

Analysis of the Application of Speech Act Theory in English Advertising

Xinyu Tang^{1,a}, Ge Zhu^{2,b}

¹*School of International Business Communications, Dongbei University of Finance and Economics, Dalian City, Liaoning Province, China*

²*Department of Commerce of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, Urumqi City, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China*

^a*dufextxy@163.com*, ^b*dufezhuge@163.com*

Abstract: *This study focuses on the application of the Speech Act Theory in English advertisements. Firstly, it elaborates on the basic concepts of the Speech Act Theory, including locutionary acts, illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts. Then it conducts an in-depth analysis of the specific application forms of this theory in English advertisements. For example, direct speech acts are used to directly convey product information and appeals, while indirect speech acts are employed to trigger consumers' thinking and emotional resonance in an implicit way and influence their purchasing intentions. Different types of speech acts are utilized to fulfill functions such as persuasion, providing information and arousing emotions in advertisements. Through case analysis, it demonstrates how English advertisements skillfully apply the Speech Act Theory to enhance the communication effects and marketing achievements. The research shows that the Speech Act Theory plays a very important role in English advertisements, providing effective strategies and ideas for advertisement creators. Meanwhile, it also helps consumers better understand the intentions of advertisements, and has positive promoting significance and reference value for both theoretical research and practical application in the field of English advertisements.*

Keywords: *Speech Act Theory, English advertisements, Locutionary acts, Illocutionary acts, Perlocutionary acts*

1. Introduction

In the modern commercial society, advertising has become an omnipresent and influential force. English advertising, in particular, plays a crucial role in the global market, aiming to promote products or services, build brand images, and persuade consumers to make purchasing decisions. With the increasing complexity and sophistication of advertising strategies, a deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms that make advertisements effective is essential. Speech Act Theory, which analyzes the functions and effects of language beyond its literal meaning, provides a valuable framework for dissecting the communicative and persuasive aspects of English advertising.

1.1 Purpose and Significance of the Research

The primary purpose of this research is to comprehensively investigate the application of Speech Act Theory in English advertising. By doing so, it aims to uncover how different speech acts are utilized to achieve various advertising goals, such as attracting attention, providing information, eliciting emotions, and ultimately, influencing consumer behavior. This study is significant as it bridges the gap between theoretical linguistics and the practical field of advertising. It offers valuable insights for advertisers and marketers, enabling them to craft more effective and persuasive advertisements. Moreover, it enriches the academic understanding of the relationship between language and advertising, contributing to the interdisciplinary research in the areas of linguistics, communication studies, and marketing.

1.2 Research Methodology

This research adopts a multi-faceted methodology. Firstly, a comprehensive literature review is conducted to trace the development of Speech Act Theory and its previous applications in advertising

research. Secondly, a large corpus of English advertisements from different media sources, including print, television, and the Internet, is collected and analyzed. The advertisements are examined qualitatively to identify the specific speech acts employed and their functions within the context of each ad. Additionally, quantitative methods such as frequency analysis may be used to determine the prevalence of certain speech act types in different types of advertisements^[1]. Case studies of selected advertisements are also carried out to provide in-depth and detailed illustrations of the theory's application. Through this combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, a more accurate and detailed understanding of the role of Speech Act Theory in English advertising can be achieved.

2. Literature Review

Speech Act Theory emerged as a significant development in the field of linguistics. It traces its roots back to the works of philosophers such as J.L. Austin. Austin was among the first to question the traditional view that language merely describes or reports facts. In his seminal work, he proposed that when people speak, they are not only uttering words but also performing actions^[2]. His ideas were further developed and refined by other scholars. For example, John Searle expanded on Austin's concepts and provided a more systematic and detailed framework for understanding speech acts^[3]. Over time, the theory has evolved and been applied in various disciplines, including philosophy, linguistics, sociology, and communication studies, as it offers a powerful lens through which to analyze the functional and performative aspects of language.

2.1 Key Concepts of Speech Act Theory

2.1.1 Locutionary Act

The locutionary act, a fundamental aspect of language communication, pertains to the elemental act of vocalizing words and constructing sentences. It entails the meticulous production of a linguistically meaningful expression. This process encompasses several key elements. Firstly, the accurate pronunciation of individual sounds is essential to ensure clarity and comprehensibility. Secondly, the combination of words must adhere to the established grammar and syntax rules of the particular language being used. This provides the structural framework that gives coherence to the expression. Finally, there is the conveyance of a specific propositional content, which imparts the intended message. For example, when a speaker utters the sentence "The book is on the table," the locutionary act is precisely the act of generating this particular sentence with its straightforward, literal meaning. This act serves as the bedrock, the essential starting point, upon which the other more complex speech acts, such as the illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, are subsequently constructed and developed. Without a proper locutionary act, the effective transmission of ideas and intentions through language would be severely hampered, as it forms the basis for all further communication.

2.1.2 Illocutionary Act

The illocutionary act lies at the heart of communication, as it is deeply concerned with the underlying intention or force that drives the utterance. It represents the very essence of what the speaker hopes to achieve or convey through their words^[4]. There exists a rich tapestry of illocutionary acts, each serving a distinct purpose. Making a statement imparts information, such as when a scientist presents research findings. Giving an order, like the example of a teacher saying to a student "Close the window," is a directive that demands compliance. Asking a question seeks to obtain knowledge or clarification. Making a promise binds the speaker to a future action, perhaps a contractor guaranteeing a project's completion date. Expressing an apology aims to repair a social rift^[5]. The illocutionary force is a powerful determinant of how an utterance will be perceived and reacted to within a specific context. In a formal business meeting, a softly spoken request might carry the same weight as a more forceful demand in a casual setting. Understanding this force is crucial for effective communication, as it allows both speakers and listeners to navigate the social and practical implications of language. It enriches our interactions, ensuring that our words are not only heard but also interpreted and responded to in the intended manner, whether it's to incite action, share knowledge, or mend relationships.

2.1.3 Perlocutionary Act

The perlocutionary act focuses on the effect or consequence that the utterance has on the hearer or the audience. It involves the actual impact that the speech act has on the thoughts, feelings, or actions of those who receive it. For example, if a motivational speaker gives a speech and as a result, the audience feels inspired and motivated to take action, the perlocutionary act is the successful arousal of

that inspiration and the potential change in behavior. The perlocutionary act is often more difficult to predict and measure precisely compared to the locutionary and illocutionary acts as it depends on many factors such as the hearer's psychological state, beliefs, and the context in which the utterance is received.

3. Classification and Characteristics of English Advertisements

English advertisement is a powerful promotional tool. It uses the English language, both in written and spoken forms, to draw public attention to products, services, or ideas. These ads are everywhere, from billboards along busy streets to pop-up windows on digital screens.

3.1 Different Types of English Advertisements

English advertisements can be classified into several distinct types based on the medium through which they are presented. Print advertisements are one of the most common forms and include newspaper ads, magazine ads, brochures, and flyers. These often rely on visual elements such as images, graphics, and text layout to attract the reader's attention and convey the advertising message. For example, a magazine advertisement for a luxury fashion brand may feature a high-resolution photograph of a model wearing their latest collection, accompanied by a catchy headline and a brief description of the products^[6].

Television advertisements, on the other hand, combine visual, auditory, and sometimes even kinetic elements. They have the advantage of being able to tell a story or create an emotional impact within a short time frame. A TV commercial for a soft drink might show a group of friends having a great time at a party while consuming the product, with an upbeat jingle playing in the background. This type of advertisement can reach a wide audience and has a high potential for brand recall^[7].

Online advertisements have seen a significant rise in recent years. They include banner ads, pop-up ads, video ads on streaming platforms, and sponsored social media posts. Online ads can be highly targeted, reaching specific demographics based on users' online behavior, interests, and location. For instance, a targeted Facebook ad for a fitness app might be shown to users who have expressed an interest in health and fitness and live in a particular geographical area.

3.2 General Characteristics of English Advertisements

One of the key characteristics of English advertisements is creativity. Advertisers strive to come up with unique and innovative ideas to make their ads stand out in a crowded marketplace. This can involve using unexpected visual metaphors, clever wordplay, or a novel approach to presenting the product or service. For example, an advertisement for a car might use a surreal visual concept to represent the vehicle's speed and agility, rather than simply showing it driving on a road.

Conciseness is also crucial. Given the limited attention span of consumers and the need to convey the message quickly, English ads often use short, punchy sentences and simple yet effective language. They avoid excessive jargon or complexity and get straight to the point. A good example is a billboard ad with a short and memorable slogan like "Just Do It" for a sports brand, which immediately conveys a sense of motivation and action.

Another characteristic is the presence of an appeal. Ads are designed to appeal to consumers' emotions, desires, or needs. This can be an appeal to vanity, as seen in beauty product ads that promise to make the user look more attractive; an appeal to convenience, such as in ads for household appliances that emphasize how they will make life easier; or an appeal to social status, like luxury brand ads that suggest owning their products will enhance one's social standing. English advertisements also often use rhetorical devices such as repetition, alliteration, and hyperbole to enhance their persuasive power and make the message more memorable.

4. Analysis and Discussions

Speech act theory, which includes locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, is vividly manifested in English advertising. The locutionary act imparts straightforward product details, like specs or ingredients, using plain language to build a knowledge base for consumers. The illocutionary act then kicks in, leveraging persuasive devices such as imperative sentences and rhetorical questions

to nudge the audience towards taking action, often a purchase. Finally, the perlocutionary act gauges success by the emotional or behavioral responses stirred up, whether it's creating brand loyalty, prompting an impulse buy, or inspiring word-of-mouth, making the ad truly impactful.

4.1 The Use of Locutionary Act in English Advertising

4.1.1 Clear and Accurate Product Description

In the realm of English advertising, the locutionary act of furnishing a crystal-clear and unerring product description holds a position of utmost significance. Advertisers meticulously select and employ precise language to effectively communicate the indispensable features, functions, and outstanding qualities of the product or service on offer. Take, for instance, a smart-phone advertisement^[8]. The locutionary act within it could entail explicitly stating technical specifications like “This state-of-the-art smart-phone is equipped with a vibrant 6.7-inch OLED display that offers a seamless visual experience with a 120Hz refresh rate. It houses a powerful 50-megapixel main camera, enabling users to capture stunning photos, and comes with a generous 12GB of RAM for smooth multitasking.” By presenting such detailed and specific particulars, consumers are empowered to acquire a factual and comprehensive understanding of precisely what the product brings to the table. This not only aids them in making more sagacious and well-informed purchasing decisions but also plays a pivotal role in fostering trust and credibility in the brand. Furthermore, these accurate product descriptions act as a potent tool to set the advertised item apart from its rivals in the highly competitive market, spotlighting its unique selling points and thereby enhancing its appeal and desirability among potential buyers.

4.1.2 Linguistic Features and Expressions in Product Introduction

The locutionary act in product introductions is a rich tapestry that employs a diverse array of linguistic features and expressions. Advertisers, with a creative flair, often turn to vivid adjectives and adverbs to breathe life into their descriptions and make them more captivating. For instance, a food advertisement might describe a dessert as “decadently rich and velvety smooth,” conjuring up images of indulgence and luxurious taste that entice the palate of the consumers. Metaphors and similes are also frequently utilized tools. A sports shoe advertisement could proclaim “This shoe is like a rocket on your feet, propelling you forward with every step,” vividly illustrating the power and speed the shoes are purported to offer. Moreover, the strategic use of brand-specific jargon or technical terms can establish an aura of expertise and exclusivity. For example, a skincare brand might employ terms like “hyaluronic acid-infused” or “retinol complex” to convey the presence of advanced ingredients in their products, appealing to consumers who seek out high-quality and scientifically-backed formulations. These carefully chosen linguistic devices within the locutionary act do more than simply dispense information; they transform an otherwise mundane product description into a memorable and alluring narrative^[9]. By engaging the audience on a sensory and intellectual level, they enhance the overall impact of the advertisement, making it stand out in the crowded marketplace and increasing the likelihood of attracting and retaining the attention of potential customers.

4.2 The Manifestation of Illocutionary Act in English Advertising

4.2.1 Persuasive Illocutionary Acts

Persuasive illocutionary acts are not only prevalent but also form the very backbone of English advertising. Calls to action, being a prime example, are meticulously crafted to nudge the consumer towards taking a particular action. Phrases like “Buy now and get 50% off,” “Sign up today for a free trial,” or “Visit our store nearest you” are far from being mere suggestions; they are direct and assertive attempts to persuade the audience to make a purchase or initiate an interaction with the brand. Promotional claims, on the other hand, also firmly fall within this influential category. Advertisers often make bold and audacious statements such as “Our product is guaranteed to make you lose 10 pounds in a week” or “This is the most innovative gadget of the decade.” These claims are not just thrown out there; they are strategically designed to instill in consumers a firm belief in the superiority and desirability of the product or service. By leveraging the powerful illocutionary force of persuasion, advertisers aim to tip the scales in their favor, convincing potential customers that their offering is not only good but essential, and that taking action – whether it's making a purchase or signing up – is the logical and beneficial next step. This calculated approach helps to drive consumer behavior and ultimately boost sales and brand engagement.

4.2.2 Informative Illocutionary Acts

Informative illocutionary acts play a crucial role in modern advertising by centering on the dissemination of valuable knowledge to the consumers. These acts go beyond mere product promotion and delve into the realm of education. For instance, in the case of an advertisement for a new energy-efficient appliance, it would meticulously detail how the appliance operates on advanced technological principles that result in significantly lower electricity consumption compared to traditional models. It might further elaborate on how, over the course of months and years, this reduction in power usage translates into tangible savings on utility bills, providing a clear economic incentive for potential buyers. Similarly, a software advertisement could comprehensively inform users about the novel features and substantial improvements incorporated in the latest version. This could involve explaining enhanced security measures that safeguard sensitive data from emerging cyber threats or highlighting increased productivity tools that streamline complex tasks and save valuable time. By meticulously performing these informative illocutionary acts, advertisers empower consumers with the necessary information to not only understand the practical value of the product or service but also to make more rational and well-informed choices. This approach fosters a relationship of trust between the brand and the consumer, as it demonstrates a commitment to transparency and customer education.

4.2.3 Expressive Illocutionary Acts

Expressive illocutionary acts in English advertising aim to elicit specific emotions and attitudes in consumers. Advertisements often use language to create a sense of happiness, excitement, nostalgia, or even fear. For example, a travel advertisement might describe a destination as “a paradise on earth, where every moment is filled with wonder and joy,” evoking a feeling of excitement and longing. A charity advertisement could use emotive language to make the audience feel sympathy and a sense of moral obligation, such as “Help save the lives of these innocent children in need.” By tapping into consumers’ emotions, advertisers can create a stronger connection with the audience and influence their attitudes towards the brand or product.

4.3 The Impact of Perlocutionary Act in English Advertising

4.3.1 Influencing Consumers’ Perceptions and Attitudes

In the realm of English advertising, the perlocutionary act plays a momentous role in molding consumers’ perceptions and attitudes. Advertisers, with their strategic and meticulously designed advertisements, possess the power to sway how consumers regard a particular product or brand. Take, for instance, a renowned luxury brand. By incorporating high-end production elements such as top-notch cinematography, sumptuous settings, and refined editing, along with the use of elegant and sophisticated language that evokes a sense of exclusivity and refinement, and presenting exclusive and aspirational imagery, they are able to craft an indelible impression of opulence and desirability in the minds of consumers. This, in turn, leads consumers to subconsciously ascribe superior quality and elevated status to the brand. Likewise, an advertisement that prominently features and emphasizes the concept of environmental sustainability can effectively prompt consumers to view the brand as being socially conscious and responsible. As consumers are repeatedly exposed to these perlocutionary acts over an extended period, their initial impressions gradually solidify into either positive or negative attitudes towards the brand. These ingrained attitudes then have a profound impact on consumers’ long-term loyalty, determining whether they will continue to support the brand and influencing their future purchasing decisions.

4.3.2 Driving Consumers’ Purchase Decisions and Behaviors

Ultimately, the perlocutionary act within the domain of advertising is strategically designed with the primary goal of effectively driving consumers’ purchase decisions and behaviors. A meticulously and skillfully executed advertisement has the potential to artfully create a palpable sense of urgency or a strong desire deep within consumers. This can be achieved through various means. For example, a limited-time offer advertisement that deftly employs highly persuasive language and shrewdly capitalizes on the powerful psychological phenomenon of the fear of missing out (FOMO) can nudge consumers to make an impulsive purchase decision on the spot. Additionally, the positive emotional associations that are carefully crafted and evoked by the advertisement, such as feelings of happiness, excitement, or aspiration, can also lead to unplanned impulse purchases. Moreover, the influence of the perlocutionary act extends far beyond just the initial purchase. It can play a crucial role in fostering repeat purchases and even transforming consumers into enthusiastic brand advocates. If consumers

have a favorable and rewarding experience subsequent to being influenced by the perlocutionary act of an advertisement, they are not only more inclined to become repeat customers but also actively recommend the product or brand to their friends, family, and social circles. This word-of-mouth promotion can significantly enhance the brand's reputation and expand its customer base, further highlighting the profound impact of the perlocutionary act in the advertising landscape.

5. Conclusion

This research has comprehensively explored the application of Speech Act Theory in English advertising. It was found that the locutionary act in advertising serves as the foundation by providing clear and accurate product descriptions and using various linguistic features to engage consumers. The illocutionary act manifests in multiple forms, including persuasive, informative, and expressive acts, each playing a distinct role in influencing consumer perception and behavior. The perlocutionary act, on the other hand, has a profound impact on consumers' overall perceptions, attitudes, and ultimately, their purchase decisions and behaviors. Through numerous examples and in-depth analyses, it is evident that English advertisements skillfully utilize the different aspects of Speech Act Theory to achieve their marketing objectives

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