

A Study on Presuppositions in Chinese and English Advertising Slogans with Big Data Analysis

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Abstract: Along with the multilateral trade among China and other countries, Chinese products and products from other countries are introduced and promoted in other countries as well as in China. In order to achieve this, advertising slogans are prevailing and commonly used. Due to the nature of advertising slogans, which is using minimum words to convey maximum information thereby boosting the sales of products, the presupposition is an essential and crucial part of the discourse of advertising slogans. As a means to make apt and decent advertising slogans, the presupposition that triggered should be considered delicately. The present study analysed the semantic presuppositions types in English and Chinese advertising slogans for the same or similar products so that the differences and similarities can be observed. Furthermore, pragmatic presuppositions in Chinese advertising slogans were discussed, especially in terms of culture and societal context. The results indicate that differences between Chinese and English advertising slogans could be observed in terms of presupposition. Also, specific cultural and societal factors necessitate rigorous considerations, as presuppositions are culturally and contextually sensitive. The findings can be fruitful because companies can refer to the findings when they desire to have appropriate and decent advertising slogans to introduce and promote the products in Chinese markets.

Keywords: presupposition, advertising slogans, cultural sensitivity, sales

1. Introduction

“China has the market that each business contests for, we have already been there.”----advertising slogan of METRO AG

The advertising slogan of METRO AG which is a German global diversified retail and wholesale/cash and carry group, shows an indisputable fact that there is multilateral trade amongst Chinese companies and the ones of other countries. This means that various overseas products are being sold in China and some Chinese products are promoted in foreign countries. To successfully sell those products and maintain a satisfactory sales growth rate, delivering information about products to customers clearly and economically can be considered a core issue. Advertisement is one of the prevailing approaches in which each company introduces and promotes its products, and it provides comprehensive information to the public about the business, the products, as well as the services [2][31][24][19][17][27]. With the rapid development of technology, diversity of media as well as social media, various types of advertisements that can be used to inspire the customers' desires for purchasing products are being utilised. Among those, advertising slogans are one of them. The visual content of an advertising slogan may be able to have a great influence on readers, yet, it usually serves to make the readers identify a product or service, remember it, purchase, and use it [4]. Also, according to some customary characteristics of advertising slogans, slogans should be capable of conveying the maximum amount of information by the approaches of the minimum possible number of words [15][37][29], which make advertising slogan form a unique practical literary style with commercial and social value as well as strong sense of purpose [1][9][8]. Therefore, the strategies, especially linguistic strategies, which enable advertising slogans to achieve their goals, were studied by researchers who have expertise in linguistics. Karol Hardin (2001, cited in Bouso [6]) suggested that the violation of Grice's Cooperative Principle can be a pragmatic strategy that allows advertisements to convey “more than what is actually said” (p. 47& 212) [6]. Bouso suggested that, apart from the violation of Grice's Cooperative Principle, presupposition can also function as a strategy to allow advertising slogans to convey a maximum amount of product information, especially unsaid information [6]. The notion of “presupposition” was first studied by philosophers and logicians. Although various definitions of presupposition were offered by different linguists, it is commonly acknowledged

that presupposition refers to certain information that speakers assume as the already-known information. This means that such information is generally not asserted, yet is consequently counted as part of what is communicated but unsaid. Thus, Wang considered that presupposition are with the property of enabling the diction of advertisements more concise and more economical^[37]. Lam indicated that although people may not be always aware of the presupposition of advertising slogans, presupposition is a requisite “*precondition for the processing of any communication, and it is often found in advertisements to convey ideas indirectly rather than asserting them directly*” (p.46)^[26].

Some other similar research has been conducted to examine the role of presupposition in English advertisements (e.g. Bouso, 2012; Ge, 2011; Lam, 2009), in Chinese advertisements (e.g. Cui and Wu, 2009^[13]), and in both Chinese and English advertisements^[11].

However, there is little research on the comparison of Chinese advertising slogans and English advertising slogans in terms of presupposition. Thus, the current study at addressing the research question – what are the differences and similarities, in terms of presuppositions, observed among Chinese and English advertisements. By doing so, the analysis results can be fruitful in terms of providing some suggestions, regarding creating appropriate and decent advertising slogans to introduce and promote products in both English-speaking areas and, especially, in Chinese markets^[2]. Also the current study may fill the research gap that there is few theoretical studies can be referred to by advertisement producers. The pragmatical strategies to produce effective advertisements is also provided.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Definition of Presupposition

Presupposition is considered, by George Yule, as “*something the speaker assumes to be the case prior to making an utterance*” (p.25)^[37]. It is concerned with the mandatory preconditions for statements to be true^[26]. For instance, in the sentence “*Mary’s dog is cute.*” (p.26)^[37] the presupposition “Mary has a dog” is triggered by the lexical item “Mary’s”. Grundy (2008) states that there is some information that “*is accommodated by the addressee as part of the non-controversial background necessary for the utterance to be a sensible or an appropriate thing to say*” (p.48). For instance, whilst some information is related to background knowledge, beliefs, or common knowledge shared by speakers and hearers, this presupposed information is not necessary to be expressed by speakers (e.g. “Why do you wear a Coat in November in Bangkok?” In this case, the presupposition of “you wear coat in Bangkok in November and it is weird, since “it is not cold in November in Bangkok” can be triggered based on the common knowledge about the world). Apart from this type of presupposition, some other accommodations can be triggered by some particular grammatical structures or some lexical items (such as the examples given by Yule, 2000) (Grundy, 2008)^[36]. Therefore, there are, traditionally, two types of presuppositions: the former one, which is closely related and profoundly influenced by the contexts and world knowledge is categorised as a pragmatic presupposition; and the latter one, which is triggered by specific grammatical structure and lexical items, belongs to semantic presupposition. This idea is in line with Leech’s suggestions of dividing presupposition into semantic presupposition and pragmatic presupposition^{[18][34][32]}.

2.2. Types of Indicators of Potential Semantic Presupposition

George Yule suggested that “*presupposition has been associated with the use of a large number of words, phrases, and structures*” (p.27)^[37], and these linguistic forms were categorised into six types (Table 1.) by Yule^[37]. The following paragraph will elaborate on them. The first type of indicator generally includes any definite noun phrase, and they can trigger “existential presuppositions” (e.g. the King of Sweden presupposes the existence of the King of Sweden). The second type of linguistic item is words that can presuppose and are considered and treated as a fact. For instance, the word “know”, “realise”, and “regret” etc. are words that can presuppose that the following information tells the fact. The presupposition triggered by these linguistic items is termed a “factive presupposition”. The third type of linguistic indicator is comprised of words with “its asserted meaning is conventionally interpreted with the presupposition that another meaning is understood” and this type of indicator can trigger “lexical presuppositions”. For example, when people use the lexical item “managed”, they already presuppose that the person they mention “tried” to do what they “managed” or “did not manage” to do. Certain sentence structures can also trigger presuppositions that suggest the true information and are accepted as true by hearers. For instance, when the wh-questions, such as when, why, and where, etc., are used by

speakers (e.g. *When did you leave?* (p.29), it is conventionally presupposed that the information mentioned in the following sentence tells the truth (e.g. *When did you leave?* presupposes that “He left”). This type of presupposition is named “structural presupposition”. The last two types of presuppositions are “non-factive presupposition” and “counter-factual presupposition” respectively. For “non-factive presupposition”, linguistic indicators like “dream” and “imagine”, etc. are used so that the following information is not true can be presupposed. “Counter-factual presuppositions” are created by a structure like “if-clause”, which demonstrates that “what is presupposed is only not true, but is the opposite of what is true”. Since the classification of presupposition types suggested by Yule (2000) is operable and has been proven to be one of the commonly-used guidance to analyse presuppositions, the data of the present study were analysed based on Yule’s classification of presupposition types^[11].

Table 1: Types of presupposition (Yule. 2000, p.30) [37]

Type	Example	Presupposition
<i>existential</i>	the X	X exists
<i>factive</i>	I regret leaving	I left
<i>lexical</i>	He managed to escape	He tried to escape
<i>structural</i>	When did he leave?	He left
<i>non-factive</i>	He pretended to be happy	He was not happy
<i>counterfactual</i>	If I weren’t ill,...	I am ill

2.3. Pragmatic Presupposition --- Cultural Sensitivity

Presupposition is, as suggested by Grundy and Leech, categorized into semantic and pragmatic presupposition^{[20] [34]}. Seel suggested that pragmatic presupposition can be sorted into two subdivided groups: “the genuinely ‘pragmatic’ ones, i.e. those communicated when referring indirectly to persons that are not present or repeatedly to certain extra-lingual information” (p.257)^[31] and cultural-presupposition which should be understood in accordance with the specific corresponding culture as well as the societal context^[33]. Gamal suggested that, when individuals perceived the unsaid information conveyed by presupposition, their culture, i.e. knowledge of the world, values, morals, traditions as well as lexicon, etc., shared by all members of the language-culture group could profoundly influence their interpretation of presupposition^[14]. Besides, Lei suggested that “culture should also be considered as a contextual factor in its broadest sense, as culture and the societal context of some specific country plays an essential role in the understanding of presuppositions. “Presuppositions about the reality familiar to one language community may be strange and new to another community, which may cause a gap in cross-cultural communication.” (p.1991)^[26]. Therefore, the pragmatic presupposition which can be triggered by advertising slogans should be considered in terms of culture and the societal context of target market of that country, especially when companies want to promote their products in specific countries.

2.4. Previous Research about Presupposition in Advertising Slogans

Although little research about the comparison of presupposition in English and Chinese advertising slogans has been conducted, some research regarding to the role of presuppositions in English and Chinese advertising slogans respectively, as well as in other languages, deserve to be reviewed, thereby getting some useful ideas. Studies demonstrate that there is no complete agreement on the standardization which refer to the use of similar or different advertising in more than one countries for the same products as the cultures can influences their effects. This can be largely presented by presupposition in advertising slogans^{[16][25][35][7]}.

Chen and Hua introduced some advertising slogans and the role of semantic presupposition in those slogans, yet, they just concluded the types of semantic slogans used in those slogans and suggested that semantic presupposition plays an important role in conveying unsaid information^[11]. Cui suggested that the unsaid presupposition can fulfil audiences’ needs, which is in line with the results of research conducted by Wang and Ge who suggested that the “largest contextual effect in recipients with minimum processing effort to achieve the maximum function of advertisement” (p.157)^[37], such as persuasion function, self-protect function, conciseness function, as well as interestingness function. Similarly, Bousso suggested that linguistic items can trigger presupposition which has persuasive functions, and, from wh-questions to factive expressions, and various semantic presuppositions can be observed in English food advertising^[6]. However, a larger corpus is required for generalizing the results and making the results more valid. Lam analysed some English advertising slogans broadcasted by Hong Kong TV or in Hong Kong magazines and suggested that those advertising slogans reflected some cultural aspects of Hong

Kong citizens ^[26]. Therefore, Lam also demonstrated understanding the cultural differences is very essential in producing successful advertising slogan^s^[26]. Chen examined the function of bilingual advertising in the Chinatown of Melbourne, Australia ^[10]. She indicated that the Chinese versions of bilingual advertisements were often very culturally-oriented, while the English version function mainly as the introduction to present central features of the products and services. Batyrovna indicated that the semantic items and linguistic structure of the advertising slogans were inseparable to produce pragmatic presuppositions, namely presuppositions related to specific contexts and cultures by readers of one specific language^[5].

3. Research Method

3.1. Research Design

The current study employed a descriptive qualitative method, which can enhance the credibility of the results^{[21][22][30][35]}, and descriptive approach to analyse the data. Sari and Bogdan stated that the descriptive qualitative method is a very reliable way to provide a description of the data. Aditya suggested that the “*descriptive approach aims to describe the facts systematically*” (p.34)^[31]. The data of the present study were selected with the criteria that they are commonly seen in the public and they cover as many types of commonly-used products in individuals’ lives as possible. The strategies of searching, selecting, collecting, categorising, analysing, and interpreting the data as well as making conclusions were applied to gain the findings. Besides, To indicate the importance of the role of culture in pragmatic presupposition, some examples were found purposely so that the idea can be proved with solid evidence. The examples were selected to tell the similarities and differences in terms of semantic presupposition and pragmatic presupposition, which is also in line with other studies.

3.2. Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis involved the procedure of grouping, interpretation and synthesis. In the current study, the data were analysed by employing sequential procedures that were listed as follows.

- a. The data were identified and classified.
- b. The classifications were re-examined to check the relevance of each example.
- c. The data were described according to the classifications.
- d. The data were compared and analysed.

4. Data analysis and Discussion

4.1. Semantic Presupposition in English and Chinese Advertising Slogans

As mentioned previously, the data of the present study were analysed based on Yule’s^[37] classification of presupposition types. The following part will analyse the types of presupposition in English and Chinese advertising slogans for the same products or similar products, so the differences and similarities can be observed.

4.1.1. Similar Types

(1) Safeguard ---- *factive presupposition*

English: Your kids aren't worried about harmful germs with the help of Safeguard.

Chinese: Benevolent mother, cares about the whole family. (translated version)

In the English version of Safeguard, the factive presupposition can be triggered by the phrase “aren’t worried about”, which means parents’ concerns and that kids can be worried about harmful germs which is the fact conveyed by this advertising slogan. For the Chinese version, the factive presupposition that there are some mothers who are not benevolent and do not care about the family can be triggered via the lexical item “benevolent”.

(2) iPhone 3G --- *factive presupposition*

English: The first phone to beat the iPhone

Chinese: with similar meaning

The English advertising slogan for iPhone 3G means that iPhone 3G is better than the previous iPhone products, which may seem to be negative for their previous products. However, the factive presupposition which is triggered by “the first” shows that no other phone can beat iPhone and there are no phones which can be better than iPhone products either, even the previous ones. In the Chinese version, the similar factive presupposition is also triggered by the lexical item --- “The first piece”.

(3) iPhone 5 --- structural presupposition

English: The biggest thing to happen to iPhone since iPhone

Chinese: Excellent iPhone, now is more excellent (translated version)

The structural presupposition was used to trigger the presupposed information that iPhone products have been always very good via the superlative degree structural. Although, in the Chinese version, the comparative degree (more) was used rather than the superlative degree, the similar presupposed information, i.e. good iPhone products can be better and better, can be triggered.

(4) Heineken ^[14] --- factive presupposition

English: Heineken refreshes the parts other beers cannot reach.

Chinese: Masterpiece is, of course, Heineken (translated version)

Similarly, in terms of Heineken’s English advertising slogan, Culperper, and Haug (2014) suggested the factive presupposition that there are parts that other beers cannot reach (Culpeper and Haugh, 2014), meaning no other beer can be better than Heineken products can be triggered via this English advertising slogan. Accordingly, the Chinese version can also trigger the unsaid information that only Heineken is brewed by brew-masters.

(5) Mercedes-Benz --- factive presupposition

English: The best or nothing

Chinese: We only have the best (translated version)

By using both English and Chinese advertising slogans, Mercedes-Benz successfully delivers the unsaid information. They both presuppose that Mercedes-Benz does not produce a normal car, only the best cars.

(6) Alipay --- factive presupposition

English: Alipay, we understand your consignments

Chinese: Whenever you pay, use Alipay (translated version)

Alipay is a third-party mobile and online payment platform, established by Alibaba Group and its founder Jack Ma. Due to the expansion of its service area, Alipay promoted its service in other countries such as Korea and America. When promoting their service, comparable to the Chinese advertising slogans, whose factive presupposition is that you do not need other services (such as WeChat pay? Apple pay? Or even bank cards and cash), you just need Alipay whenever you buy things, the factive presupposition of the English version conveys that Alipay can give a commitment to users (users want high credit product and trustworthy service, and Alipay can provide users with both of them). Although the content is different, the presupposition types are the same.

4.1.2. Different Types

(1) Air-conditioning (AC)

English: Why suffer another summer? (American brand)

Chinese: Insist upon producing ACs that are efficient, energy-saving, and environmental-friendly (translated version)

The presupposed information of the English advertising slogan is triggered via the wh-questions structure. It presupposes that you suffered in the past summer before having their products. However, the Chinese advertising slogan has a lexical presupposition. The word “insist” conveyed the unsaid information that Gree produces good ACs in the past, and is producing good ACs now and will produce good ACs in the future.

(2) iPhone 6

English: Bigger than bigger

Chinese: Not limited to big size (translated version)

Although the Chinese version of the iPhone 6 advertising slogan seems similar to its counterpart, their presupposition types are different. For the English version, the structural presupposition was used (comparative degree) to convey that iPhone 6 has more than a bigger size. Similar presupposed information, which is the good points of the iPhone 6 are not limited to big size, is, yet, conveyed by its factive presupposition of the Chinese version.

(3) Yakult

English: When do you drink every day?

Chinese: Healthy intestine, beautiful face (translated version)

The unsaid information that you drink Yakult every day can be conveyed via the structural presupposition through the wh-questions structure. The presupposition type of the Chinese version is dissimilar to the English one. The factive presupposed that the condition of the intestine influences individuals' condition of facial skin and that Yakult can bring you a healthy intestine can be observed from this advertising slogan.

(4) Airlines

English (KLM): What makes this World Business Class so special?

Chinese: China Southern Airline, flying journey is no longer the same (translated version)

The advertising slogan for KLM presupposes that the business class of their airplanes is so special via the wh-questions, i.e. structural presupposition type. Differently from KLM, China Southern Airline's advertising slogan conveys, via factive presupposition, the unsaid information that you can experience different and better services provided by China Southern Airlines rather than other airlines.

(5) SONY TV set

English: Why Sony, when they could have any TV in the world?

Chinese: Sony TV, new sensory experience (translated version)

Different presupposition types can be observed in these two advertising slogans for the same product. For the English version, the structural presupposition is triggered by the wh-question, suggesting that SONY is the only choice of customers and that SONY TV set has unique properties that other TV sets do not have. However, the Chinese version tells customers SONY is the only TV set that provides you with a new sensory experience, which is treated as fact, namely factive presupposition.

It is clear from the discussion about examples that different types of presupposition can be used to imply that certain conditions exist as well as unsaid information about the products. More importantly, some similarities and differences in the preferences of using types of presupposition can be discerned.

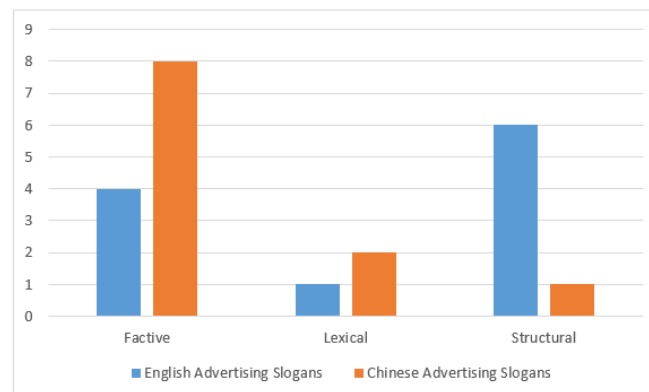


Figure 1: Types of presupposition in studied English and Chinese advertising slogans

According to the Figure 1, it is obvious that unsaid information of studied Chinese advertising slogans is conveyed mainly by factive presupposition, while the structural types of triggers can be observed more

in English advertising slogans. This can, indirectly, shows that companies may prefer to deliver presupposed information that can be treated as a fact in the Chinese context, and structural presupposition is preferable in English-speaking countries.

4.2. *Pragmatic Presupposition in Advertising Slogans*

Apart from functioning as an aid in introducing and promoting goods, advertising slogans are also a carrier of cultural values [28]. Cultural traditions as well as societal contexts should be considered as very important factors when creating advertising slogans. Therefore, when some semantic items are used as indicators of semantic presupposition in advertising slogans, its pragmatic presupposition, especially in terms of cultural sensitivity, should be contemplated deliberately and cautiously. Otherwise, some misunderstanding and even some hatred towards the companies as well as their products can be yielded, evidenced by the following examples.

(1) *TOYOTA cars*

Chinese: The domineering, you have to respect (translated version)

This is the typical advertising slogan that Chinese customers dislike most, and the company made a good public apology. The lexicon, i.e. “you have to” which means have to, triggers the factive presupposition that people do not normally respect the domineering, but for this car, it has the power to let Chinese people respect it, and even though our products are the domineering in the market. This advertising slogan made Chinese people have an aversion for it, because, traditionally, domineering refers to very negative characteristics, and we only respect people who are worth being respected. Furthermore, due to some historical reasons, this Japanese company requires Chinese people to respect their domineering cars which may evoke memories of Chinese people’s suffering caused by WWII. This, therefore, is surely against by Chinese citizens and market. This, according to some surveys, can be very unfavourable in terms of marketing and selling.

(2) *Coca Cola* English: Open Happiness

Chinese: In every direction toward home, there is Coca-Cola (translated version)

Both of the advertising slogans imply the factive presupposition. For the English version, that drinking Coca-Cola makes you feel happy is conveyed, whilst, the fact that whenever people go home, they take Coca-Cola, i.e. Coca Cola means going home is conveyed by the Chinese version. This can be considered as a good example that shows respect and consideration of Chinese culture and societal context. To be more precise, this slogan is very evocative, as the home is, traditionally, very important for every Chinese people, and going home is very delightful and gleeful. This slogan can be more evocative during the Spring Festival, as Spring Festival is one of the most important festival that Chinese people are eager to go home and celebrate with their family members.

Another advertising slogan also demonstrates the importance of pragmatic presupposition, especially in terms of culture and societal context.

(3) *Lay’s (chips)*

English: Too good to eat just one

Chinese: Bring Lay’s home. (translated version)

In Chinese, the pronunciation of “happiness and good things” and the pronunciation of the translated version of Lay’s are the same, so this can also mean: Bring the happiness and good things home.)

Lay’s uses factive presupposition to suggest that Lay’s chips are good and you cannot stop eating it its English version. And, for the Chinese version, it presupposed that when you bring Lay’s home, you bring good things and happiness home. More importantly, comparable to Coca-Cola, Lay’s also considered cultural and societal sensitivity when making Chinese advertising slogans. It is our tradition that we only bring good things and happiness home rather than making our family members feel worried about us. Therefore, this Chinese advertising slogan can really touch Chinese people’s hearts and provoke their desire for purchasing their chips. Also, similar to the one for Coca-Cola, the Chinese slogan can be more evocative during the Spring Festival, as Spring Festival not only means the end of the year but also the start of another new year. In such a meaningful period, Chinese people would like to bring happiness and good things home, meaning we have good ends and good starts.

5. Conclusion and Limitation

Along with the multilateral trade between China and other countries, products are sold in China as well as in other countries. In order to introduce the products and promote the sale growth rate, advertising slogans are prevailing and commonly used. Advertising slogans are aimed at getting the public to react and to buy the advertised products, via achieving an impact by appealing to the public's interest. Due to the nature of advertising slogans, presupposition is an essential a crucial part of the discourse of advertising slogans. As a means to make apt and decent advertising slogans, the presupposition that triggered should be considered delicately. The present study provided some suggestions after comparing English advertising slogans and Chinese advertising slogans, and companies may refer to these suggestions when they would like to release advertising slogans to introduce and promote their products, especially in China. To be more specific, based on the comparison of the types of presupposition, the present study found that companies prefer to deliver presupposed information which can be treated as a fact in the Chinese context, while, in English advertising slogans, structure, especially wh-question, are preferred to be used to trigger presupposition. Additionally, apart from semantic presupposition, pragmatic presupposition, especially in terms of culture and societal context, necessitates rigorous considerations, as presuppositions are culturally and contextually sensitive. By considering the conclusion given by the present paper, companies may need to give some thoughts on the presuppositions conveyed by the adverting is they could like to promote the sales volume in the Chinese market. It is very essential to think about the information because the audience and readers can unconsciously get some unfavorable message which is transmitted by the presuppositions, if the advertising slogans tell some. Then, there is predictable that they will go against the products. Therefore, companies may use the conclusion provided by the present study to guide the generation of advertising slogans for different markets^[23].

Although the present study first examined the difference and similarities between English and Chinese slogans and offers some suggestions, some limitations need to be noticed, and improvements are required to be made in future studies. To start with, further studies are strongly recommended to discover the reason why factive presupposition is preferable in Chinese advertising slogans whilst more structural presuppositions are found within English advertising slogans. Whether it is due to cultural factors or different cognitive patterns. Furthermore, a larger corpus is necessary for generalizing the results of the present study as well as making the results more valid.

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