

# A Study on Presupposition of Advertising Discourse From the Perspective of Adaptation Theory

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## Abstract:

Presupposition of pragmatics is one of the common strategies used in advertising language. Pragmatic presupposition can not only make advertisements concise, but also enlarge advertising information and activate consumers' original cognition. Based on Verschueren's Adaptation Theory, the paper selects 15 advertisements and analyzes how pragmatic presupposition is used in them and the ways of adaptation between presupposition and communicative situation. The results show that the presupposition of advertising language is generally designed to meet the needs of consumers' practical needs. In order to stimulate consumption, the advertiser's pragmatic selection is mainly the result of adapting to the communicative context, including psychological, social and physical worlds. It has been proved that Verschueren's Adaptation Theory has a strong explanatory power for pragmatic presupposition in advertisements and that pragmatic presupposition strategy used by advertisers is the key of successfully advertising the products.

**Keywords** —Linguistic Adaptation Theory, Commercial Advertisement, Presupposition

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## I. INTRODUCTION

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### A. Research Background

Advertising is a product of the market economy and has become an integral part of modern society. Companies spend large amounts of money each year advertising on television, radio, magazines, newspapers, the Internet, and other media to attract consumers. Advertising can be defined as "the impersonal, usually paid and often persuasive, communication of products, services, or ideas through a variety of media" (Cheng, Y. R. 2003).

Advertisements can be divided into two main categories, "Commercial advertising and non-commercial advertising" (Vestergaard & Schroder 1985). Most of the advertisements studied in this paper are commercial advertisements due to their high investment, wide distribution as well as the great impact on consumers. In commercials, the authors of the advertisements usually write slogans by using simple words and concise grammatical structures in order to quickly arouse consumers' interest. As a special kind of language, advertising discourse involves great amount of propaganda and strategy (Zhou X. 2021).

The practical presuppositions contained in the slogans carry more information and compensate for the shortage caused by limited advertising space. This allows ad writers to convey a large amount of information in just a few sentences, stimulating consumers' existing knowledge and allowing them

to draw conclusions. Consumers can also become more familiar with their products more easily because of their presupposition. The pre-determined use of advertising words is a process of linguistic selection, which requires a high standard of language selection to get the consumers' attention.

From the perspective of Adaptation theory, the use of language is a dynamic process of linguistic choice and a process of mutual adaptation with the context. Thus, language users can make suitable and appropriate choices in the process of linguistic communication. As a common linguistic phenomenon and language strategy, linguistic presupposition, because of its uniqueness, is often used intentionally or unintentionally by ad writers to enhance the persuasive power of commercial advertising. From the above analysis, it can be seen that the pragmatics used by advertisers need to conform to the psychological, social, and physiological world of consumers in order to meet their needs and to stimulate their potential desire to buy, thus achieving the purpose of selling products. However, it is noted that so far there are few studies on advertisements that combine pragmatic presupposition and Adaptation Theory. Therefore, it is necessary to study presupposition adaptation in advertisements and make relevant suggestions.

### **B. Research Objectives**

This paper recognizes the uniqueness of advertising language, which combines simple words, concise grammatical structures and abundant information because presuppositions in advertising language carry great information. Although experts and scholars at home and abroad have analyzed Advertising words presuppositions from different perspectives such as rhetoric and pragmatics, advertising communication is also facing many new problems with the change of international forms. It is very one-sided to study presupposition with a single approach. This paper aims to provide a new way of thinking for studying the presupposition of advertising language. By analyzing presuppositions in various types of advertisements of the last decade under the perspective of adaptation theory, the writer explores how adaptation of presuppositions is realized in communication context.

### **C. Research Significance**

Fairclough (1995) argues that mass media have a significant impact on people's knowledge, beliefs and values, social relationships, and social status. As a mass medium, advertising plays an increasingly vital role in people's daily life. In modern society, people are prone to receive fragmented information, and advertisements are more often placed on subway screens, short video platforms, in films and TV dramas. The previous knowledge of advertisements can resonate with consumers faster and thus trigger more attention of consumers. The paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the concept of presets in advertising discourse. The concept on which this paper is based is derived from Verschueren's (1999) Adaptation Theory. The study has theoretical and practical implications for presuppositions in advertising language. Theoretically, the study of presupposition involves many aspects of the language domain. Although there are some studies on presuppositions in advertising language, few scholars have studies presuppositions from the perspective of Adaptation Theory. In practice, in order to attract consumers' attention, presuppositions in advertising language stimulate customers to learn about products and thus lead them to make purchases, and the theory helps ad writers organically combine products with presupposed message. Therefore, the study of presuppositions in advertisements based on adaptation theory is of great importance to advertisers.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **A. Literature Review on Presupposition**

The German philosopher and mathematician Frege (1990), who is regarded as the father of modern logic, first used the term "presupposition" to explain some logical-semantic phenomena in his book "On Sense and Nomination". Frege studies the relationship between sentence meaning and presupposition. In his view, when people give a proposition or express it in a sentence, the speaker has an obvious presupposition in it. Frege (1990) proposed a theory of presupposition with the following premises. (1). Accusative phrases and

tense sentences actually carry accusative presuppositions.(2). Sentences and their negative equivalents have the same presuppositions.(3). If an assertion is true, its presupposition is also true. In the 1960s to 1970s, there were many discussions on the theory of presuppositions in the field of linguistics. Chomsky (1965) added a new dimension to the systematic study of semantic grammar by placing theoretical presuppositions in the theoretical study of linguistics, leading to further linguistics development and a high level of interest in the study of presuppositions among linguists. Mey (1993) explains the need for presuppositions to be expressed in a wider context and argues that presuppositions are the ideas of the speaker, which means the realization of the presuppositional idea depends on the cooperation of the hearer; presuppositions cannot be reasoned in isolation from the context. According to Levinson(1983), "prerequisites are best described as the relationship between the speaker and the appropriateness of the sentence in the context". Yule (1996) maintains that "a presupposition is a situation assumed by the speaker before speaking, not a presupposition of the sentence." Peccei (2000) argues that "a presupposition is seen as an inference about what is assumed to be true in discourse."

From the above viewpoint, it can be seen that presuppositions are knowledge shared by participants, and the participants discussed in the paper are mainly advertisers and consumers. Although presupposition research in China started slightly later than in Western countries, it is now developing rapidly. In recent years, an increasing number of Chinese scholars have begun to focus on presupposition-related research. He Zhaoxiong (2000) puts forward that different people hold different conceptions of discourse presupposition, and there are three main opinions. The first one is to treat discourse presupposition as an assumption made by the speaker according to the context. According to He Zhaoxiong (2000: 281), "every time a speaker utters a sentence, he or she may assume something according to a particular context." For example:

- [1] a: I realize that he threw something.  
b: He threw something.

In both sentences, when the speaker utters sentence A, he or she has already presupposed sentence B. The speaker has already assumed that someone threw something. The second opinion defines discourse presupposition as "the conditions required for an appropriate speech act" (He. Z. X. 2000: 282). For example, "Ms. Maria, please send this letter to George!" The third understanding views discourse presuppositions as "background knowledge shared by both speakers" (He. Z. X. 2000: 283). This is the main presupposition used in the paper. Take the following two sentences as examples.

- [2] a: Linda moved to a new school.  
b: There is a person named "Linda".

From these two sentences, we can know that both speakers know who "Linda" is. If one of the speakers does not know "Linda", then the two sentences are meaningless and difficult to understand. From the above analysis, we can see that the premise refers to "common background knowledge of both speakers" (He. Z. X. 2000: 283), and the speaker will say a sentence to the other speaker based on the common knowledge. If there was no person named "Linda", or if one of the two speakers did not know who "Linda" was, the speaker would not have said the sentence because even if he or she had, the hearer would not have understood the meaning.

#### ***B. Literature Review on Preconceptions in Advertising***

With the continuous development of economic globalization, advertising plays an increasingly important role in modern society. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines *advertising* as "the techniques and products used to bring products, services, opinions, or causes to public notice for the purpose of persuading the public to respond in a certain way toward what is advertised". Most advertising involves promoting goods, but similar methods are used to encourage people to drive safely and to support a variety of public service in many countries, advertising is the most important source of revenue for the media (such as newspapers, magazines, or

television). In many countries, advertising is the most important source of revenue through which the media (such as newspapers, magazines or television) is conducted." This definition is noteworthy in several ways. First, "revenue" reflects the fact that advertising usually requires payment for the time and space of its vehicle. Second, "persuasion" implies that advertising aims to persuade consumers, but may not have access to the immediate feedback offered by the recipients of the message. Third, "media" refers to magazines, newspapers, television, radio, etc., so that the message can reach the recipient. Generally speaking, advertisements are divided into commercial and non-commercial advertisements, in which commercial advertisements is more common, expensive, widely distributed and influential. Thus, this paper chooses commercial advertisements for analysis to study how the concept of presupposition functions in advertising language. Peccei (1999:21) argues that presupposed appellations serve the language of advertising. "Advertisers are not allowed to make direct claims about their products or competitors without evidence. But they can usually get away with it indirectly through predetermined assertions." The Chinese scholar Chen Xinren (1998) elaborates on discourse presupposition in Chinese advertising. In his paper, he defines four types of presuppositions frequently used in advertisements, namely factual presupposition, belief presupposition, state presupposition and behavioral presupposition. He also investigates the distribution and frequency of occurrence of different presuppositions in advertisements. The results of the study showed that state presupposition appeared most frequently, accounting for almost half of all presuppositions. Such a high frequency is not a coincidence. It reflects that advertisers have a good understanding and control of consumers' psychology. However, Chen did not conduct a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the specific functions of advertising presets. In other words, further research on presets is needed. After Chen's article was published, many others have further studied the discourse presupposition in advertising language. According to Wu Yanguo (2003), discourse

presupposition can cut off the diversity of advertising language, which should be diverse so as to attract consumers' attention. Presupposition can diversify advertising to a certain extent because the presupposed message can diversify the advertising language to a certain extent because the presupposed message can be easily expressed in different sentence structures with certain words. According to Pang Yuan (2005), people usually emphasize the most important information in communication, i.e., the message focus. Presupposition is closely related to message focus, and advertisers can mark the message focus by changing the position of presupposed information through certain means, such as lexical means, syntactic means, and other linguistic means.

From the above analysis, some conclusions can be made. First, if the assumptions which are beneficial to the advertiser's product or service are knowledge shared by a reader or at least a group of readers, advertisers might probably regard those assumptions redundant. If these assumptions are beyond reader's knowledge or experience, the advertiser will tend to use some predetermined triggers to make them seem reasonable; otherwise, the reader will be confused and the advertiser might fail to convey the intended message. Second, cultural factors seem to have a strong influence on readers' evaluation of advertisements. According to Oxford English Dictionary (2008: 7a.), *culture* means "the distinctive ideas, customs, social behaviour, products, or way of life of a particular nation, society, people, or period". Advertising always tries to discover "cultural values", which may be related to the latest fashions sought by an increasing number of people. In short, shared knowledge and cultural factors play a vital role in the preconceptions of advertising. They have a great influence on the effectiveness of the advertiser's message delivery and the reader's message interpretation.

### III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the past, scholars have conducted research on pragmatic presuppositions of advertising discourse. It is found that discourse presuppositions are reflected in many aspects of advertising language,

such as on lexical and syntactic levels. However, in previous studies, researchers seldom analyze the presuppositions of discourse at the theoretical level. Therefore, the paper applies Adaptation Theory to analyze advertisements so as to provide a more comprehensive pragmatic insight into its language use.

#### **A. Research Questions**

According to Adaptation Theory, the preconceptions in the tagline must be adapted to readers' needs. Readers can then interpret them in light of the relevance of the content. Here research questions arise. 1. How do ad producers choose the presupposed messages? 2. How do they ensure that consumers can correctly understand the presupposed messages in the advertisements? 3. How does Adaptation Theory function between preconceived ideas and communication situations?

Adaptation Theory provides a comprehensive pragmatic perspective for explaining language use. Language use is a continuous process of selection. In advertising slogans, advertisers choose predetermined words to quickly engage the readers. In this sense, predetermination in slogans is the process of adaptation. Presets in slogans can not only condense the information about the advertised product but also provide other information. From this point of view, presuppositions in taglines adapt to real-life needs. Moreover, the presupposition is a background belief, a common knowledge between producers and consumers. Thus, presuppositions in advertising discourse activate consumers' background knowledge about the product and lead them to purchase it. In this sense, presuppositions in advertising adapt to the consumer's psychological world. Moreover, communication is ubiquitous in the society. Therefore, social factors influence the choice of language. Presuppositions in advertising language shorten the distance between the advertiser and the consumer, thus adapting to the society. In the process of communication, ad makers constantly choose appropriate presets to achieve their purpose, especially in designing slogans. Appropriate presuppositions are used to achieve simplicity and to arouse the interest of consumers. During the process, both language

producers and users can achieve their purposes. From this perspective, presupposition in advertising discourse is a means of linguistic adaptation. Therefore, it is feasible to study presuppositions in advertising language, and it can also open up new ideas for the study of presuppositions in advertising language to a certain extent.

#### **B. Research Methodology**

In the field of language research, there are three main methods for conducting various language studies: the logical-analytical method, the observational method, and the experimental method. As objects of research differ and the purposes of language research vary, research methods change accordingly.

In view of the features of presupposed phenomena, the paper uses two main research methods, namely case study and theoretical analysis. Due to the changing times and the rapid development of technology, people's life and consumption patterns have also changed. Newspapers and magazines are no longer the main sources for consumers to obtain advertising information. More often, they get advertisements on the Internet. Therefore, the advertisements studies in this paper are mainly extracted from the Internet. And the convenience of the Internet and the integrity of its content storage also provide sufficient research materials for this paper.

#### **C. Verschueren's Adaptation Theory**

Adaptation Theory was first proposed by Verschueren, Secretary-General of the International Linguistic Association, in 1987 and was then fully elaborated in 1999 in the book *Understanding Pragmatics*, which marked the maturity of adaptation theory.

The theory of linguistic adaptation has a strong philosophical and psychological basis. It benefits from Darwin's insistence on the "survival of the fittest" theory of evolution and from Piaget's stimulus-response theory of behaviorist psychology in psychology. At the same time, compliance theory is influenced by Giles' theory of verbal adaptation. According to Verschueren (1999), Adaptation Theory can be defined as "language use involving

successive language choices, conscious or unconscious, for internal (i.e., structural) and/or external reasons". Verschueren (1999) states that the process of using language is a process of choice. According to Verschueren's overview theory of pragmatism, Adaptation Theory views human language use from a cognitive, social, and cultural perspective, which makes it different from previous pragmatic theories.

#### *1) Three Key Notions in Adaptation Theory*

The three core concepts in Adaptation Theory are variability, negotiation and adaptation. To make a choice, three key concepts are needed. (Verschueren 1999). They are three levels of concepts that cannot be separated from each other. Variability, which refers to the properties of language, defines the range of possibilities within which choices can be made. Negotiability implies that the choice of language use is not mechanical, but based on flexible principles and strategies. Adaptability enables humans to make negotiable linguistic choices from a range of options, thus meeting the needs of communication. It has two features: the choice of linguistic components is context-dependent. (Verschueren 1999)

#### *2) Four Angles of Adaptability*

In addition, there are four perspectives to analyze linguistic adaptations in describing and illustrating language use. They are the contextual relevance of adaptation; the structural object of adaptation, the dynamics of adaptation, and the importance of the process of adaptation. These four aspects are in perfect agreement with the linguistic, social, cultural and cognitive elements involved in the dynamic process of language use (Yu G. D. 2001). The study focuses on using the contextual relevance of adaptation to analyze presuppositions.

#### *D. Study Framework*

According to Adaptation Theory, adaptation is the process of mutual adaptation between context and language structure. Verschueren (1999) asserts that contexts related to language structure and adaptation strategies can be divided into two types, namely linguistic contexts and communicative contexts. Linguistic contexts include contextual

articulation; articulation includes connectives, repetition, ellipsis, etc. Non-linguistic contexts are also known as communicative contexts. Adaptive contextual associations can include all components of communicative contexts in which language choices must be adapted to each other. It includes the language user, the physical world, the psychological world, and the social world. Verschueren (1999) proposes that the language used is central to the communicative context because the language user's cognition activates the context. Language users include the recipient and the sender as well as others associated with the discourse. According to Verschueren (1999), the physical world implies the current context of language choice. In the physical world, time and space are the central factors. There are many forms of reflecting time and space. In pragmatics, linguists are mainly concerned with temporal and spatial referents. Verschueren (1999) suggests that social factors adapt to language choice, including social environment, social occasions, and social relations. The fourth is the psychological world. According to Verschueren (1999), it is the communication between the sender and the receiver in a psychological state. In the process of language selection, certain factors of both communicators are stimulated to enter the communicative environment, which results in the adaptation of language selection. The process of language speaker's selection is a process of adaptation to the dynamic processes of the mental world of the speaker and the recipient. The mental world includes cognitive factors, influencing factors, such as emotions, characteristics, and desires of both sides of the communication. At the same time, the selection and use of discourse presuppositions is a highly complex and dynamic process. In the specific process of using discourse presuppositions, the advertiser's compliant objects include the physical world, the social world, and the psychological world. In other words, the use of presuppositions in advertising discourse is to achieve compliance with the physical world, social world, and psychological world of the audience, so as to ultimately achieve its advertising purpose.

Based on the knowledge above, this study aims to construct a theoretical framework to better understand why and how advertisers use discourse presuppositions as a communicative strategy in advertising discourse. In this framework, the process of using discourse presupposition is a process of linguistic selection that focuses on the advertising writer and his or her speech acts as the object of study. When the advertising designer enters the communicative process, he has certain kind of communicative purpose.

In order to achieve his advertising purpose, the advertiser needs to make choices on different levels, including the choice of language and the choice of communicative strategy. All these choices at different levels are made in a dynamic communicative process in a deliberative manner (Yu G. D. 2004). Among so many communicative strategies, language presupposition is a powerful one, so that advertisers can choose language presupposition to achieve their communicative purpose, i.e., advertising purpose, by conforming to the communicative contexts of the physical, social and psychological worlds. Throughout the dynamic process of adaptation, the advertiser need to comply with various linguistic rules in order to achieve the meaning of a particular linguistic presupposition. Once the advertiser successfully completes this dynamic process of adaptation, specific advertising phrases with pragmatic presuppositions emerge. The variability reflected in these ad phrases comes from the advertiser's linguistic repertoire and is a concrete expression of the advertiser's linguistic competence. If what the advertiser wants to express can be successfully understood by the audience, the advertiser's communicative purpose can be realized. The whole process can be reflected in the following figure which is improved based on Liu Baocai's original one (2013).

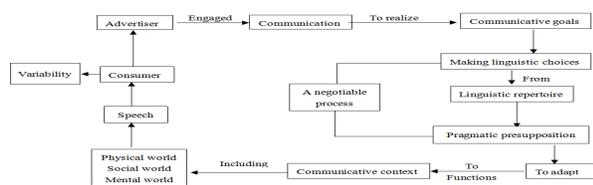


Figure 3-1 An Adaptation Model Elaborating Pragmatic Presupposition

Adaptation Theory provides an integrated view of pragmatics for explaining language use. Language use is a continuum of choices. The advertiser's presuppositions determine his choice of particular words. According to Verschueren (1999), variability, negotiability, and adaptability are guarantees of language choice. The communicative context is the factor that adapts language choice. Thus, it is the three attributes of language that motivate the choice of advertisers. The predetermined usage in language must be adapted to the communicative context.

#### IV. ANALYSIS OF PRESUPPOSITION IN ADVERTISEMENTS

According to Verschueren's Linguistic Adaptation Theory, the choice of linguistic presuppositions as an effective communicative strategy by an ad designer is actually an intention to adapt to various environmental factors. As Verschueren (1999) states, adaptation is one of the properties of language that people use to make negotiable linguistic choices from a variety of options in order to achieve a specific communicative goal. Adaptation is a dynamic process whereby language users manipulate linguistic structures to suit the context according to their intentions. In contrast, pragmatic reference is a highly conscious act of linguistic choice.

Based on the Adaptation model of advertising discourse presuppositions proposed in the previous part, the paper examines the adaptation of advertising discourse presuppositions in the material world, the social world and the spiritual world respectively so as to reveal answers to the questions of why and how discourse presuppositions arise.

##### A. Adaptation to the Physical World

In general, the physical world refers to the material elements that objectively exist and influence the linguistic choices of communicators. Among them, time and space are two of the most popular and widely studied elements. When it comes to communication, what people call time is actually a relative concept, and the same goes for space. When people choose time and space, they

consider various factors and adjust them to achieve the desired communicative effect. At the same time, body posture, gestures, appearance and physical features are all parts of the physical world. The aforementioned factors can affect to some extent the language choice of language users when presenting, and understanding language. In advertising discourse, as a linguistic choice, discourse presuppositions are often used to fit the real world. In addition, advertisers often use some rhetorical devices to increase the persuasive power of advertising discourse.

In this study, the main selection was the adaptation of discourse presuppositions to time and space in the physical world.

#### *1) Adaptation to Time*

The following two examples are analyzed with an adaptation to time.

[2] 8小时, ok ok啦。护舒宝, 女人“月”当  
“月”快乐。(卫生巾广告, 月=越)  
8 hours are OK.  
Whisper. Women are increasingly happy.

In this sentence, "8 hours" has two meanings. On one hand, the working hours during the day time is usually 8 hours. "OK" means that you can live worry-freely with the product. On the other hand, "8 hours" means that the product itself is of good quality and can be used for a long time. In the second half of the ad, "月" and "越" are Chinese homophones, where "月" means month and "越" means degree. The target consumers of this advertisement are females. The physiological phenomenon of menstruation occurs every month, and sanitary napkins require long-term use during menstruation. By using this pragmatic presupposition and harmonic pun, the effects of advertising can be achieved.

[3] 三棵树, 马上住, 三棵树油漆。(油漆广告)  
Three trees. Live now. Three Trees oil paint.

Example [3] is an advertisement for oil paint. Generally speaking, consumers always have the emotion that they cannot wait to move into the house they have purchased after it has been renovated. However, for the sake of health, most

families choose to open windows for a long time to ventilate or buy activated carbon to disperse harmful substances such as formaldehyde. Thus, the language of this advertisement presupposes that people are eager to live in their new homes but often need to wait for a long time, which is consistent with the situation that people need to wait for a long time after completing the renovation. In this ad, the spokesman boldly shouts out the slogan "Live Now", which means that consumers no longer had to struggle with the healthy problems caused by oil paint. It can also reflect the advertiser's confidence in his product.

#### *2) Adaptation to Space*

According to Verschueren (1999), spatial concepts are central to human thinking in many ways. Spatial reference can be divided into two categories: absolute spatial relations and relative spatial relations. Spatial reference is usually relative to perspective and can be either speaker-space or listener-space. Speakers align their perspective with the intrinsic orientation of the object they are talking about, while the relativity of the Spatial-temporal reference of the "I" refers primarily to the orientation of the language user in the "world". The linguistic presuppositions that accommodate space in advertising are designed by advertisers to make the advertised product easily acceptable. For example:

[4] Airbnb belongs anywhere.

This is an advertisement for Airbnb. Airbnb, which stands for Airbed and Breakfast, is a service that connects travelers with hosts who have rooms available for rent. The slogan is presupposed in the phrase "belong anywhere". Some consumers who see this ad may have already experienced what it's like to travel around, so they might be willing to try Airbnb's short-term rental service for a more home-like experience. Other consumers who have experienced that might imagine what it would be like to have a room that feels like home at a place of interest. Therefore, Airbnb uses "Believe in Anywhere" as a tagline to promote its brand and attract consumers.

### **B. Adaptation to the Society**

In the previous part, we have discussed how pragmatic presuppositions in advertising discourse are adapted to the physical world of language use. In this section, we will focus on the adaptation of pragmatic presuppositions in advertising discourse to the society, which Verschuere (1999) defines as the social context, the social environment, and the principles and norms that govern communicators' speech acts. As an important part of society, culture and social norms play an essential role in discourse.

#### **1) Adaptation to culture**

Culture and language are closely related. Language is a prerequisite for the existence of culture and is a symbolic representation of culture, which is influenced and shaped by language. Meanwhile, language carries key messages of culture and facilitates its transmission. Language itself cannot be fully understood except in its cultural context. For example:

[5] 别逼我，我有能力结婚，世纪佳缘，勇敢爱。  
(相亲平台广告)

Don't force me. I can afford to get married.  
CenturyLink.Be brave to love.

This is an advertisement of CenturyLink. In traditional Chinese concepts, "weddings and funerals" are major events in one's life. With the rapid economic and social development, the concepts of the elders and young people are diverging. Countless young people are being pushed and forced to marry, and some even fear of marriage. This piece of advertisement presupposes forced marriage faced by young people in the modern society. The advertiser's attitude of staying together because of love and of bravely taking the responsibility of marriage resonates with many consumers.

[6] a. Here is MTNDEWzero!  
b. Oh, I'm thirsty.

This is the jingle for MTNDEWzero (a Pepsi drink). The ad pays homage to the movie "The Shining". From the scene of the advertisement, the actors' costumes match perfectly with the tune of the jingle, which parodies the scene where the

heroine is trapped in the bathroom and cannot escape from the window. Imagine both the advertiser and the target consumer have seen or known *The Shining*, so they share some common knowledge about the movie. Through a series of scary scenes, consumers feel like they are once again watching the movie and have to pay attention to the unexpected situation. Then, two nonsensical lines "Is my window zero? I'm thirsty." came out and surprised the audience and reminded them how good and attractive the drink is, making them forget about the horrible scenes.

[7] Chevrolet Silverado, accompany you to the end of the world from the first day.

This is a commercial for Chevrolet's car named "Super Bowl". The ad is based on a Mayan prophecy about the end of the world in 2012 and how only high-quality cars can escape from the rubble. The ad designer believes that most consumers are aware of the Mayan prophecy about the end of the world or have seen the movie "2012". "From the first day to the end of the world" reflects the high quality and durability of Chevrolet vehicles.

[8] Drink pure natural, Evian live young.

This is the classic advertising slogan of the Evian baby movie series. "Live young" is the premise of the sentence. In the advertisement video, adults are transformed into children in the mirror. In all cultures, children represent innocence and cuteness. This leads to a broad consensus between advertisers and consumers. Meanwhile, in today's society where "quality of life" is commonly mentioned, modern people are also paying much more attention to the safety of drinking water in order to improve the quality of life and maintain health, so "living young" may become a common knowledge between advertisers and consumers. "Purity and quality" contained therein is also very popular among consumers. As a result, advertisers have succeeded in getting various audiences interested in mineral water and making it famous.

## 2) *Adaptation to social norms*

Social norms are behaviors and ways of thinking that are considered conventional and acceptable by the vast majority of members of a given society (Yu G. D. 2004). In order to achieve communicative purposes, language users need to dynamically conform or comply with social norms. Appropriate pragmatic presuppositions in advertisements can serve the function.

[9] This Christmas, give something that only you can give.

This is Coca-Cola's Christmas advertisement for 2020. These are simple words, but have touched countless people. As we all know, Christmas is an important Christian holiday to commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ. At Christmas, people often give gifts to each other, hold joyful feasts and add to the festive atmosphere with Santa Claus and Christmas trees. Today, Christmas has become a public holiday in the Western world and many other regions. If consumers do not understand the importance of "giving" behind Christmas Festival, he or she will not know why little girls look forward to their fathers coming home and why fathers are obsessed with bringing presents to their girls. As a result, they will not be able to understand the true meaning of the advertisement.

[10] 今年过年不收礼，收礼只收脑白金。

No gifts this year, just melatonin.

(PS: The main ingredient of Naobaijin is melatonin, so it is translated here as "melatonin".)

This is the classical advertising slogan of Naobaijin, a famous health care product for the elderly. Chinese culture places great emphasis on filial piety, and it is a good morality to repay parents. And giving nutritional health products is one way of showing filial piety. Besides, during the Chinese Spring Festival holiday, the hosts and guests send each other gifts to show care and love to each other. And this advertisement is to persuade consumers to accept the idea of giving Naobaijin as the best gifts to parents and relatives through the magical advertising words.

[11] ---妈妈，什么香香脆脆我们最爱？

Mum, what's our favourite crispy snack?

---美好时光海苔。

It's the sea sedge called "Good Times".

---什么带给全家营养健康？

What makes the family members healthy?

---美好时光海苔。相亲相爱共同分享幸福的一家。

It's the sea sedge called "Good Times". We are a happy family.

It is well known that family and ethical relationships have been well emphasized in Chinese culture. Today, the family is still a basic social unit. Although the size and structure of the family have now changed, it still plays a key role in one's life. Therefore, many companies use the concept of family in their advertisements and shoot advertisement videos with a family background. As what is shown in [9], the advertising discourse highlights the delicious and healthy snack in the girl and her mother's dialogue.

## C. *Adaptation to the Spiritual World*

In the previous two sections, linguistic adaptation to the physical and social worlds are discussed respectively. In this section, we will examine another category, namely the adaptation of language to the mental world. According to Verschueren (1999), language interaction is undoubtedly communicated between the mind and the heart. The mental world to be activated in language use contains cognitive and emotional factors (including personality, emotions, beliefs, desires, and motivations or intentions). In modern society, there is an increasingly close relationship between advertising and social psychology. According to Yu Genyuan (1998), social psychology advertising is a multi-level psychological system. It includes consumer psychology, consumer needs, and advertising acceptance psychology. Thus, the linguistic presuppositions of language choice as an advertiser have been adapted to consumers' psychological world. Therefore, advertisers are supposed to understand consumers' needs and psychological motivations.

This study broadly classifies the adaptations of advertising language prerequisites to the psychological world into four categories: adaptations to consumer perceptions, beliefs, emotions, psychological motivations, and desires.

### *1) Consumers' psychology*

In advertising discourse, emotional presuppositions are often designed by advertisers to cater to consumers' emotional needs. In other words, advertisers presuppose an intimate relationship between target audience and themselves. The emotions, such as love, jealousy, sympathy, and concern, expressed in the advertisements can influence target audience's psychological world, and ultimately achieve their advertising objectives. For example:

[12] 宝宝肠胃好，妈妈少烦恼，贝博儿羊奶粉。

If her baby has a good stomach, the mother will be less concerned. Beiboer milk powder.

As mothers, they are always concerned about the health of their children. Because of the delicate stomach of infants, Since the quality of milk powder in the market varies, mothers are careful choosing the milk powder for their babies. Advertisers presuppose mothers' concerns about formula products in order to arouse psychological empathy and stimulate purchases.

### *2) Consumers' demand*

According to Maslow's hierarchical needs theory (1954), there are five types of needs: physiological needs, needs for security, needs for belonging, needs for respect and needs for self-actualization. In advertising discourse, advertisers often use some practical prerequisites to cater to consumers' needs or desires so as to promote products or services.

[13] 真熨斗，真紫光。

Real iron. Real light stripes. (L'Oréal Purple Iron Light eye cream)

Nowadays, an increasing number of consumers are concerned about anti-aging. Various eye creams and anti-aging serums have been launched and are rapidly taking over the market. Consumers are longing for products with visible results. In people's perception, "ironing" is to smooth out

wrinkled clothes. The slogan "real iron, real light stripes" precisely meets consumers' needs for anti-aging products and plays a role in recommending consumers to use L'Oréal Purple Iron Light Eye Cream, making the advertising words reflect the product's utility while emphasizing the product's name.

[14] 飘柔三十年，为你顺发梳心。

Rejoice is used for thirty years so as to smooth your hair and your heart. (Shampoo ad)

This is the advertising slogan for Rejoice's 30th anniversary. The word "rejoice" in the shampoo commercial is a pun. On one hand, "Rejoice" is translated as "飘柔", which means supple and smooth in Chinese. "飘柔" predicts people's demand for the product, which consumers need to use to make their hair smooth and flowing. On the other hand, it also emphasizes the name of the brand.

[15] 农夫山泉有点甜。

Nongfu Spring is a little sweet. (A mineral water ad)

This is the classic advertisement of Nongfu Spring mineral water. Like mineral water, its primary purpose is to meet consumers' drinking needs, which belongs to the physiological needs of consumers. Secondly, consumers probably hope that the drinking water is sweet and can make them satisfactory. This advertisement satisfies both needs. The word "sweet" in the ad can not only foreshadow the sweetness of the mineral water but also imply that consumers are pleased after drinking mineral water.

### *3) Adaptation to Consumers' Psychology*

Advertisements are usually designed to adapt to consumers' psychology. For example:

[16] We are second place, but we have to work harder. (An ad for a cab company)

This is the slogan created by DDB Advertising Company for Avis Motor Company in 1959. The designer is William Bernbach, the general manager of DDB. At that time, the largest cab company in the United States was Hertz. And the company next to Hertz is called Avis, which suffered a lot through

fierce competition. Thus, Avis turned to DDB Advertising for help. DDB created the famous slogan by putting Avis in an inferior situation than its competitors. However, it turned out to be a great success and guaranteed its future development. The ad portrayed a tenacious and industrious company that, despite its current disadvantage, was unwilling to settle for the second place and was actively and catching up with others. Sympathy, even admiration can be found in the advertisement.

Immediately after the advertisement was released, it attracted great attention of the American consumers, thus enabling Avis to turn a loss into a profit and even taking over Hertz's position.

#### **D. Summary**

In this chapter, the adaptation of discourse presuppositions in advertising discourse are analyzed from three perspectives, namely the physical world, the social world and the psychological world. All of them can exert an influence on ad designers' discourse presuppositions. Thus, the question of why and how discourse presuppositions are applied is answered. Adaptation to the communicative context can be found in advertising discourse. The whole process of adaptation is a very complex and dynamic one. In general, adaptation to the communicative context can be divided into: adaptation to the physical world, adaptation to the social world, and adaptation to the psychological world. The physical world can be divided into time and space. Adaptation to the social world includes adaptation to cultural and social norms. Adaptation to the psychological world includes adaptation to consumers' perceptions, beliefs, actions, psychological motives, and purposes.

#### **V. CONCLUSIONS**

Major findings of the study are summarized, which is followed by a discussion of implications, limitations, and research recommendations.

##### **A. Major Findings**

Advertising discourse is a vehicle between producers and consumers. Unlike novels or

academic language, advertising discourse have their own linguistic purposes and functions, which were summarized by American advertising scholars in 1898 as "AIDMA", where "A" is for attention, "I" is for interest, "D" is for desire, "M" is for memory, and "A" is for action (Wen C. Y. 2007). "AIDMA" embodies the process of consumers' psychology through the five links of "arousing attention, generating interest, fostering desire, forming memory and causing action" to make the advertising message influence consumers' way of thinking and behavior. It can also be used as a criteria of evaluating an advertising slogan.

Linguistic research on advertising has been a hot topic both at home and abroad. However, there is a vacancy in studying the presuppositions of advertising language from the perspective of a combination of Adaptation Theory and quantitative analysis. In particular, based on the collected data and previous studies, the paper aims to discuss how to achieve the adaptation of presupposition to the communicative situation. Through detailed analysis of advertisements in recent years, presuppositions in advertising language are mainly focused on areas closely related to life, such as clothing, food, housing, and transportation. As a kind of discourse, the use of presuppositions in advertising language is adapted to the communicative context. Specifically, presuppositions not only condense the content of the advertisement but also provide other useful information about the product.

It is clear from the study that the ultimate goal of advertising is generally to sell its products, so presuppositions are generally presented in response to the consumers' needs. The temporal aspect can highlight the durability of the product or the immediacy of the effect. In terms of space, the relevance of space to consumers are highlighted. For example, cell phone ads can be pre-defined with the phrase "The sky is the limit". In the social aspect, advertising discourse can be combined with relevant culture to resonate with consumers, such as mooncakes, zongzi (a traditional Chinese rice-pudding), and other specialties of traditional Chinese festivals. It is worth noting that with the development of economic globalization, many products have a huge market overseas. While

selling products, businesses should also respect the local culture. A typical negative example is the Italian brand Dolce & Gabbana. To prepare for the Shanghai show, Dolce & Gabbana launched three advertising videos, one of which is entitled "Chopsticks for Dinner". In the ad, the model refers to chopsticks as "little stick-shaped cutlery" and margaritas as "great". This satire of Chinese cuisine culture has infuriated Chinese consumers. It can be inferred from the example that the social aspect of adaptation cannot be ignored. The third level is the psychological level, which might also be a tangible level of consumers' needs. For example, skincare advertising can provide information on the efficacy that consumers want while baby products can provide information on ingredients.

In short, with the rapid development and changes of the times, advertising language presets should also keep up with the times and be able to properly combine new information with advertising phrases in an organic way.

#### **B. Limitations and Suggestions for Further Study**

Through the above analysis, it is feasible to study presuppositions in advertising language from the perspective of Adaptation Theory, especially from the perspective of communicative context. It provides a new perspective and method for studying presuppositions in advertising language. It helps to shorten the distance between merchants and consumers. However, as a tentative exploration, this

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study still has limitations and needs further improvement in many aspects due to the limitations of the authors' abilities. Specifically, the limitations are as follows. First, the corpus might be a little bit insufficient to collect enough information for data analysis. Second, apart from the physical level, social level and psychological level, advertisement discourse might be analyzed from some other perspectives.

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