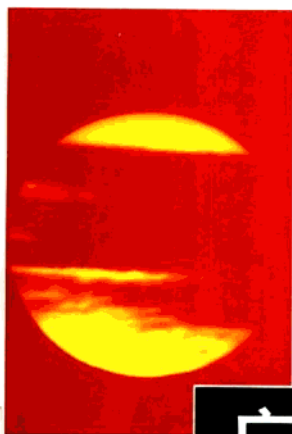


Advertising Language and Messages



范亚刚 著

广告语言与讯息

军事谊文出版社

Foreword

Dr. Fan Yagang has chosen for his academic work a topic that would seem to be of special importance at this point in China's history. As China develops its economy and as Chinese advertisers learn how to market their products effectively, there is an urgent need for the theoretical study of the language of advertising.

As shown in the bibliography, this is a field of study which in the West has a history of more than thirty years but, as the author says, "in China (it) is still in its infancy". As a further point, he says, "advertising in China has not gained its academic status". It is high time that linguists in China applied their theoretical insights not only to academic subjects such as literature but also to the world of commerce outside academic walls.

To this Western reader, the topic was intrinsically interesting as a comparison of Chinese and Western cultures and values. Dr. Fan Yagang has read widely in order to prepare for this book, including in advertising and marketing, linguistics, communication, semiotics and culture. Based on his study, he has developed the "C+A" Model of Advertising Language ("C" = central messages and "A" = additional messages). He points out that "little work has been done on providing an overall

framework for advertising analysis" because many previous studies "are just limited to a certain disciplinary perspective". He therefore offers his original "C+A" model "as the starting point and guiding principle to investigate how the messages (in advertising) are realized in linguistic forms and how they are interpreted by consumers".

Chapter I is mainly a literature review and in Chapter II the "C+A" Model is proposed. Chapters III, IV and V are the main body of the book, in which the author discusses the three main avenues of his research: a message study, a linguistic realization study and a message comprehension study. This reader was particularly interested in the message study in which there was a content study of Chinese and American print ads, the results showing that there is a common existence of "C+A" in all the ads but a variation of quantity in different cultures. In the message comprehension study a questionnaire was given to Chinese and Western students, the results revealing that people from different cultures comprehend not only "A" differently but also "C". The author states that his model can remind us to balance "C"+"A" in advertising analysis. Dr. Fan Yagang has used both qualitative and quantitative approaches in his research that would seem to validate his arguments. His questionnaire is well designed. His database — print ads — seems to be adequate for the purposes of this research. Such a solid factual basis has produced an excellent foundation for the development of advertising studies in China.

The book is written in an appropriate academic register and is well presented. As a manifestation of his comprehensive

approach, the bibliography is particularly beneficial in its breadth of academic perspectives and coverage from both Western and Chinese viewpoints.

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June, 2000

Preface

The development of the study of advertising follows three macro-trends: language, language + context, and message + language + context. My project investigates the third macro-trend.

As in previous studies of the advertising industry, advertising, as a special form of communication, has its own particular model in terms of message organization and communicative routine.

Drawing on perspectives from a variety of disciplines such as communication theory, semiotics, functional grammar and pragmatics, this study begins with the formulation of a "C+A" model, which consists of three major elements: "C" is the central, objective message about the product or service being promoted; "A" refers to the additional, evaluative message, which is transformed from "C"; the last element is the persuasive intention loaded in the model.

The "C+A" model is not a message model but an entrance or an approach towards the study of advertising language. It differs from the previous classification of advertising messages in that it identifies primary and secondary messages and forms a sharp contrast with the taxonomy of factual and evaluative advertising. It suggests that every ad should be a combination of

"C" and "A," and that whether "C" and "A" are opaque or plain is not important. The key contention of this book is that the advertiser's motivation does not reside in "C" itself, and what s/he strives to do is find various expressions for "A" in "C." In other words, the advertiser's ulterior motive is to foresee and create all kinds of "A," directly and indirectly, from "C."

The "C" + "A" model stems from three main avenues of research in this project: message, linguistic realization and message comprehension studies. In the message study, I have examined the actual creation of "C+A" in Chinese and American print ads (Chinese $n=300$; American $n=300$) by conducting a content analysis with regard to "C" and "A." The results of this study indicate that there is a general trend toward the "C+A" framework in both Chinese and American print advertising even though the mean ratios of "C" to "A" are different between the two groups ads. This study supports the hypothesis that there is a "C+A" model in advertising as well as variations in the quantities of "C" and "A" in respect to the different cultures. In the linguistic realization study, I have analyzed how advertisers try to resolve or blur some contradictions or paradoxes in advertising such as objectivity vs. subjectivity, fact vs. puffery, exposure vs. disguise, amiability vs. indifference and foreground vs. background in an attempt to illustrate how linguistic realizations themselves can yield additional "A" as a persuasive catalyst. The analysis of double grammatical roles and message weight might shed light on the creation of extra "A" by linguistic realizations. A double grammatical role could blur objectivity and subjectivity while message weight could serve as an

important device to convey interpersonal feelings. In the message comprehension study, 416 university students (Chinese $n=206$; Western $n=210$) from different cultures were chosen as subjects to answer a questionnaire with 8 "C"-centered and 4 "A"-centered ad sentences or passages as well as 4 brand names for two kinds of products. The subjects were asked to make extra-literal message expansion and elaboration or connotation preferences from the examples in the questionnaire. The results of this study show that people from different cultures comprehend not only "A" differently but also "C" differently. It seems that the findings warn against the idea that linguistic realizations of "C" are universally accepted in the same way and thus can be neglected in intercultural ad writing or translation. The results also reveal that the connotations or associative meaning of brand names might determine brand preference in a certain way.

In brief, the "C+A" model is not a hard-and-fast rule but a means of understanding the treatment of advertising language in the field of advertising. It can remind us not to give priority only to "A" but to balance "C" and "A" in ad analysis as well as ad writing.

Acknowledgements

First of all, I must thank Professor Hu Zhuanglin, my supervisor, for his academic guidance and personal support through every phase of this study. In the past years, he did his best to help me in all the ways he could for my academic research. His unceasing encouragement and breadth of experience were invaluable. It was his acute and insightful thoughts that guided me to make the best efforts at every turn and prompted me to seek new angles of research. If I remain unenlightened, the fault is entirely mine. Moreover, what he has done for me is far beyond his duty as a supervisor. He often helped me on a personal level.

Secondly, I should express my heartfelt thanks to the foreign expert Professor Betty Barr, my earliest teacher of linguistics at Shanghai International Studies University for her useful comments on this book. She was scrupulous about every detail of the book and provided me with many useful ideas and opinions from the angle of a Westerner when she found some intercultural issues in the book.

In addition, I would thank Professor Liu Runqing, whose course on linguistic research methodology guided me to the field of quantitative research in this project indirectly. His words which gave me a deep impression are that "the explanation of

certain linguistic phenomena needs quantitative research because the results of quantitative study represent a probability and are thus convincing". Thanks are also due to Professor Wang Fengxin, Professor Liu Yiqing and Professor Jiang Wangqi, who directly or indirectly indicated to me the orientations of this project on certain occasions.

I wish to thank the following people for their helpful suggestions and comments. In the first place, Dr. Gao Yihong, my teacher of sociolinguistics, deserves a special mention. She read the draft of the book and gave me many evaluations and useful suggestions, most of which were accepted as the basis of its revisions. My thanks to Mr. Bryan Pate, Mrs. Jennifer Pate, Dr. Qian Jun and my fellow doctoral candidates Tian Guisen, Fan Wenfang and other participants in the Linguistic Circle of the English Department, Peking University, who brought in examples and made suggestions for the project.

Thanks also to Mr. Ruan Guihai, an expert in statistics at the Department of Sociology in Peking University, and to Mr. Fang Xiangzhong, a Ph. D. candidate at the Department of Probability & Statistics of Peking University and to Gong Yuxuan, Chen Yi, postgraduates of the Psychology Department of Peking University for their assistance in the statistics of the content analysis study. I am grateful to Ms Zhang Hua at Peking University, Mr. Peng Rui and Ms. Sun Xinxin at Beijing Language & Culture University and Ms Han Dong at Beijing Foreign Studies University for their help in distributing the questionnaires to subjects for this research.

Furthermore, I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to some

people whom I have never met but whose books and papers have long been my friends. I often argued and dialogued with them day and night. Theoretically, I owe my debt to such linguists as Geoffrey Leech, Dwight Bolinger, Micheal L. Geis, Torben Vestergaard, Kim Schrøder, Guy Cook and Greg Myers as well as such non-linguists as Roland Barthes, Gillian Dyer, Robert Goldman and Judith Williamson. Thanks also to Alan Wolfe, Editor of International Journal of Advertising, who sent me articles on advertising language.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, my brother, my sisters and my close friends for their emotional support and encouragement during the course of my doing this project.

I started this project just 8 days after our lovely daughter was born. My wife, Wu Daihong, has shouldered almost all the household chores during the past years. And though the road was long and bumpy at times, she stayed the course all the way. No person deserves as much thanks and appreciation as she does for the sacrifices.

In spite of owing an enormous debt of gratitude to the several individuals mentioned above, the remaining faults in the book are entirely mine and, of course, I take full responsibility for the form of this presentation.

Fan Yagang
Tsinghua University, Beijing
May, 2000

Contents

Foreword	(III)
Preface	(VI)
Acknowledgements	(IX)
Chapter 1 Introduction	(1)
1.1 General Purpose of this Study	(3)
1.2 What Is Advertising?	(5)
1.2.1 Definition of Advertising	(7)
1.2.2 Definition of Advertising Language	(9)
1.2.3 Classification of Advertising	(11)
1.2.4 The Fundamental Structure of Print Advertising	(11)
1.2.5 Functions of Advertising	(12)
1.3 Advertising Language: Previous Studies and Evaluations	(13)
1.3.1 Some Linguistic Approaches	(13)
1.3.2 Some Semiotic Approaches	(22)
1.3.3 Some Communication Approaches	(29)
1.4 Focus of the Present study	(32)
1.5 Reasons for Studying the Form and Content of Advertising Language as a Whole	(34)
1.6 Methodology of this Study and Data Collection	

.....	(36)
Chapter II A "C+A" Model	(38)
2.1 The Link between Communication and Advertising Language Study	(38)
2.2 A Basic Model of the Communication Process	(39)
2.3 The Highlight: Message	(41)
2.3.1 The Definition of Message	(41)
2.3.2 The Role of Message in Advertising	(43)
2.3.3 Two Groups of Messages	(52)
2.3.4 Selected Research Findings on the Two Groups of Messages	(55)
2.3.5 The Problems Posed	(59)
2.4 The Solution: A "C+A" Model	(64)
2.4.1 The Importance of "C"	(71)
2.4.2 The Necessities of "A"	(72)
2.4.3 The Balance of "C" and "A"	(75)
2.5 The Purpose of Advancing the "C+A" Model	(83)
2.6 Several Hypotheses	(86)
2.7 Summary	(90)
Chapter III Message Study	(92)
3.1 Introduction	(92)
3.2 Literature Review on Message Study	(93)
3.3 Purpose of this Study	(100)
3.4 Criteria for this study	(102)

3. 4. 1	Criteria for message classification of "C" and "A"	(102)
3. 4. 2	Linguistic criteria for the judgement of indirect realizations	(110)
3. 5	Methodology	(123)
3. 5. 1	Ads Analyzed	(123)
3. 5. 2	Coding and Sampling	(124)
3. 6	Results	(126)
3. 7	Discussion and Conclusion	(126)
Chapter IV	Linguistic Realization Study	(139)
4. 1	Introduction	(139)
4. 2	Objectives of this Study	(140)
4. 3	Double Grammatical Role; A Pilot Study of Advertising Slogans	(142)
4. 3. 1	Nominalization	(154)
4. 3. 2	Adjectivalization	(163)
4. 3. 3	Verbalization	(170)
4. 3. 4	Adverbialization	(171)
4. 3. 5	Afterthoughts on Nominalization, Adjectivalization, Verbalization and Adjectivalization	(173)
4. 4	Message Weight	(176)
4. 4. 1	Two Cases Concerning Message Weight	(177)
4. 4. 2	Definition of Focus, Message Weight and New Message	(180)
4. 4. 3	An Empirical Comparative Study on Message Weight and Persuasion	(190)
4. 4. 4	Summary of Message Weight Study	(202)

4.5	In-depth Case Study	(205)
4.6	Conclusion; Linguistic Realizations Themselves Create "A" or Produce Pseudo "C"	(213)
Chapter V	Message Comprehension Study	(216)
5.1	Introduction	(216)
5.1.1	Perspectives on Language Comprehension	(216)
5.1.2	Advertising Comprehension Research	(218)
5.2	An Advertising Verbal Message Comprehension Model for "C+A"	(227)
5.3	Purpose of the Study	(231)
5.4	Research Method	(233)
5.4.1	Subjects	(233)
5.4.2	Materials	(234)
5.4.3	Design and Procedure	(235)
5.5	Results	(236)
5.5.1	"C" and "A" Message Comprehension Study	(237)
5.5.2	Brand Name Processing Study	(259)
5.5.2.1	What's in a Name?	(259)
5.5.2.2	Findings and Analysis	(266)
5.6	Summary and Discussion	(268)
Chapter VI	General Discussion	(273)
6.1	Introduction	(273)
6.2	Sociosemiotic Rationale of the "C+A" Model	(273)
6.3	A Metaphor of the "C+A" Model: The Sun plus Sunlight	(283)

6. 4	Major Findings of this Project	(285)
6. 4. 1	General Trend of "C+A" Framework with Variation in Quantity in "C" and "A"	(292)
6. 4. 2	The Creation of Extra "A" by Linguistic Realizations	(297)
6. 4. 3	The Invisible "A" Surrounding "C"	(300)
6. 5	Concluding Remarks on Advertising Language Study	(301)
6. 5. 1	Limitations of this Project	(302)
6. 5. 2	Implications of this Study	(303)
	Bibliography	(306)
	Appendix A	(328)
	Appendix B	(329)
	Index	(336)

Chapter I Introduction

With the further development of reform and opening to the outside world, a unified and open socialist market economy is taking shape progressively in China. The growing importance of China's economic activity to the world economy is becoming more evident daily. Advertising, as a fundamental ingredient of a market economy and the free enterprise system, is showing its exuberant vitality and its propaganda power. It will go deep into many aspects of our lives and influence the speed of economic development and everyone living and working in our society.

In recent years the advertisements that we have all been exposed to, no matter whether in Chinese or in foreign languages, have aroused great interest from different fields such as sociology, psychology, economics, aesthetics and linguistics as a subject for scholarly research. However, the depth and scope of the research on them lag far behind the situations of economic construction and reform. Moreover, advertising in China has not gained its academic status. Among the researches on advertising, the study of advertising language is scarce and superficial. Many articles and works on it tend to do rhetorical analysis rather than probe into it from the angles of linguistics and communication (Cao, 1992; 1994). As a matter of fact, the use of language in advertising has its own model and patterns,

which have more regard for persuasive effects and communicative functions than the rhetorical devices themselves. All linguistic realizations serve the messages conveyed.

As a phenomenon of the market economy we look at advertising as something new but in developed capitalist countries it is rather mature. The systematic study of it in the West has a history of more than thirty years. In contrast, the study of it in China is still in its infancy. Now it is urgent for us to have a systematic study of it with theories guiding our research, but where shall we start? Do we need the experience of the studies on advertising language in capitalist countries? In my opinion, it is necessary to have a thorough study of their findings on advertising in order to know where they are and where we shall go and then try to find the areas which are not thoroughly explored and do some comparative analysis and further explorations. This study is guided by these dominant ideas. It is based on the theoretical ground of their findings and concentrates on the areas which the previous studies have not explored completely, that is, the relationship between what is said in ads, how it is expressed and how people comprehend it.

Then what can advertisers do with the ad and what can consumers get from it during the advertising communication? These questions touch its form as well as its content. Many studies on advertising language either focus on its form or on its content, but few studies examine it as a combination of the two. This study joins messages and linguistic forms and functions as a whole, regarding advertising language as the vehicle of messages loaded with persuasive intentions. It also sees advertising