

PRESUPPOSITIONS IN SOME ENGLISH ADVERTISEMENTS

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***Abstract:** This article is mainly intended to give an overview of the theoretical background knowledge of presuppositions and analyze the practical use of presuppositions in a small number of english advertisements. The results revealed that presuppositions are frequently exploited in advertisements in order to build close relationship with consumers and persuade them to buy the product.*

***Key words:** Presuppositions, English advertisements.*

1. Introduction

Besides entailments and implicatures, presuppositions also play a very important part in pragmatics. Presuppositions are used in a wide range of aspects in life, and one of which is advertisements. There are many kinds of advertisements such as TV advertisements, radio advertisements, newspaper advertisements, etc; however, this paper only focuses on analyzing a small number of online English newspaper advertisements to find out types, the frequency, and functions of presuppositions.

Therefore, this paper is intended to contribute to the understanding of presuppositions, especially in English advertisements and to the existing studies in the same field.

2. An overview of advertisements

There have many different definitions about advertisements; most of them focus on the function of the advertisement as a public announcement. Harris and

Seldon (1962) assumed an advertisement as “a public notice designed to spread information with a view to promoting the sales of marketable services.” As an integral part of marketing, advertisements are designed to inform and motivate. Their objective is to change the thinking pattern (or buying behavior) of the recipient so that he or she is persuaded to take the action desired by the advertiser. When aired on radio or television, an advertisement is called a commercial. According to the Canadian-US advertising pioneer, John E. Kennedy (1864-1928), an advertisement is “salesmanship in print”[16]. Besides, an advertisement is defined in Cambridge English dictionary as “a picture, short film, song, etc which tried to persuade people to buy a product or service”.

In a nutshell, above definitions have common feature that advertisements give people information about their products and try to persuade consumers to agree with them.

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3. Features of language in English advertisements

3.1. Lexical features

In order to make the information effective, impressive and accessible to audience, words used in advertisements have to be chosen skillfully and carefully. As a result, emotive adjectives, monosyllabic, and simple words, compounds are used frequently in English advertisements. Among these, adjectives, especially the positive adjectives are used with the highest frequency in advertisements because an advertisement message has to present best impressions of a product or service (Teodorescu, 2015). The most frequently used adjectives are indicated in Crystal's study (1997) including *new, crisp, good / better / the best, fine, big, fresh, great, delicious, real, full, sure, easy, bright, clean, extra, safe, special and free*. For example:

“**Good** to the last drop; The taste is **great**; Let us make things **better**”.

Furthermore, mono-syllable verbs are widely used to make English advertisements simple and easy to understand. This will create an image as if the product is user-friendly and helps consumers remember the products easily. The most frequently used verbs are “*make, get, give, see, buy, come, go, know, keep, look, need, love, use, feel, like, choose, take, start, taste*” (Leech, 1997).

In addition, compound words are frequently employed. Some compounds are written as single words and some with a hyphen but others appear as two separate words. Some of the most commonly used ones include “*top-quality bulbs, fresh-tasting milk, chocolate-flavored cereal*” (Napitupulu and Shinoda, 2014: 138).

3.2. Syntactic features

To be in accordance with the demand and the purpose of the advertisements, the sentences in advertisements are simple and short, which makes the advertisements expressive, emphatic and memorable. Advertisements have its own characteristics in syntax, such as the frequent use of simple declarative sentences, interrogative sentences and imperative sentences. Compared with complex sentences, simple sentences are more understandable and forceful. For example: “LG - *Life is good*”.

The interrogative sentence plays a vital role in the advertisement process. This provokes the curiosity of the customers and silently persuades them to purchase the product. As interrogative sentences are usually short, simple, attractive, and encouraging, they can arouse reader's thinking and attract their attention. For example: “*Have you driven a Ford lately?; Tired of cleaning yourself? Let me do it; How to get 100 watts of light for only 44 watts of electricity?*”.

Thirdly, imperative sentences are preferably used in advertisements. Leech (1966: 80) indicated that “...the imperative in public communication does not suffer from the implication of its use in private contexts. We are used to receiving exhortations and directives in the imperative mood from all manner of public sources: road signs (“*Halt at major road ahead*”); public transport notices (“*Do not lean out of the window*”); instructions from government departments...”. For example: “*Enjoy coca-cola; Just do it; Obey your thirst; Let's make things better; So come into McDonald's and enjoy big Mac Sandwich*” [17]

Besides, the present tense is dominant in advertisements, and some sentence

structures such as ellipsis, parallel structure, and sentence fragments are sometimes used to meet the demand of advertisements.

3.3. Rhetorical features

Aside from lexical and syntactic features, some rhetorical patterns are adopted to make advertisements more attractive such as simile and metaphor, pun, alliteration, repetition, personification, and hyperbole. The first ones are simile and metaphor. The word simile is derived from the Latin word ‘simile’, meaning ‘resemblance and likenesses’, technically it means the comparison of two objects with some similarities. “Simile is fundamentally a figure of speech requiring overt reference to source and target entities, and an explicit construction connecting them” (Gibbs, 1994: 40). While in simile two essentially unlike things are often compared in a phrase introduced by ‘like’ or ‘as’, in metaphor the comparison is more implicit as a word or phrase that ordinarily designates one thing is used to designate another. For example: “*Smooth as silk (Thai Airway International)*; “*Breakfast without orange juice is like a day without sunshine (Orange juice)*”.

In addition, pun is also used to enhance the effect of advertisements. Pun means play of words, something with similar sense or different sense or sound of different words. The pun will be eye-catching and it can pull an audience’s attention for a longer period of time. For example: “*Ask for more*”. More is a famous brand of cigarette. “Give your business the **sharp** edge”. Sharp is Corporation name [18].

Another rhetorical pattern is alliteration. Alliteration can be seen as

the use of words that begin with the same sound in order to make it communicative. For examples: “..., *everything you need for that big bargain basement special. ..., and vitamin E to leave skin soft and smooth*” [19].

Moreover, hyperbole is also employed effectively in English advertisements. Burgers et al. (2016, p.166) define hyperbole as: “an expression that is more extreme than justified given its ontological referent”. This term can be understood as a way of describing something in order to make it sound bigger, smaller, better, worse, etc., than it really is. An example for hyperbole is “Samsung presents “World best” (Samsung). As for repetition, advertisers may repeat words, sounds or images to reinforce the main point. The message itself can be displayed many times. Even unpleasant ads and political slogans work if they are repeated enough to pound their message into our minds.

Beside simile, metaphor, pun, alliteration, hyperbole, and repetition, personification is also exploited in advertisements. For example, in the advertisement of Interflora flower shop, flowers by Interflora “speak from the heart”. Personification endows the product with human emotion and makes it friendly with the customers.

In conclusion, aside from lexical and syntactic feature, different rhetorical patterns are exploited to contribute to the effect of advertisements.

4. An overview of presuppositions

4.1. Definition of presuppositions

Presupposition is such an important concept that researchers tend to make investigations in various perspectives. Presupposition is first “treated as an issue of philosophy of logic or truth-

based logic semantics, which means a proposition whose truth is taken for granted” (Liping 2001: 153). However, it is widely studied in pragmatics. This section mainly deals with the viewpoints of pragmatics.

Various opinions exist about the definition of the presupposition by different linguistics. According to Yule (1996: 25), “a presupposition is something the speaker assumes to be the case prior to making an utterance”. Pragmatic presupposition is best described as “a relation between a speaker and the appropriateness of a sentence in a context” (Levinson 1983: 177). “Speakers, not sentences, have presuppositions” (Yule 1996: 25). Yule (1996: 26) also stated that “in many discussion of the concept, presupposition is treated as a relationship between two propositions. If we say that the sentence in [2a.] contains the proposition p and the sentence in [2b.] contains the proposition q , then, using the symbol \gg to mean “presupposes”, we can represent the relationship as in [2c.]: [2 a.]: Mary’s dog is cute ($=p$); [2 b.]: Mary has a dog ($=q$); [2c.]: $p \gg q$.

Besides, Peccei (2000: 19) indicated that presupposition is “the set of conditions that have to be satisfied in order for the intended speech act to be appropriate in the circumstances, or to be felicitous”, “the speaker’s assumptions about the speech context”, “that of shared background information”, and “about what is assumed to be true in the utterance rather than directly asserted to be true”.

In addition, some linguists regard pragmatic presuppositions as mutual knowledge or common ground between the speaker and the listener. Presupposition is a part of assumptions made by participants

in a conversation, which Stalnaker termed the common ground. It shifts as new sentences are uttered. When speaker’s utterance assumes something that is not in the common ground, presupposition failure occurs. (Stalnaker, 1974, as cited in Chen). As Levinson defined, “an utterance A pragmatically presupposes a proposition B if A is appropriate only and if B is mutually known by participants” (1983:202). In this sense, presuppositions can be based on the assumption of shared knowledge of a domain and its updating. This is an alternative, interactional view of presuppositions, in which the speaker depends on his knowledge about the hearer, context or the world to organize information so that the hearer can obtain maximum clarity. The speaker should not presuppose what is not already mutually assumed (Levinson, 2001, as cited in Chen).

All in all, there is something common among these opinions about pragmatic presuppositions: pragmatic presuppositions consider the context and the mutual knowledge. It’s the speaker rather than the sentence or statement that has presuppositions.

4.2. The properties of pragmatic presuppositions

• Felicity:

Felicity can be considered as appropriateness in this characteristics. One of conditions for the felicitous use of sentences to perform a speech act is the pragmatic presupposition (Lou, 2010). It is the fact that the speaker usually has some presuppositions before uttering. In real communication, some cases of misunderstanding or wrong interpretation of the speaker’s utterance meaning have happened because the speaker held the inappropriateness of the presuppositions

(Lou, 2010). Lou also stated that “a sentence is appropriate if and only if it is uttered under the condition of a felicitous presupposition”. He took an example to illustrate this point “that person is not a bachelor”. He assumed that if one of the following presuppositions holds in the every context, the example will be an appropriate utterance: (1) He is married; (2) He’s only six years old; (3) The person is a woman; (4) The person is a woman, who is married; (5) The person is a spinster. This example demonstrates that the utterance is meaningful only if the presupposition is appropriate to the context (Lou, 2010).

- *Mutual knowledge:*

It is mutual knowledge that makes it possible for the speaker to utter a sentence whose presuppositions are known to the hearer or is not controversial to the knowledge state of the hearer, which leads to the fact that the hearer can properly interpret what they heard and achieve the goal of communication. Lou (2010) gave an example to make sense this property “can you close the window?”. He claimed that this sentence can be appropriately understood if the existence of the window is mutually known by both the speaker and the hearer, and the hearer will feel confused when hearing this sentence if he does not know which window the speaker is referring to.

- *One-sidedness:*

Only the speaker holds presuppositions or presuppositions exist only in the mind of the speaker before the hearer interprets or infers presuppositions (Lou, 2010). Lou (2010) also concluded that pragmatic presuppositions are firstly known by the speaker, which leads to the property of one-sidedness.

- *Subjectivity:*

Pragmatic presuppositions are of subjectivity. It is assumed that presuppositions are speaker’s subjective assumption which is not necessarily true. Pragmatic presuppositions are not only relative to the context but also to the speaker. Presuppositions are assumed or believed to be true by the speaker if they are the pragmatic presuppositions in a certain context of the speaker (Stalnaker, 1973, as cited in Lou, 2010). In addition, when speaking X, the speaker thinks that Y is surely true (Leech, 1983, as cited in Lou, 2010). Moreover, the pragmatic presupposition is a characteristic of cancelibility which depends on the attitude or belief of the speaker (Lou, 2010).

- *Sneakiness:*

Pragmatic presuppositions are of sneakiness which is a kind of potential and invisible meaning. It is especially true when presuppositions are related to the questions. When you answer the questions, you accept presuppositions unconsciously (Lou, 2010). Take an example “why do you use A instead of using B”. When you answer this question, you already unconsciously accept the presupposition “I use A instead of using B”. All in all, the pragmatic presuppositions can be sneaky, which leads to the fact that it is easy for the hearer to accept it as an assertion.

4.3. Classification of presuppositions

Some of the constructions have been isolated by linguistics as sources of presuppositions, which are known as presupposition triggers. Yule (1996) and Karttunen classified presuppositions in terms of triggers. This study focuses on the Yule and Karttunen’s classification. The combination of their results is indicated as below:

Type	Linguistic Form	Example	Presupp-osition
Existential	Definite descriptions	The King of Japan	The King of Japan exists
Factive	Factive verbs	He realized that he was late	He was late
Non-factive	Non-factive verbs	He dreamed that he was young	He wasn't young
Lexical	Implicative verbs	He managed to pass the exam	He tried to pass the exam
	Change of state verbs	It stopped raining	It had been raining
	Iterative	The girl came again	She came before
	Verbs of judging	She criticized him for breaking the window	(She thinks) he broke the window
Structural	Temporal clauses	His father died before he was born	He was born
	Cleft sentences	What he bought was a book	He bought something
	Implicit cleft with stressed constituents	The watch was stolen by Tom!	Someone stole the watch
	Comparisons and contrasts	John is as clever as Mary	Mary is clever
	Non-restrictive relative clauses	The bridge, which was built in 1900, was burned by the enemy	The bridge was built in 1900
	Questions	Who did you talk with just now	You talked with someone just now
Counterfactual	Counterfactual conditionals	If I were rich, I would go traveling around the world	I am not rich

5. Presuppositions in some English advertisements

It is clear that presuppositions have a great impact on the majority of advertisements and the advertisers have made a useful use of them so as to enhance the effect of the advertisements and persuade customers to purchase their products. Therefore, it is essential for the readers to be aware of the uses of presuppositions as well as the functions of them when reading advertisements so that they can assess the true quality of products and have the most suitable choice for themselves. Among six English advertisements having presuppositions exploited, all of them employ the existential presupposition.

The first advertisement is about Christmas present. In this case, the existential presupposition is used once through the possessive construction "... our fantastic collection of Christmas gift ideas..." The advertiser presupposed that we have the fantastic collection of Christmas gift ideas. As a result, the expression or the information about the product "fantastic collection" is transmitted through presuppositions or is not directly asserted, which does not only achieve maximal advertising effects but also makes the advertisement appear more objective. In other words, the presupposition plays its self – protection function in this advertisement. Similarly, the second advertisement applies the

existential presupposition through the possessive construction “your”. The advertiser wanted to presuppose that you have a denture, which indicates that the advertiser claims his concern about consumer’s matter, or consumer’s denture as close friends. Consequently, the advertiser makes the customers believe that the service is designed especially for them. In a word, the presupposition in this advertisement has emotional function, which constructs close relationship with consumers and persuades them to go to Hereford denture clinic. Notably, the existential presupposition in the third example is exploited through the word “your” five times which are “your health”, “your choice”, “your GP” (twice), and “your treatment”. The presuppositions are that you have health; you have a choice; you have a GP; you have a treatment respectively. The existential presupposition in this advertisement also has the same function as the second one in which the presupposed information makes close relationship between the advertiser and consumers, wins consumer’s trust and persuades them to go to West Midlands Hospital. Whilst the existential presupposition “your” in the fourth advertisement indicates that the advertiser takes interest in consumers’ life, in the fifth example it shows the advertiser’s concern about customers’ appliance in their kitchen. This type of presupposition in both examples improves the relationship between the advertiser and consumers and make the customers believe that the product or service is designed especially for them. In the last example, the existential presupposition is used through the definite noun phrase “the cobwebs”. The advertiser wants to

presuppose that you have cobwebs before creating the statement “Come and blow the cobwebs away with some fresh air and exercise”. The existential presupposition in this advertisement also concerns about consumers’ problem cobweb, which assists to shorten the distance with the consumers and to increase the opportunity to persuade them to go to Leominster golf club.

In short, it can be seen that the existential presupposition is the most frequent being exploited presupposition. This type of presupposition can be used once or many times through the possessive construction such as our fantastic collection of Christmas gift idea, your choice, your GP. With the employment of the presupposition, the expression or the information about the product is not directly asserted, which does not only achieve maximal advertising effects but also makes the advertisement appear more objective. Sometimes, the presupposition in advertisements has emotional function (as in the second ads). In this case, the advertiser makes the customers believe that the service is designed especially for them as well as constructs close relationship with consumers and persuades them to buy the product.

6. Implications for English language teaching and learning

6.1. Implications for teaching English

In order to promote the marketing and attract consumers, the advertisement designers make good use of words and structures; therefore, advertisements can be vivid and interesting materials for teaching English. Teachers can use them as extra reading materials to show students the unique choice of words and expressions of advertisement designers. Also, teachers should explain why the

advertisements attract and persuade consumers base on the knowledge of presuppositions. In addition, advertisements contain the lively pictures to illustrate the products; as a result, the teachers could evoke students' interest in reading those advertisements.

In a nutshell, advertisements are useful authentic materials; they assist teachers to improve students' reading skills and create the comfortable and fascinating learning environment which encourages students' enthusiasm and positive learning attitude.

6.2. Implications for learning English

Beside learning and practicing English at school, students should take their time and effort to practice further at home. Advertisements could be one of useful materials to improve their reading competence. Via advertisements, students can learn the ways to use and choose words in specific contexts and enrich their vocabulary. Moreover, the words used in advertisements are often concise, which helps to transfer as much information as

possible. Additionally, the very lively and attractive pictures in advertisements may arouse students' interest in reading. As a consequence, the students do not only study English but also relax when reading English newspaper advertisements. If students learn about the presuppositions, they can fully understand advertisement designers' intention.

7. Conclusion

Presuppositions in English advertisements are the topic concerned by many researchers nowadays. This study focused on the investigation into the exploitation of presuppositions in some of English advertisements. According to the analysis of chosen English newspaper advertisements, it is clear that the presuppositions have been employed in English advertisements with a high frequency. Moreover, the analysis of chosen advertisements also indicates that among types of the presuppositions exploited in advertisements, the existential presupposition is the most common used one./.

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ỨNG DỤNG CỦA TIỀN GIẢ ĐỊNH TRONG CÁC QUẢNG CÁO BẰNG TIẾNG ANH

Bùi Thị Mai

Tóm tắt: Bài viết chủ yếu sơ lược những nội dung lý thuyết về tiền giả định và tập trung phân tích ứng dụng của tiền giả định trong một số quảng cáo bằng tiếng Anh. Kết quả cho thấy tiền giả định thường xuyên được sử dụng trong quảng cáo nhằm xây dựng mối quan hệ mật thiết với người tiêu dùng, cũng như là để thuyết phục họ mua sản phẩm.

Từ khóa: Tiền giả định, những quảng cáo tiếng Anh.