

The Observance and Non-observance of Cooperative Principle in English Advertisements

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Abstract. Advertising, as being the important part of the social language, has directly affected people's daily life and work through many ways, and makes use of all kinds of techniques to attract the consumers' attention. Based on the Cooperative Principle, this paper expands its applicable scope by connecting it with various English advertisements. According to the observance and non-observance of Cooperative Principle, the author analyzes a large number of English advertisements and finds that it is a main feature of advertising language to produce implicatures by flouting the maxims of CP.

Theoretical background

Cooperative Principle. The linguistic philosopher Paul Grice's Cooperative Principle points that in ordinary conversation both parties share a cooperative principle which serves to promote comprehension and understanding. In other words, the participants seem to follow some principles like the following: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged"(Grice, 1989:26). This principle is famous as the Cooperative

Principle, abbreviated as CP. To be more specific, there are four maxims under this general principle:

- (1)The maxim of quantity
- (2)The maxim of quality
- (3)The maxim of relation.
- (4) The maxim of manner

Grice uses his principles and maxims to make the important claim that the speaker tries to meet certain standards in communication, and the hearer uses these standards in deriving what the speaker intends to communicate. So people have to speak sincerely, relevantly, clearly and to provide sufficient information. But he does not claim that these maxims cover all the conversational assumptions, which may need the other principles. For example, polite behavior. The maxims also may inferences that go beyond the literal content of the utterances.

The implicature of B's utterance is that the dog has eaten the steak. Speaker A can only manage to recognize this implicature by making inferences based on the context of conversation. This inference is the so-called conversational implicature. So from this example, people can see the maxims produce implicature that goes beyond the literal content of the utterances.

(1) Observing the Maxims. Grice says that speakers intend to be cooperative when they talk. In this case the addresser is observing the maxims in a fairly direct way, he may nevertheless rely on the addressee to make his inferences on the assumption that the addresser is following the maxims of conversation (Levinson, 1983:104). This means the addressees and the addressers assume that both of them follow the conversational maxims. The addressee expresses the addresser's statement on the basis of the CP. One way of being cooperative is to give as much information as is expected of a speaker. For example,

For arthritis pain, choose what doctors have recommended millions of times. (Advil)

Obviously, the meaning of this advertisement is not given directly. However, in order to infer the implied meaning of this ad, the reader must assume that the advertiser is observing the

conversational maxims. According to the maxim of relation, whenever something is said, there must have been some related reasons for saying it; otherwise the utterances will not make any more sense. Thus the reader will have to get the implied meaning by thinking about the relation between “Advil” and the former sentence.

(2) Non-observance of the Maxims. People do not always observe these maxims under all conditions all the time though the Cooperative Principle is shared by most of the people in their daily communication. People may violate these maxims in actual communication, sometimes even deliberately. For example, the speaker wants to mislead the hearer, that is, to lie, or the speaker does not possess the adequate amount of information he is expected to provide, or the speaker simply does not want to go on with the conversation. But such violations do not generate any implicature in conversation, thus are of no significance in the study of conversational implicature. Only when a maxim is “flouted” to use Grice’s term, does “conversational implicature” occur. Flouting a maxim means violating it blatantly, i.e. Both the speaker and the hearer are aware of the violation. When we flout a maxim, our language becomes indirect. The following four conversation exchanges illustrate the violation of the four maxims and the resultant implicatures respectively:

A: When is Ann’s farewell party?

B: Sometimes next week.

This is said when it is known to both A and B that B knows exactly when Ann is going to give her farewell party. Thus B is withholding some of the information required at this stage of conversation and is thus flouting the maxim of quantity. The implicature that results is “I do not want to tell you when the party is going to be held.”

Conversational Implicature. The term “implicature” is used by Grice to explain what a speaker can suggest, imply, or mean, as distinguished from what the speaker literally says. A conversational implicature is something which is implied in conversation, that is, something which is left implicit in the real usage of the language. The reason that why pragmatics are interested in this phenomenon is that it seems to be dealing with a regularity that cannot be captured in a simple syntactic or semantic rule, but has to be explained in other ways. As Bilmes has expressed, “In everyday talk, we often convey propositions that are not explicit in our utterances but are merely implied by them. Sometimes we are able to draw such inferences only by referring what has been explicitly said to some conversational principle. In certain cases, we are dealing with ‘conversational implicature’ (Jack Bilmes, 1986:34-37).” Implicature gives us an explanation why it is possible to express more than what is actually said by little words.

Case Analysis: Implicatures of the English Advertisements

Observing the Conversational Maxims. Grice points out the implicature can be generated by observing the maxims. When the addresser is observing the maxims directly, he may expect the addressee to make his inferences on the assumption that the addresser is following the maxims of conversation. (Levinson, 1983:104) This means both the addresser and the addressee assume that they are following the conversational maxims. The addressee interprets the addresser’s statement and makes inferences in order to preserve the assumption of cooperation.

Example : Unlike me, my Rolex never needs a rest. (Rolex)

By attaching the two seemingly unrelated concepts “me” and “Rolex” together, advertiser wants the readers to know that he obeys the relation maxim, and the readers also try to explain the advertisement according to the same maxim. So the implicated meaning of this advertisement is such a product has great quality, and it can keep working for a long time.

It has been concluded that the relation maxim is observed in creating implicatures in ads. As we know, almost all the utterances in daily communications can be taken as interrelated. So, advertisers always take advantage of relationships with products to create advertisements. Of course, by observing other maxims, it is also probable to generate conversational implicature. However, there is a tendency that advertisers make full use of conversational implicature by flouting the maxims of

the CP. According to Grice, conversational implicatures will occur by flouting the maxims of the CP. Implicatures are more persuasive than plain expressions, especially in ads.

Flouting the Cooperative Principle in Advertising. From the previous section, the implicatures that arise from observing the maxims of CP have been discussed. However, like daily communication, there are also many occasions that advertisers fail to observe the maxims in the advertisements: flouting a maxim, violating a maxim, opting out of a maxim, infringing a maxim, and suspending a maxim. According to Grice, the speaker may flout a maxim by blatantly failing to understand it, without any intention of deceiving or misleading, but because the speaker wishes to prompt the hearer to find a meaning which is not the literal meaning.

(1) Flouting the Maxims of Quantity. According to Grice, when a speaker blatantly gives more or less information than the situation needs, then he flouts the maxims of quantity. In advertising, if the advertiser leaves out some information, he must do it intentionally. It can make people memorize easily and achieve the promotion effects. If the ads are brief and short. So most of the slogans or headlines are succinct. Obviously this flouts the maxims of Quantity that needs to make required information (Jenny Thomas, 1983:108). For example:

Example : More people choose a dog over other pet.

More people choose blue over other color.

More people choose ice cream over other treat.

More people choose cotton over other fabric.

More people choose football over other televised sport.

More people choose the Accord over other car. (Accord)

This is an advertisement for the Accord car. It uses the technique of parallelism. At the beginning, the first five sentences seem no use to the aim of advertising Accord car, but after thinking it over, one will find that they are all the indispensable part of human life liking the transportation exhibited by the Accord car. The advertisement indicates that just like those favorite choices in human's basic life, the Accord Car is also the favorite choice in transportation. The use of parallelism also has a good effect. It gives prominence to the degree of the Accord cars' popularity and gains more persuasiveness than simple and direct stating.

(2) Flouting the Maxims of Quality. Advertising, flouted the maxims of Quality, occurs when a speaker blatantly speaker something untrue or something he does not have enough evidence. According to Grice, there are several rhetoric devices which typically give rise to the flouting of the maxim of Quality, including irony, metaphor, hyperbole, personification and so on. This kind of flouting is very common in newspaper, magazine, etc.

Example : The most spacious the world has ever seen,

The new business class. (Singapore Airline)

More exclusive than you could ever imagine,

The new first class. (Singapore Airline)

By using hyperbole, the advertisements above claim "the most spacious" and "more exclusive" in promoting the comfortable environment and superior service during the flight. These ads lack enough evidences to prove if the environment the ads advertise is true. So these ads flout the maxim of Quality. However at the same time, it can attract people's attention and give them deep impression to remember this ad by using hyperbole. By emphasizing the extremely space and the beautiful environment to the customer, the Singapore Airline leaves good impression deeply to customers and make them remember it. At the same time the ads also express that they not only can meet customers basic needs but also meet the respect the customers want.

(3) Flouting the Maxims of Manner. According to the Cooperative Principle, the maxim of manner demands that one's contribution should be brief and orderly. A good advertisement must have great inducement and exert special social effect. In the case of advertising, the advertiser sometimes flouts this maxim when he says something obscure or ambiguous, something not brief or something in unusual order. Therefore, advertisers flout the maxim in order to enhance the charm of their commodity and arouse consumers' interest and desire of purchasing. Meanwhile, it attracts people's attention to think more about the advertisement and then at this time they achieve their

purpose . The following section will examine how the special effects are achieved by flouting the maxim of Manner.

Example : You will go nuts for the nuts you get in Nux. (Nux)

“Nux” is a brand name. The pronunciation of “Nux” is similar to “nuts”. While the first “nuts” is an adjective, it means very crazy and extremely enthusiastic. The second “nuts” is a noun and it means The firm shelled fruit of some trees and bushes. These three words being put together not only produce rhyme, but also express the implicature that Nux nuts are so delicious that customer will become extremely enthusiastic about them. By using puns, the advertisers can implicitly achieve their aims.

Conclusion

Having reviewed many previous works about english ads, this thesis focuses on the Cooperative Principle and advertising implicatures and explores how consumers interpret advertisements at the same time. Based on the CP and its maxims of Quality, Quantity, Relation and Manner proposed by Grice, The author analyze of the advertisements. Cooperative Principle explains how this happens by introducing the concept of conversational implicature. Two sorts of implicatures has been made: conventional implicature of advertisements and. Our discussion mainly focuses on the conversational implicature of advertisements. From the examples of the advertisement, we can see the advertisers do not always willing to express their persuasive force by the literal meanings of language. They try to use implicit words to attract audience’s interest and influence them to buy their product. So from the analysis, we can see because of the using of implicatures, some ads became totally attractive. From this thesis, we can know that the creative ads leave people deep impression, though flouting one or more than one maxim. Direct ads are poor in creativeness thus weak in attracting attention and persuasive power. That’s why advertisers willing to use a more subtle way to deliver their message.

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