

A Study of Pragmatic Presupposition on Airline Advertising Slogans

Liu Yang and Tian Jianguo

Abstract—This paper collected 83 airline advertising slogans from the website *SlogansPoint.com*. to figure out the categories, the frequencies of each type and functions of pragmatic presuppositions adopted in these airline advertising slogans. The study found that there are existential, factive, belief, state and behavior presuppositions in these airline slogans, and factive presupposition occupies the highest proportion, followed by existential presupposition. The study also found these presuppositions have the following functions: conciseness, diversity, persuasion, politeness and concealment. These results provide some strategies for advertisers as to how to design appealing and effective advertisements, and inform customers of the working mechanism of advertisement.

Index Terms—Airline advertising slogans, functions of presupposition, pragmatic presupposition.

I. INTRODUCTION

As one of the most essential and effective instruments, advertising slogans play an indispensable role in promoting products, strengthening the influence of brands and even accelerating the development of a whole industry. To attract customers in the highly competitive market, airlines represent their commodities by adopting advertising slogans which are usually concise, humorous and catchy.

Presupposition is ubiquitously used in the advertising slogans because it can convey hidden information in an interesting and prominent way. A number of researches on advertisements have been carried out, whereas the studies on advertising slogans are still scant, especially the airline advertising slogans. In view of this, this paper collected 83 items of airline advertisements from the Internet *SlogansPoint.com*., investigating the categories, frequencies of each type and functions of pragmatic presuppositions. It is expected that a deep investigation of airline advertising slogans helps advertisers better grasp the techniques of conveying abundant information in an indirect and concise way. On the other hand, the exploration of the advertising slogans helps customers make rational and sensible choices when they are faced with various advertisements.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of presupposition originated from philosopher Frege [1] who proposed when people assert something, they actually presuppose the existence of other things. Then Bertrand Russell [2] proposed two truth-value conditions to challenge Frege's opinion, that is, a sentence can be true or

false. All of the researches at that period were conducted from the semantic perspective. Later, Strawson [3] put context into consideration when studying presupposition, which can be regarded as the beginning of the studies of pragmatic presupposition. After the long period of development, different scholars proposed various definitions of presupposition. Presupposition was thought to be concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (writer) and interpreted by a listener (reader) [4]: 3. Presupposition was treated as inferences about what assumed to be true rather than directly asserted to be true [5]:19. Presupposition can be informally defined as an inference and proposition whose truth is taken for granted in the utterance of a sentence [6]: 65.

Generally speaking, presupposition was analyzed from the perspectives of semantics and pragmatics. Different from semantic presupposition which focuses on sentence level, pragmatic presupposition puts emphasis on the communicative level. Stalnaker [7] first brought the concept of "pragmatic presupposition" into the field of presupposition. According to him [7]: 387, "to presuppose a proposition in the pragmatic sense is to take its truth for granted, and to presume that others involved in the context do the same." Levison [8] further studied the pragmatic presupposition. He believed that pragmatic presupposition was based on the mutual knowledge or common sense of the speaker and hearer. Yule [4] claimed that pragmatic presupposition exists in the speaker not the sentence, and he also made a classification of pragmatic presupposition.

Chinese scholar Chen Xinren [9] is one of the most famous ones studying pragmatic presupposition. He proposed three properties, namely, subjectivity, uni-directionality and latency. Other scholars also combine pragmatic presupposition with the Cooperative Principle, Relevance Theory, Conversational Principle, Speech Act Theory and so on to further explore the types, weaknesses and other aspects of pragmatic presupposition.

Many scholars have also noticed the importance of pragmatic presupposition in advertising. Goddard [10] emphasized the indispensable role of presupposition in advertising language. Jean Stillwell Peccei [5] paid attention to the connection between presupposition and advertising language. Chen Xinren [9] studied presupposition in Chinese advertisement and then classified presupposition into four categories: fact presupposition, belief presupposition, action presupposition and state presupposition. Li Peiyu [11] explored the pragmatic presupposition in the beverage English advertising slogans. Guo Jiaojie [12] analyzed the application of pragmatic presupposition in automobile advertisement. However, there are scant researches on pragmatic presupposition in airline advertising.

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III. THEORETICAL BASIS

A. Definition of Pragmatic Presupposition

Since the proposal of the pragmatic presupposition, various scholars have defined it in different ways, such as Fillmore [12]: 276 who defined it as following: "By the presupposition aspect of a speech communication, I mean those conditions which must be satisfied in order for a particular illocutionary act to be effectively performed in saying particular sentences. Of course, we need not be concerned with the totality of such conditions, but only with those that can be related to facts about the linguistic structure of sentences." And the following definition was given by Levinson [8]: 205: "An utterance A pragmatically presupposes a proposition B if A is appropriate only if B is mutually known by participants."

Generally, there are some common points in different definitions. Firstly, it is defined as propositional attitude. Secondly, presupposition is a kind of pragmatic, and is regarded as mutual knowledge. Thirdly, pragmatic presupposition is often regarded as conditions for the felicitous or appropriate use of sentences to perform a speech act.

B. Classifications of Pragmatic Presupposition

Yule [4] classified pragmatic presupposition into six parts: existential, factive, non-factive, lexical, structural and counterfactual. Chinese scholar Chen Xinren [9] divided pragmatic presupposition into four parts: belief presupposition, fact presupposition, state presupposition, and action presupposition. Based on the studies of the Yule and Chen Xinren, this paper divides presupposition into five types: existential presupposition, factive presupposition, state presupposition, belief presupposition, and behavior presupposition.

Existential presupposition means that a speaker has already assumed something or ideas which must exist before he or she speaks. Fact presupposition means the information is regarded as a fact triggered by such words as "know", "realize", "remember" and so on. State presupposition means the presupposed information is relevant to the states of feelings or emotions of the readers. Belief presupposition assumes new attitudes or beliefs to change people's original belief. Behavior presupposition involves actions that people used to have or will have.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Questions

The author intends to answer the following questions:

1. What are the categories and frequencies of each type of pragmatic presuppositions in these airline advertisements?
2. What are the functions of pragmatic presuppositions in these airline advertisements?

B. Data Collection Method

The author collected 83 items of airline advertisements from the Internet SlogansPoint.com, which is a famous advertisement website. On this website, slogans are exhibited with the names of their brands, which renders the data collection procedure much easier in that the author does not need to find products first and then seek for their slogans. The author clicks on the column of airline slogans and then 83

items are shown.

C. Research Procedures

The author uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to proceed with the research.

Firstly, the author collects airline advertising slogans on the English website *SlogansPoint.com*, which provides a total of 83 items of different airlines. Secondly, the author categorizes these slogans based on the classifications of pragmatic presuppositions proposed by Yule and Chen Xinren. Next, detailed analysis of part of the corpus was conducted by qualitative method. By virtue of quantitative method, the author calculates the frequencies of each type of pragmatic presupposition. Lastly, the author investigates the functions of presupposition in these advertising slogans.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Types of Pragmatic Presupposition in Advertising Language

In this study, the types of pragmatic presupposition are following: factive presupposition, existential presupposition, behavior presupposition, state presupposition, and belief presupposition. The author will list several examples.

1) Factive presupposition

Rest, keep warm and drink liquids.

– American Airline

This is the advertisement from American Airline. This slogan presupposes the fact that passengers can rest and drink in their plane, and the temperature in the plane is pleasant. As we all know, everyone wants a comfortable environment in the plane to kill time. By claiming such a fact, customers will believe the advertisement is a true description, and they are convinced of the good service quality of the airline. Finally, the possibility of taking the purchase action increases greatly.

2) Factive presupposition

Lower fares, fewer restrictions.

– America West Airlines

This slogan presupposes the fact that the America West Airlines charges fewer and provides more convenience to customers. It is common that passengers want to book airline tickets at lower prices but not at the expense of the quality of airline service. By directly stating its advantages, this slogan attracts people's attention and also spares a lot of effort to process the implicit information behind the slogan.

3) Existential presupposition

The world's favourite airline

– British Airways

Existential presuppositions occupy the highest proportion in this research. The definite article "the" presupposes the existence of the airline. It tells us that they advertise an airline called British Airways and this airline is favored by the whole world. Therefore, the advertisers do not have to use too many words to introduce the existence of such an airline.

4) Existential presupposition

Asia's boutique airline – Exclusive Service to Exotic Gems

– Bangkok Airways

In this slogan, the existential presupposition is triggered by the possessive “Asia’s” which presupposes the establishment of Bangkok Airways. Short as it is, the slogan leaves readers with a deep impression. The adoption of existential presupposition drives readers to make further inference and collect more information about this airline.

5) *State presupposition*

You’re going to like us.

– Trans World Airlines (TWA)

These words are adopted to describe the feelings of customers after their contact with the TWA. People normally like something pleasant and beneficial. It presupposes that the passengers will praise TWA on the supposition that the airlines serve people better, which is a prediction of after-use affection to convince customers. The advertisement availing state presupposition attempts to guide customers to imagine the psychological state after the experience in the plane and then increase customers’ confidence in TWA.

6) *State presupposition*

You are now free to move about the Country.

– Southwest Airlines

In this slogan, there is a state presupposition, which presupposes that the former state is different from the state after choosing the airline. The word “now” is a presupposition trigger which assumes that in the past people were not free and the condition was unpleasant. More importantly, it presupposes that if you want to change the state, you should choose their airlines.

7) *Behavior presupposition*

Up, up, and away.

– Trans World Airlines (TWA)

This is an advertisement of Southwest Airlines, which describes the action of a plane leaving a place. It presupposes the would-be behavior after choosing the product. By the concise yet vivid description, it can arouse people’s desire to fly.

8) *Behavior presupposition*

Stop Searching. Start Traveling.

– Southwest Airlines

This slogan clearly presupposes a behavior of customers, that is, customers are seeking for the best airlines for their journey. Faced with too many choices, customers are hesitant. Therefore, this slogan shows its understanding of the dilemma of the customers and calls for them to stop the current behavior. The second part of the slogan is the solution to the problem: just choose Southwest Airline, and then they can carry out their journey immediately. By adoption of the behavior presupposition, the advertiser compels customers to give up their previously unpleasant action and change to the newly beneficial one, that is, choosing their product.

9) *Belief presupposition*

Defy obstacles

– Air Canada

It is widely held that obstacles are formidable and undesirable. However, in this slogan, it encourages people to defy them, which challenges the common opinion and thus delivers a positive message to its potential customers. By adopting the belief presupposition, firstly it may attract

people’s attention by its unconventionality, and then it wins readers’ favor by forging an aspiring image.

10) *Belief presupposition*

Being there is everything.

– Air New Zealand

At the first sight of the slogan, customers will be a little puzzled. How could arrival at the destination be everything? People usually deem many other things as important in their life, such as money and personal items prepared for a journey. The slogan challenges the traditional belief, and thus compels people to contemplate on their past conception. In this way, the slogan attempts to establish a new belief: being in your destination is the most important thing and do not let other trifles impede your journey.

B. Frequencies of Each Type of Pragmatic Presupposition in Advertising Language

When analyzing the data, the author found that some advertising slogans may only contain one type of presupposition whereas others may be a combination of more than two types of presuppositions. Therefore, one slogan may be counted more than once when it contains more the one type of presupposition.

TABLE I: FREQUENCIES OF EACH TYPE OF PRAGMATIC PRESUPPOSITION IN 83 ADVERTISING SLOGANS

Types of pragmatic presupposition	Number	Percentage
Factive Presupposition	36	43.4%
Existential Presupposition	34	41%
Behavior Presupposition	14	16.9%
Belief Presupposition	9	10.8%
State Presupposition	7	8.4%

As can be seen from Table I, factive presupposition occupies the highest proportion, which accounts for 43.4%. Existential presupposition ranks the second largest group, occupying 41%. The number of behavior presupposition is 14, accounting for 16.9%. The belief presupposition represents the fourth one with the proportion of 10.8%. The adoption of state presupposition is the least with its number being 7 and percentage 8.4%.

Factive presupposition dominates all types of presuppositions. Considering that airline is closely related to people’s safety and life, which is different from other fields, such as cosmetics, clothes, service, airlines mainly adopt factive presupposition to provide reliable and real background information, thus convincing customers of the quality of the airline.

Existential presupposition ranks the second biggest one. Advertisers desire to impress the clients and increase the influence of their brand by letting people know the existence of their airlines.

The third one is behavior presupposition. Advertisers usually assume the past behavior of the consumer and then predict the future behavior. Advertisers utilize behavior presupposition to shorten the distance with consumers by seizing their psychology and indicating their would-be behavior.

The occurrence of the other two, namely belief and state presupposition is less, but that does not mean they are ineffective. Emotions and attitudes can greatly influence people’s behavior.

C. Functions of Pragmatic Presupposition

1) Presupposition and the conciseness of advertising slogan

Be it on the street or the television, advertisements are prevalent. As a result, the masses are fed up with the long and tedious advertising which is time-consuming and banal. However, the phenomenon is improved by advertising slogans which feature conciseness. Conciseness can capture the attention of customers because consumers can acquire what they want to know immediately without spending a long time to read. Concise and catchy slogans are also much easier for purchasers to remember, which is rewarding for advertisers to promote their products. Moreover, conciseness of advertising slogans is beneficial in that it saves the cost for advertisers on the ground that slogans only contain a dozen of or even several words, occupying only a small space. To achieve conciseness, pragmatic presupposition plays a critical role. Presupposition assumes some information as common ground and known information. Consequently, only new information is mentioned with the presupposed one omitted. As the previous examples have shown, the simple pronouns are used to replace the long proper nouns, and advertisers only arrange the most important information at the prominent position in the sentence and delete the presupposed information. For example, the slogan "You'll Love the Way We Fly" presupposes the existence of "we", that is, the Delta Airlines. Rather than adopting the long sentence to explain that "we" are Delta Airlines and other basic information, the adoption of "we" effectively makes the information clear. By virtue of presupposition, advertising slogans successfully achieve the conciseness.

2) Presupposition and the diversity of advertising slogan

To compete with other airlines, the advertising slogans of each company must be fascinating enough to attract the potential customers, and thus the diversity of advertising language is a must. Many airlines adopt various rhetorical devices to achieve the ideal effect. Presupposition contributes to the diversity of the advertising language in that the presupposed information can make a contrast to readers' expectation by adopting various rhetorical devices. For instance, the slogan "The Spirit of the South of the World" firstly presupposes the existence of the airline by the presupposition trigger "The", and at the same time, it contains a metaphor, that is, the airline in question is likened to "The Spirit". The metaphor is realized by the presupposed information which admits the existence of the airline. Another example is the slogan "Hawaii Starts Here" designed by Hawaiian Airlines. This slogan contains a semantic pun, that is, Hawaii refers to the geographical location of Hawaii as well as the specific plane by which customers have travels. Similarly, the meaning of the semantic pun can only be acquired by the presupposed information of the existence of the airline. Moreover, advertisers attempt to change the old presupposed beliefs and attitudes of customers to promote their products, which can also be achieved by exaggeration, simile, personification, to name just a few. For example, the slogan "Like a smile in the sky" challenges people's old impression of the plane by using a simile. To conclude, the diversity of the advertising slogans is realized by the combination of the presupposed information and asserted information.

3) Presupposition and the persuasive function of advertising slogan

Frankly speaking, the ultimate purpose of advertisements is to persuade customers to choose their product. Therefore, the persuasive force is of significant importance. Advertisers attempt to put themselves on target customers' shoes to resonate with them, seizing their psychology and convincing them into the action of purchasing. By adopting the existential presupposition which states the existence of the airlines, advertisers increase the brand awareness and recognition in customers' mind, thus encouraging them to buy the product. As for the factive presupposition which describes the advantages of their product, advertisers convince consumers of the fact of good quality of their airlines, and usually customers will take what they have said for granted without suspecting. By virtue of behavior, state and belief presuppositions which contain the change of attitudes of the customers, advertisers convince them of the would-be-effect of the product, and then consumers are persuaded to choose their airlines.

4) Presupposition and the polite function of advertising slogan

As can be seen, numerous advertising slogans adopt the pronoun "we" whose referent is assumed to be the airlines themselves, and pronoun "you" that is supposed to refer to the readers of the slogan. The referents of the pronouns "you" and "we" are presupposed by the advertisers as the known information for customers, and then the psychological distance between the advertisers and customers can be shortened. Customers will feel that the advertising slogans are designed for them particularly and that they are respected and valued by the airlines. What is more, the use of the second personal pronoun "you" shows politeness of the advertisers. Compared with addresses such as "client", "customer", "he", the second personal pronoun seems that the advertisers are talking to the customers directly and respectfully, and sounds more intimate and decent by recognizing the existence of the customers. In this way, advertisers are increasing the possibility of winning the trust and gaining the favor of customers.

5) Presupposition and the concealment of advertising slogan

Advertisers do not boast their product in a direct way but prefer to express their advantages in an implicit way. Concise as the advertising slogans are, the abundant information is conveyed indirectly to avoid the undesirable effects. Taking the slogan "Fly cheaper" as an example, by adopting the comparative form of the adjective as a presupposition trigger, advertisers either imply that their products have a lower price than other companies or than they did in the past. Claiming vaguely in this way, they can avoid many interest conflict with other airlines. Moreover, according to the relevant rules, advertisers are not allowed to exaggerate their product, and it is unacceptable for advertisers to praise their product directly. However, presupposed information could effectively convey the concealed assertions. For instance, the slogan "We know why you fly. We're American Airlines" presupposes that the airline understands the purpose of the its clients' travel, and then it can greatly meet their needs. The thoughtfulness of the airline is not stated directly but can be inferred by the presupposition. By concealing its blatant praise, advertisers do not have to worry about the impression of arrogance left on readers.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study found that five types of presupposition can be found in these slogans, and they are factive presupposition, existential presupposition, state presupposition, behavior presupposition and belief presupposition. Factive presupposition enjoys the highest percentage in that it can convey the advantages of the product in an implicit way, and consumers will take it as a fact without suspicion. Existential presupposition occupies the second largest number. It can leave customers with a deep impression of the existence of the airline. Behavior presupposition is the third most one, which mainly includes past behavior and future action in this study. The belief and state presuppositions rank the fourth and the fifth respectively. Though their adoption is relatively fewer, their function can not be denied. That is, they alter customers' emotions and attitudes to increase their purchase. What is more, the advantageous functions of pragmatic presupposition in these advertisements are crystal-clear. The adoption of pragmatic presupposition helps these advertising slogans achieve conciseness, diversity, persuasion, politeness, and concealment.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Liu Yang conducted the research, analyzed the data and wrote the paper; Tian Jianguo gave many suggestions and helped revise the draft.

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