behind the differences are closely related to different cultural backgrounds. With its long history and cultural heritage, China has noticeable cultural differences from the Western countries represented by the United States. This paper selected some Chinese and English new energy vehicle advertisements and briefly analyzed them with Hall's high and low context theory. The analysis aims to understand the differences and characteristics of Chinese and English advertising languages in different contexts.

1. High/Low-context culture

1.1 Definition of high/low-context culture

The study of cultural contexts is of great value in cross-cultural communication. So far, the earliest and simultaneously the most authoritative and representative theory is the high and low context culture proposed by American anthropologist Edward T. Hall in his book *Beyond Culture*. Hall pointed out that anything can be assigned high, medium, or low contextual characteristics due to the differences in cultural backgrounds and the variability of expressions and attribution of communicative responsibility.^[1] Moreover, thus two types of communication are proposed, high-context cultural communication and low-context cultural communication. In different contextual cultures, the language itself and the connotations of the context have different positions in the communication process, and any communication has different contextual-cultural characteristics. In high-context cultures, people have similar cultural reserves and form a cultural "consensus" with each other. The creation of messages does not depend much on the language itself, so expressions are mostly euphemistic and implicit. In contrast, low-context cultures rely more on the words themselves as the carrier of the expressed semantic meaning, so the language is more direct and explicit in exchanging information.^[2]

1.2 Causes of variability in High/Low Contexts Culture

The cultural differences between high and low contexts are mainly due to the different cultural backgrounds. For example, Western society has a long tradition of "exalting speech," requiring people to express themselves more efficiently and precisely. On the other hand, Chinese culture advocates "careful speech" and pays more attention to semantic and allegorical expressions.^[3] On the other hand, social background and objective environment also influence the formation of high and low context cultures. People in Asia, Africa, and Latin America live in relatively concentrated areas, with solid group activities, stable lives in the same area, and little social change. This has resulted in a long history of relatively fixed development patterns, and people have gradually formed a way of communicating with each other that they can identify with. In contrast, people live in an isolated and loose environment in the United States and European regions, where they can only communicate efficiently and smoothly through clear and explicit expression. These cultural backgrounds have created different expressions in high and low-context cultures.

2. High/Low Context Culture and Chinese-English Advertising Slogans

2.1 The connection between high/low contexts and advertising slogans

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Chinese and English are different in many ways, and this difference is more pronounced in terms of contextual culture. Hall points out that the great and complex Chinese culture is on the “high context” side of the scale, while American culture is on the lower side of the scale.^[4] Chinese and English have completely different expressive tendencies under the effect of high and low context cultures. As a kind of condensed language expression, both Chinese and English will undoubtedly reflect the respective characteristics of the high and low context cultures. In the process of presenting advertising slogans, some graphic or invisible symbols are inevitably used to arouse the audience’s resonance, so the role of context becomes apparent: in a high-context culture, the advertising language will try to explore the deep cultural value given to the product as much as possible, emphasizing its cultural background, and at the same time aiming to inspire consumers to integrate their original cultural background with the message conveyed by the advertisement, thus Add more hidden added value to the product. In the eyes of the advertising language of geographic context culture, its expression tends to be a more specific description of the product, mostly with more scientific and rational characteristics. The application of advertising language is more inclined to introduce the product or service itself.

2.2 New energy vehicle advertising slogan example analysis

New energy car ads use both superficial and implicit content to reach consumers. In contrast, English slogans emphasize external components and specific performance, exuding scientific rationality and innovative development. In this paper, we choose BYD, which is the most competitive and favored by consumers in China’s new energy vehicle field, is expanding its overseas market, and can best represent the field. The English tagline is from Tesla, the largest U.S. new energy vehicle company, which best represents the field in the U.S.

2.2.1 Chinese advertising slogans

2.2.1.1. Han for the view 汉为观止 (BYD Han)

“BYD’s ad slogan is Han. “Han” is from “Han Dynasty.” The Han Dynasty was the first feudal era in ancient China, and its culture showed diversity, unity, inclusiveness, harmony, and creativity, adhering to local traditions while absorbing the excellent culture of other nationalities to enrich itself and use it for itself. In high context culture, a single “Han” character can convey rich cultural imagery to consumers, boosting the cultural value of automobiles. The character “han” is similar to “tan” If “han” in the slogan is replaced by “tan,” a new Chinese idiom means “peak of perfection.” The Han Dynasty was a time of national strength, technological and cultural awe, and a spiritual symbol of Chinese civilization that surprised the world.” It’s also a new high-end flagship with more space.

2.2.1.2 Never before harnessed, the world is created 前所未驭，创世而来 (BYD Tang)

In Chinese, “harness” can be derived from the feeling of driving a car and has the same pronunciation as “encounter.” The slogan, pronounced like “encounter,” means BYD Tang’s performance innovation is new. The Tang Dynasty was the most cultured. Chang’an was the capital of the Tang Dynasty and the cultural center of Asia at the time. “Never before driven” refers to a car that has never been driven and an innovation that has never been seen. Similarly, “Genesis” creates a new era of new energy vehicles. Under high-context culture, advertising slogans are no longer a straightforward narrative of product performance but an idiomatic allusion that incorporates product features into culture and has a deeper meaning.

2.2.1.3 Harnessing is leading 驭见皆引领 (BYD Song)

“Harness” has a rich connotation in this ad slogan. First, it can show the meaning of control and control, highlighting the car’s ease of operation and belonging through technological innovation. “Harness” can also mean driving, giving consumers the feeling of flying and galloping. Combined with Song Dynasty cultural characteristics, it can be associated with the historical sense and magnificent momentum of Yue Fei, the famous Song Dynasty general, who galloped into the sands, broke the enemy’s army, and made a name for himself, giving the original simple driving car rich historical and cultural characteristics. The Chinese pronunciation of “Harness” is “Meet,” and combined with “lead” in the slogan, it shows the performance of this new energy vehicle and its technological leadership. Chinese for “harness” is “meet.” Consumers can interpret “meeting” the BYD Song as innovative and “leading.”

Therefore, we can see that Chinese advertising slogans for new energy vehicles contain many hidden messages. In addition, the companies show the world that they have set a new standard for Chinese manufacturing through technological innovation. These macro expressions are in line with China’s collectivist culture.

2.2.2 English advertising slogans

2.2.2.1 Feel it, believe it (Model 3)

The advertisement for Tesla’s Model 3 does not have so many derived meanings. However, it mainly introduces the features of the latest automatic assisted driving function of Tesla’s Model 3, telling people that automatic assisted driving is a convenience and innovation that consumers can intuitively feel. However, because it is an innovative technology applied to daily driving, consumers will inevitably have concerns about its safety and other issues. The second half of the tagline tells consumers that they can trust our technology, trust the future of technology, and trust Tesla. The second half of the tagline tells consumers that they can trust our technology, believe in the future of technology, and believe in Tesla. This low-context culture makes the tagline easy to understand, and consumers do not need to have the appropriate cultural reserves to understand the meaning, but only the literal meaning.

2.2.2.2 The silence between us

When any consumer sees such a slogan, I believe they can intuitively accept the “silence” feature of Tesla. By describing the silence between us during the driving process to show consumers the optimization and improvement of Tesla’s new energy car compared to the shortcomings of traditional cars with a loud noise. As consumer demand increases, consumers will no longer be satisfied with simply improving speed, and other aspects of the driving experience are gradually increasing in importance. Moreover, the quietness of driving is a critical way to improve the driving experience. If consumers have the same confusion about this or require quiet driving, they will find a solution to their needs when they see such a concise and clear description. The English tagline does not focus on the connotation behind the words but only on the limited vocabulary that conveys the product’s qualities to the consumer and stimulates the consumer’s desire to buy.

2.2.2.3 The safest, quickest car on the road (Model S)

Compared with other new energy cars, the price of the Model S is relatively high, even reaching the pricing of what we call luxury cars. In order to convince consumers to buy it at such a high price, the marketing process must show its features and value that are far superior to other cars. So the tagline uses the two most advanced words in English, “fastest” and “safest,” to show consumers the reason behind the high pricing. Speed and safety are two characteristics that often do not coexist, and the faster the speed, the less safe it seems to be in the traditional perception. Tesla’s propaganda undoubtedly tells consumers that choosing this car means that you have the fastest speed and the strongest safety guarantee. Therefore, we can see that in the context of low-context culture, the English advertisement is more inclined to use simple words to show the characteristics of the product in front of the consumers.

If the Chinese new energy car ad isn’t annotated, consumers may not associate it with the slogan. High-context advertising slogans use imposing language with deep cultural values. English ads are different. Low-context advertising slogans reveal a product’s superiority. Chinese and English new energy vehicle advertising slogans reflect high- and low-context cultures.

Conclusion

Chinese and English advertising slogans have different expressions and features in different contexts. High and low contexts have influenced Chinese and English new energy vehicle advertising slogans. This thesis concludes that Chinese new energy vehicle advertising slogans are influenced by high context culture and tend to have more derivative meanings in expressions, which can present more wonderful and rich connotations and meanings behind the words; English new energy vehicle advertising slogans are influenced by low context culture and tend to be more straightforward in expressions, while the content is limited. Text-only content exists. In marketing and cross-cultural communication and expression, to convey the intention more accurately and appropriately, we should select and use the corresponding language content more comprehensively and reasonably.

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