

A Contrastive Analysis of Interpersonal Function of Public Service Advertising in English and Chinese

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This paper adopts Halliday's systemic functional grammar as the theoretical framework to make a contrastive analysis of the interpersonal meaning of Environmental Protection Public Service Advertising from the perspective of mood and modality. It is found that there are both similarities and differences in the realization of interpersonal meaning in the discourse of both English and Chinese environmental protection public service advertising. In terms of mood, both tend to use declarative, imperative, interrogative mood, among which the declarative mood is the most frequently used, while the imperative mood is the second. In the aspect of modality, the use of modal words in English environmental protection advertising language is more abundant, and it is customary to use modal words with low emotional value to realize interpersonal meaning, while Chinese advertisements prefer more modality words with high emotional value.

Keywords: public service advertising, systemic-functional grammar, interpersonal meaning

Introduction

Compared with the western developed countries, China is later than other countries in environmental protection public service, but it developed rapidly. In recent years, many scholars have shifted their perspectives to concern foreign studies, hoping to provide useful references for China's environmental protection public service advertising by learning the mature experiences and models of public service advertising in developed countries. However, there are few researches on the interpersonal meaning of environmental protection advertising language based on the systemic functional grammar, and fewer on the contrastive analysis of interpersonal meaning in English and Chinese (Zhu & Yan, 2000). Therefore, it is of theoretical and practical significance to make a contrastive study of interpersonal meaning in English and Chinese public service advertising from the perspective of systemic functional grammar.

System functional grammar holds that language is the product of social activities and plays a variety of functions in the process of use. According to Halliday (2000), language is mainly used to express three basic meta-functions, namely, ideational function, interpersonal function, and textual function. Among them, interpersonal function means that people communicate with others in language and use language to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships, in the hope of influencing the attitudes and behaviors of others, also to express views on the world, and even change the world. Language is composed of systems, and functions of language are realized by different systems. Interpersonal function is realized by two systems: mood

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system and modality system.

Mood system consists of two parts: subject and finite element. The subject can be served by a noun, or by any noun-specific word, a phrase, or even a clause. A finite element is an auxiliary verb that expresses tense or modality. For example, "The boy has lost the wallet". "The boy" is the subject while "has" is finite element. Mood system is mainly divided into: declarative mood, interrogative mood (general question and special question), and imperative mood.

Modality system is another important component of interpersonal function. Halliday (2000) divides the modal system into two parts: modality and intention, in which modality is the possibility and frequent judgment of the speaker to a certain discourse proposition while the intention is the speaker's judgment on the obligations and intentions covered by a certain discourse proposition.

Literature Review

In recent years, many scholars have made great achievements in the relevant studies on public service advertisement from different perspectives. For example, Weinberger and Spotts (1989) make an analysis on the differences of contents of television advertisements in England and America from a cross-cultural perspective. They discover that the level of contents in American television advertisements is higher than that in England in terms of information. Cook (1992) makes emphasis on the multi-modality of advertisements especially on its context. He also discusses the participants in advertising communication, which includes the stances of both the senders and the observers of the advertisements and their corresponding judgments. Huang (2001) has used systemic functional grammar to analyze different types of advertising discourses and studied verbal contents of English and Chinese public service advertisements from the perspective of emotional appeal, ethical appeal, and rational appeal. What's more, other scholars have taken environmental protection as the topic of their theses and conducted some specialized studies. For example, Zhu (2003) tries to make an analysis of interpersonal meaning in English public service advertisements from the perspective of systemic functional grammar. She makes a conclusion that both advertisers of English and Chinese public service advertisements use various lexico-grammatical patterns skillfully to establish interpersonal relationship with readers.

As was reviewed above, though there are various studies concerning discourses including advertising discourse, there are still few researches on interpersonal meaning of environmental protection public service advertising from the perspective of systemic functional grammar.

A Contrastive Analysis of Interpersonal Meanings of Public Service Advertising

Interpersonal meaning can be realized through two systems of mood and modality. In this section we analyze how interpersonal meaning is achieved through mood and modality in English and Chinese public service advertising based on a few typical examples.

Mood and Interpersonal Meaning

Mood has two basic functions: to give and obtain. "As we know, mood is a kind of language used to express emotions, and mood function is realized by mood words" (Wang, 1985, p. 150-155). The exchanged "goods" can be divided into two categories: intangible information, goods and services. They form four main interpersonal functions: providing, declaring, command, and question. In English, these four speech functions are realized by four moods, namely, declarative mood, exclamatory mood, imperative mood, and interrogative mood. But in specific communication, "a function can be implemented by different moods or by several

different tones together” (Zhu, 2003, p. 101-105). The tone of statement illustrates the facts and provides information to the audience, as well as questions and commands. For example:

(1) 地球只有一个，失去它，我们将无家可归。

Diqiu zhi you yige, shi qu ta, women jiang wu jia ke gui.

There is only one earth. Without it, we will be homeless.

(2) Water is scarce, potable water, even more so.

(3) With increasing populations, the pressure on securing and providing clean drinking water becomes tougher and tougher.

(4) And no region or country is immune to that.

As in Example (1), the Chinese language of environmental protection public service advertising contains a statement saying that protecting the environment is actually protecting our own oasis, which is for our own sake. The advertisers don't order people to do things for others, but tell people to do something for their own interests, i.e. environmental protection, which invisibly calls on people to take actions.

In Examples (2), (3), and (4), the English environmental protection public service advertisements consist of three sentences which are declarative, indicating that all of our actions will produce great effect on the environment where we live. Everyone needs to make a little dedication to making a healthy life. Therefore, the declarative mood does not directly command the public to do anything by explaining the contents of the specific sentences. But it expresses requirements and commands indirectly, which fully embody the communicative function of language.

Imperative mood is a mandatory tone to tell the public what to do, what not to do more directly, which remains communication of strict orders and requirements. For example:

(5) 别让人类成为最孤单的生命！

Bie rang renlei chengwei zui gu dan de shengming!

Don't let mankind be the loneliest life!

(6) Don't buy animal souvenirs.

In Examples (5) and (6), both advertisements use imperatives, which express mandatory commands to protect the animals. From these examples we can see that whether it is the Chinese language or the English language of environmental protection public service advertisement, both may prefer the imperative mood to express the request and the command (Su, 2001). Most of these advertisements are issued by the government, and inevitably reflect the authoritative tone of the government.

But sometimes you need to use “please”, “OK”, and “let's” to weaken the harsh tone, making the advertisers and the audiences closer, thus building up the interpersonal relationship between the two parties. For example:

(7) 请为动物保留温暖的家。

Qing wei dongwu baoliu wen nuan de jia.

Please keep a warm home for the animals.

(8) Please hide your song in your heart for our wall is not as strong as you imagine.

In the above two Examples (7) and (8), “please” is employed to soften the imperative mood and make it more acceptable to the public. In advertising discourses, questions are not just used to raise questions, nor are the advertisers seeking answers from the public. Instead, through raising questions, the audience will

think of answers by themselves so that the public and the advertisers reach an interaction. In this way, people could have the awareness to regulate their own actions, so as to realize interpersonal function. For example:

(9) 人体的70%是水, 你污染的水迟早会污染你自己, 把纯净的水留给下一代吧。

Renti de 70% shi shui, ni wuran de shui chizao hui wuran ni ziji, ba chunjingde shui liugei xiayidai ba.

70% of the human body is water, sooner or later your polluted water will pollute yourself, leave the pure water to the next generation.

(10) How can people survive if all trees are fallen down?

(11) Washed your face with the tap running?

(12) Shaved as the water flowed?

As we can see from the Chinese Example (9), and English Instances (10), (11), and (12), the advertisers are not really asking what will happen to the future of the planet, or how human beings will survive without trees on the earth. Such questions are employed to make people aware of the serious current crisis and take firm measures to save water, and protect trees. Through such special mood of interrogatives, the interpersonal function of language is better realized by reflections.

Modality and Interpersonal Function

Modality is the measure and uncertainty of the language user's own understanding of things. In English, modality is realized by auxiliary or modal verbs and modal adjuncts, adverbs, adjectives, etc. In Chinese, modal meaning is realized by willing verbs and auxiliary verbs, modal adjunct, comment adjunct, and emotive nouns, real verbs, and adjectives, etc. The three parts of speech with a low value such as nouns, adjectives, adverbs, etc. can realize modality, but they are hardly found in big corpora. Modality is mainly realized by using modal verbs and modal adjuncts, which are called modality words. In English advertisements, words with low modal value appear frequently, for example:

(13) But about the fact that we can be so irresponsible as to actually cause a day to come when sweat would be the only thing left to drink.

As you can see, in Example (13), the use of the word "would" enables the statement to be more easily accepted. That is to say, if we are "irresponsible" for water as what we are doing now, in the future all humans can drink is sweat, and once they pay attention to the habit of using water, there is no need to observe World Water Day. The right use of a modal word with low value makes the warning more objective, accurate. It is easier to gain the trust of the readers, thus achieving better persuasion of them to pay attention to the problem of water. Another example:

(14) That's what you would think, wouldn't you?

In Example (14), the use of the word "would" illustrates that the author is not fully responsible for what is being said, avoiding direct criticism of the readers because not having a sense of responsibility may lead to water problem and lacking in economy consciousness of protecting environment, thus being acceptable to the readers. The advertiser is merely stating his point of view, and the reader can completely ignore and disagree with it. By doing so, it is easier to gain the trust of the audience. There are also other modality words as shown in the following example:

(15) But we know that you could get the point.

(16) We might have a long way to go in making even a small change in daily habits.

In Example (15) and (16), modal words “could” and “might” are used to show that the advertisers believe in the ability of the public to solve water problems, which can also play a role in persuasion.

Sometimes under other circumstances, the advertisers are highly committed to the contents, and it is necessary to use some modality words with high values in advertising, which can improve the emotional appeal of such advertisements. For example:

(17) 保护水资源，人人有责。

Baohu shui zi yuan, ren ren you ze.

It is the responsibility of everyone to protect water resources.

(18) Ignoring global warming won't make it go away.

(19) Garbage can be reused. Nature cannot.

It can be found from the three above Instances (17), (18), and (19), “everyone”, “won't”, and “cannot” are employed to make the contents stated in advertising more objective and credible and easier for the public to accept. Meanwhile, people could be aware of the importance of water conservation, global warming, and garbage recycling.

The use of the modal words “won't”, “cannot” with high modal value makes the public undoubtedly believe that protecting environment is absolutely important. These high-modal words immediately make the public realize that the protection of the natural environment is of the utmost importance.

In addition to low value modal expressions, the advertisers may also prefer a small amount of high-value modality words to achieve interpersonal function. Most of the high value modal verbs in Chinese advertising are about obligation while some high value modal verbs in English advertising are concerning the ability.

The use of the high value modal word “*yinggai*” (should) in Chinese, “should” in English shows that the public must make efforts to protect the earth on which we live, and at the same time make the public aware of the urgency of protecting the environment. For example,

(20) 动物是人类的朋友，我们应该保护它。

Dongwu shi renlei de pengyou, women yinggai baohu ta.

Animals are friends of mankind. We should protect them.

(21) You should reduce the use of private car to protect their living space.

In Example (20), the preceding subject is “we”, and “should” is a high value modal word, such two words are used together. The advertisers regard themselves as members of the public, demonstrate a high degree of public responsibility, and make a commitment: we should protect animals. In Example (21), the sentence has the subject “you”, which means anyone of the readers, emphasizing the universal responsibility of the whole society. The high value modal word “should” is also employed to stress the importance of reducing air pollution by not using private cars. By using these two words together, a strong sense of obligation is evoked. By evoking the public awareness of protecting our environment, interpersonal function is realized between the two parties. For instance:

(22) Maybe this is no longer a planet worth living.

As we can see from the Example (22), “maybe” is a modal adjunct with low value and it is used to show probability. And it is also used to express the advertiser's idea with less certainty, whether our planet remains worth living or not depends on what we will do next. The application of low value modal words can lower the absoluteness of his meaning. So, the public can not only hear the note of warning from the message, but also be

easily aware of severity of the pollution on our planet. Through the analysis, we can also find that the use of median modality words in English advertising is much more than that in Chinese. “Systemic functional grammar is the most effective way to analyze discourses” (Cook, 1992, p. 101-105). “In addition, either providing response or confronting response to questions and statements in headlines can contribute to the total effect of advertisement through the exploration of the headline of the example” (Huang, 2001, p. 58-69).

For example,

(23) We cannot create, but so lucky, we can cherish and protect it.

In Example (23), the modal word “cannot” is a finite modal operator and a good instance of the realization of probability with high value. In such a way, it increases the truth of the meaning conveyed by the advertiser, making the public realize the dreadfulness of the fact. However, it is followed by a lucky thing, that is though we cannot create our planet yet we still have the chance to cherish and protect it. This contrast becomes more obvious after knowing the cruel fact of not being able to create the earth. Through this contrast, a strong desire to protect our planet is evoked immediately from the public. This is how interpersonal function is realized in this advertising.

Conclusion

From the above analyses, it is concluded that the realization of interpersonal function of environmental protection public service advertising in English and Chinese has similarities and differences in the connection of mood and modality. Both of them tend to use statements, imperatives, and interrogatives to achieve their interpersonal functions (Leech, 1966). However, the two languages differ in preference of modal words with different values in realizing interpersonal function. The English language in environmental protection public service advertisements is better at using richer modal words than the Chinese language in the same kind of discourse to realize interpersonal function. “The Chinese language in environmental protection advertising is more inclined to use high value modal words, while English environmental protection advertising language uses low value modality words” (Myers, 2005, p. 87-95). The persuasiveness of environmental protection public service advertisements depends, to a great extent, on the application of mood and modality systems. Proper choice of each of the two systems determines the degree of success of the realization of interpersonal function in advertising. The systematic functional grammar makes a reasonable and full explanation for the realization of interpersonal meaning in environmental protection advertisements in English and Chinese. This study is practically helpful to the development of environmental protection advertisements in China. Moreover, it has certain enlightenment and guidance for linguistic studies in terms of function.

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