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| RESEARCH ARTICLE

## The Comparison of Rhetoric in Chinese and English Commercial Advertisements

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| ABSTRACT

Nowadays, we are living in the information era with frequent commercial activities. As an effective way to spread information, we can see advertisements almost everywhere in our lives. The characteristics of advertising determine the regular use of rhetoric in both Chinese and English ads. However, the application of rhetoric in both Chinese and English promotion involves a similar discipline. This thesis intends to explore the effects of advertising on different rhetorical devices by analyzing three rhetorical devices, including the figure of speech, parody, and pun. Additionally, this thesis also compares the uniqueness and similarities of rhetorical devices used in English and Chinese advertising styles. By comparing how these devices are used in Chinese and English advertisements, marketers and businesses can understand the language nuances deeply to develop context-relevant advertisements.

| KEYWORDS

Rhetoric; Chinese advertisement; English advertisement; the modes of thinking; cultural differences; advertising strategies

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### 1. Introduction

The field of advertising is a dynamic and influential aspect of modern society, shaping consumer behavior and promoting products and services. Advertisements increase business turnover by creating consumer awareness, enhancing products' persuasiveness, reinforcing the target audience's attitude, developing brand loyalty, and building a good brand image (Ilyas & Nayan, 2020). The use of rhetoric is a fundamental aspect of advertising, as it seeks to capture attention, evoke emotions, and ultimately facilitate the purchase decision-making. Rhetoric involves not only the message but also the determination of the most effective persuasive methods, and it frequently incorporates the application of rhetoric figures or devices (Tom & Eves, 1999). Rhetorical strategies vary across cultures and languages, reflecting unique cultural values, linguistic structures, and communication norms. As such, exploring the differences and similarities in rhetoric between Chinese and English commercial advertisements can provide valuable insight into the cultural and linguistic influences on advertising practices. Although rhetoric devices are commonly found in advertising slogans, the comparison between the rhetoric devices used in English and Chinese advertisements receives less attention. This article aims to identify the linguistic and cultural elements of the three rhetoric devices, including the figure of speech, parody, and pun, which are applied in Chinese and English advertisements. By understanding the similarities and differences in rhetoric device application between Chinese and English advertisements, business practitioners can develop more culturally sensitive and context-relevant advertising campaigns that resonate with their target audiences.

### 2. The Features of Advertisement and the Use of Rhetoric Devices

Advertising is a purposeful means of disseminating information, aiming to persuade consumers to buy or enjoy the advertised goods. Advertising language has distinct characteristics that help it achieve its utilitarian purpose. It needs to be accurate and based on scientific information, guiding consumption and promoting purchase. Considering that the purpose of advertisements is not only to inform but also to persuade, it is crucial to add creativity to avoid dullness and make a significant impact on the target group. The definition of rhetoric in the Oxford English-Chinese Dictionary is the skill of using language in speech or writing

in a special way that influences or entertains people (Hornby, 2018). Applying rhetoric devices can significantly increase the expressiveness of the language and thus describe advertising products more vividly. This section discusses the use of rhetorical devices, including metaphor, pun, and parody, in enhancing the expressiveness of advertising language.

## **2.1 The Elements of an Effective Advertisement**

### ***2.1.1 Achieve Straightforwardness***

Advertising is a bilateral communication process: advertisers convey the advertising messages to the targeted consumer segments through mass media and further induce and persuade consumers to buy advertising products. Only when target consumers identify the main ideas of advertisements and, moreover, pay the bills can the description realize its value. According to the early American advertising writer John E. Powers, commercial writing's correct criteria are easy to understand. The most prominent merit of advertisement is straightforward: over-embellished text will cause repulsion.

### ***2.1.2 Satisfy Cultural Norms***

People's interactions, communication, and manner of life are influenced by cultural norms (Adetunji & Abdulbaqi, 2012). Depending on the culture of the recipient, advertisements may be disruptive, offensive, or acceptable (Hynes & Janson, 2007). Advertisers may overdo their creative and conventional persuasive communication convention in their quest to reach a larger audience, slipping into a shallow and unethical conveyance that may even disdain and insult the cultural values of their target audience. It goes without saying that an advertisement that infringes against cultural rights will be ignored by the target audience. Therefore, it's critical to increase awareness of cultural conventions when creating advertisements for different regions.

## **2.2 The Importance of Applying Rhetoric**

### ***2.2.1 Enhance Expressiveness***

The situation in which readers accept product information superficially has changed since the development of the modern advertising industry. Today, readers get advertisements as a process of aesthetic experience, which could attract their attention, influence their value opinions, stimulate their buying desire, and then facilitate final purchase behavior. Hence, advertisements are often elaborately worded. To gain the favor of potential consumers, most advertisement writers use circuitous and indirect methods to express their core ideas. They resort to various rhetorical devices such as personification, metaphor, exaggeration, pun, and parody for those implications that are inappropriate to be described in colloquial terms. Rhetorical devices improve the function of language expression by modifying and adjusting sentences and using specific forms of expression. By applying rhetoric, advertisers can add literary color to the tone of colloquialism, raise advertisements' character, and broaden their appeal.

### ***2.2.2 Create Emotional and Cognitive Engagement***

Humans are naturally drawn to stories, and narratives can be a powerful tool for creating emotional engagement. Rhetoric often utilizes storytelling techniques to illustrate a point, evoke empathy, or create a shared emotional experience with the audience. Additionally, the specific words chosen and the way information is framed can have a significant impact on emotional engagement. Rhetoric can employ positive or negative framing, carefully selected adjectives, or emotionally charged language to shape the audience's emotional response to a particular topic or message (Auger, 2014). Through applying rhetoric, readers can obtain noble taste and spiritual enjoyment as well as receive commodity information.

### ***2.2.3 Improve Market Appeal***

Rhetoric can be traced back to antiquity and is today a well-used tool in marketing and persuasion (Hellsten & Lidgren, 2011). Rhetoric can assist in showcasing the unique features, benefits, and value proposition of a product or service. By effectively communicating the unique selling proposition using rhetorical techniques, marketers can differentiate their offering from competitors and highlight the reasons why consumers should choose their brand (Tevi & Koslow, 2018). This differentiation adds to the market appeal by positioning the product or service as distinct and desirable. Additionally, rhetoric can be instrumental in crafting effective calls to action that prompt the audience to take desired actions (Brown et al., 2018). By using persuasive language, urgency, and clear instructions, marketers can motivate consumers to make a purchase, sign up for a service, or engage with the brand in a meaningful way. A compelling call to action improves market appeal by facilitating conversions and driving desired consumer behaviors.

## **3. Rhetorical Comparison between English and Chinese Advertisements**

Advertising language acts as the communication bridge between goods and consumers. Various rhetorical devices are frequently used in all kinds of advertising slogans. Parody, pun, and figure of speech are effective tools for engaging the audience. They add an element of surprise, entertainment, and linguistic playfulness to advertisements. To impress the readers deeply, all advertisements are characterized by originality in the conception of advertising language and rhetoric methods. However, there are many similarities and differences in the use of rhetorical devices. The following is a brief analysis of Chinese and English advertisements' connotations based on the most commonly used rhetorical devices, including figure of speech, parody, and pun.

Examining these three devices in Chinese and English advertisements allows a deeper understanding of cultural nuances and audience engagement, and it provides references for businesses to react to how different cultures respond to and interact with advertising messages.

### **3.1 The Application of Figure of Speech in Chinese and English Advertisements**

The figure of speech is one of the primary rhetorical devices in English advertisements, including simile and metaphor. By utilizing the similarity relation between the signified and signifier, the ad's meaning can be more vivid and concrete. The pragmatic meaning of metaphor can leave consumers with a favorable impression of the products, arouse their inner emotional resonance to the goods, and improve their acceptance.

Initially, the definition of simile is a direct comparison of two things with different properties. The item being compared is the tenor of the rhetorical figure, and the other is the vehicle. The signified and the signifier are concatenated by the close conjunction. As long as people have a better knowledge of the former, they will have a deeper understanding of the latter, so the content of the advertisement will be easier to remember by applying similes than in a complex set of interactions to achieve the purpose of promoting the product. For example, "Light as a breeze, soft as a cloud." This advertising slogan for clothing describes its material as breeze and cloud, light and soft. When consumers catch sight of such a title, they can naturally imagine the lightness and comfort of clothing made of this kind of fabric. Furthermore, look at another Chinese advertisement: "As soft as a mother's hand" (Wang & Sun, 2006, p. 19). It is an advertisement for baby soap. Likewise, skin-friendly, the feature that mothers are concerned about the most is briefly revealed by applying simile skills.

Additionally, Metaphor refers to indirectly comparing an object with another one that bears some resemblance without comparative words. Metaphors are widely used in advertisements; the author takes full advantage of his imagination to find niceness in describing the product, thereby enhancing the aesthetic feeling of the language. For instance, "EBEL, the architects of the time" (Wang & Sun, 2006, p. 19). In this advertisement, the watch's perfect quality is demonstrated in just a few words, which quickly puts people in the context. At the same time, Metaphor is also prevalent in Chinese advertisements. Take the glasses advertisement as an example, "Eyes are the windows to the soul" (Wang & Sun, 2006, p. 19). The author extends this advertisement's meaning based on a familiar phrase: our eyes, as the window of the soul, need protection. Such implicit expression can indeed arouse people's resonance.

According to what is mentioned above, figurative rhetoric serves as an impressive reminder by making abstract things concrete, making the profound truth understandable, and making the general thing novel. Applying the figure of speech in business communication enables the audience to understand relevant qualities or other demands precisely and vividly. The communicator uses the similarity hidden in the signified and signifier to highlight the advantages of the products, hence making them more memorable. Whether in Chinese advertisements or English advertisements, the figure of speech is used widely by copywriters.

### **3.2 The Application of Parody in Chinese and English Advertisements**

Parody is a rhetorical device that temporarily creates new linguistic forms according to existing expressions. Its originality and vitality help attract the reader's attention. Take a look at Coca Cola's slogan in 1932, "Thirst comes, thirst served" (Wang & Sun, 2006, p. 20). It is not hard for us to figure out that it is an intimation of an English idiom, "First come, first served." What's more, "Where there is a way for cars, there is a Toyota" (Liu, 2010, p. 68). It is the advertising slogan of the Japanese automaker Toyota. It's not difficult to find that this slogan was adapted from "Where there is a will, there is a way." Toyota cleverly integrates into this sentence pattern and makes fair use of the sense of cultural identity, therefore making it unaffected by consumers from English-speaking countries. When Polished by Parody, advertising slogans sound harmonious, leaving a great impression on people and making room for thinking readers.

Parody also frequently occurs in Chinese advertisements, usually by rewriting proverbs and the common sayings for public service. Typically, the slogan of a company that sells catalysts: "Catalyst promotes human progress". (Zhang Xiuxian & Ma Jun, 2002:81) The 'catalyst' not only stands for a chemical but also refers to an abstract facilitation. For another example, GREE Air-conditioner chose to write advertising copy on the base of "多快好省, 静在其中" (Lu & Li, 2000, p. 1) which highlighted the complete function of the air conditioner and its efficiency and good quality. The copywriter has changed the Chinese character "尽" to "静"; in this way, it reflects the feature of low noise.

Through the specific parody application in the advertising slogans, product advantages and features can be fully reflected. Although the use of parody rhetoric can provide people with a refreshing feeling, we should also be aware of its adverse effects. It is of great significance for us to avoid abusing idioms; some are even used in multiple product advertisements. Randomly adapting idioms and phrases but ignoring their cultural and social backgrounds has resulted in social criticism. Many people think that this phenomenon will separate traditional culture and cause misunderstanding. As an old saying goes, "Good steel needs to

be used for the blade's edge." When pursuing a new appearance for an advertising slogan, advertisers should take further consideration of those idioms' meanings and cultural backgrounds in order to make the most of them.

### **3.3 The Application of Pun in Chinese and English Advertisements**

Pun, colloquially speaking, is a word game characterized by using one word and one sentence to express two different meaning levels. Dryden, a linguist, once used this phrase to vividly describe pun: Punning-to torture one poor word ten thousand ways (Li, 1988). The use of pun rhetoric in advertising can make advertisements more interesting and strengthen consumers' memory. When a pun is applied to the slogan, many copywriters use the meaning and function of the advertising product's name to form a slogan. In general, there are two forms of puns. The first one is a homograph, which refers to the use of the polysemous phenomenon of the word to achieve the special expression effect. Another one is a homophone, which indicates making use of the same or similar sound of words. Next, this thesis will focus on the application of pun rhetoric in English advertisements from these two aspects.

In Chinese and English advertising copywriting, the creators often take advantage of a particular word's polysemy to produce some exquisite advertising slogans by means of a homograph. In fact, homograph refers to a word that is concerned with two different meanings at the same time, which builds ambiguity on the purpose to achieve the effect of aiming at a pigeon and shooting at a crow, thus creating an implicit, profound, and euphemistic artistic conception, which dramatically enhances the effect of language expression. The following are typical examples of advertisements that use puns as a rhetorical device. Firstly, "The road to success starts from your head" (Zhou, 1988, p. 63). It is the slogan of Rejoice Shampoo. The apparent meaning of the Chinese character is beginning; however, its deeper meaning has returned to its original simplicity, man's head. The use of the pun in this slogan communicates to the public that you can shape yourself from your hair. Secondly, the advertising slogan of Coca Cola: "Coke refreshes you like no other can" (Li, 2011, p. 154). Likewise, this slogan leaves a deep impression on the public by using puns. The word "can" can be understood as a model verb, as well as cans containing beverages. The former means Coke refreshes you like no other can that rejuvenates you; the "can" here stands for a drink. The latter means Coke refreshes you like no other drinks that can refresh you; the "can" here stands for a model verb. According to the examples that have been mentioned, it is not difficult to see that in Chinese and English advertisements, copywriters skillfully use lexical puns with the ambiguity of words so that two kinds of semantics are achieved at the same time in a certain language context. When consumers appreciate those slogans slowly and carefully, it also deepens their eagerness to have a try.

Homophone refers to using words with the same or similar pronunciation but different meanings to replace the author's intended purpose. This rhetorical device is quite common in many text-oriented advertisements, such as newspapers, magazines, street signs, and TV advertisements, but less common in radio advertisements that simply rely on voice to convey information. For example, "More sun and air, for your son and heir" (Qin, 1992, p. 13). This is a slogan written on the poster of a beach. Roughly speaking, the sun is shining, and the air is fresh, which is good for your son, the heir of your business and fortune. The main aim of the advertising slogan is to attract all the family members to visit the beach. Because of the wise use of homophones, the sentence has a unifying effect on the public: to touch the parents' love for their children. Additionally, a medical advertising slogan: "Dake patch, ensure you amazing clear sight" (Gan & Yi, 2005, p. 123). Unlike some medical product ads that claim to be multifunctional, the AD concentrates on the "bright" character of the patch, making myopic people eliminate psychological obstacles and generate their desire to purchase the product. By comparing the advertisements mentioned above, both Chinese and English advertisements apply homophones, which makes the advertising content easier to accept and, more significantly, potential consumers may remain delighted to see and hear those products' introduction. However, the characteristics of applying homophones also vary differently from Chinese ads to English ads. Most Chinese advertisements use familiar idioms and replace the original word with a homophonic one to highlight the product features. The rational use of Chinese idioms conjures up pleasant associations that provide enjoyment when looking at the ad. In contrast, English advertisements prefer to use rhythm to express themselves, making them read in cadence and catchy.

## **4. Conclusion**

Whether in English or Chinese, there are a variety of rhetorical devices in advertising slogans, which are not only limited to the four methods mentioned above but also include rhetorical devices such as exaggeration and personification. This thesis expounds on the necessity of using rhetorical devices through the characteristics of commercial advertisements, analyzes the slogans written in different thinking modes, and compares the Chinese and English slogans, which apply three different rhetorical devices, respectively, through detailed examples. The use of rhetoric greatly increases the expression effect of language, makes advertising language more vivid and easy to remember, and, more importantly, makes advertisements more persuasive, which can better promote potential consumers' purchase desire. However, rhetorical devices present consumers with beautiful, elegant, succinct, and vivid language art and carry out a psychological attack in various ways, such as the beauty of sound, form, and meaning at the same time; this is also the highlight of rhetorical devices in advertising language. To sum up, because advertising language has unique functions and purposes, it plays a vital role in promoting products. The target audience is potential customers with

purchasing power, so how to deliver advertisements has become the top priority of advertising language. From the aspect of language, using different rhetorical devices can play a better role in promoting products.

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