

## Study of Apple Advertisement: The Critical Pragmatics View

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## Abstract

Apple is successful in the smartphone market, and the advertisement is an important factor in its success. In this study, the author is going to make a study from the critical pragmatic view to analyze the pragmatic identity that is presupposed in its 2020 Special Event. Through the analysis, three pragmatic identities are implied in its advertisement. They are environmentalist, movie professionals, and trendsetters. The aim of this paper is to help consumers to avoid the presupposition trap in the advertisement.

**Keywords:** Advertisement; Critical pragmatics; Identity presupposition.

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, advertising slogans are everywhere, and advertisement has become an effective marketing strategy to promote goods. No matter where you are and what you do, you will find the commercial advertisement. Customers' desire to buy is largely affected by advertising. The more ads there are about the product, the more impressive the product is and the more likely customers are to buy it. However, everything has two sides. The advertisement can give huge information to the consumers and help consumers to select the product they need. At the same time, advertisement can also deceive the consumers by using some language strategies. This kind of conflict is inevitable, because the merchants always want to seek the higher profits, but the consumer are more likely to purchase the product at a suitable price.

Apple is known for its innovation in the technology, such as the exquisitely designed IOS operating system, MacBook, iMac desktop computer and iPad. Recent years, the Apple's product sales and profits have greatly surpassed other brands. There is no doubt, Apple's success can be attributed to its unceasing innovation and high quality, however, their ingenious advertisement is also a huge factor that promotes the product of Apple incorporation.

The study on the advertisement is diversified. It includes social, linguistic, psychological and other fields. And the research on advertisement from linguistic perspective is also popular. In this paper, the advertisement from Apple incorporation will be analyzed under the critical pragmatic framework which is proposed by Chen Xinren. As a new merging field, the critical pragmatics aims to explore the values, prejudices power and others under the social context. And presupposition is an important phenomenon in the pragmatics since people realize it. Besides, pragmatic presupposition, as an important phenomenon in the advertisement is frequently employed in promoting the goods. This paper aims to analyze the pragmatic presupposition in the commercial advertisement in the Apple incorporation.

## 2. Literature Review

As the previous chapter mentioned, the studies on the advertisement are diversified and prosperous. There are many studies on the advertisement language from various fields. However, in this paper, the studies from linguistic angle will be focused.

### 2.1. Previous Linguistic Studies on Advertisement

*English in Advertising: A Linguistic Study of Advertising in Great Britain* is a book written by Leech (1966), and in this book Leech studied the advertisement from the stylistic view which includes phonology, words and syntax. Analyze the advertisements from the perspective of sociolinguistics in their book *The language of Advertising*. Their studies went beyond the superficial structure and explored the hidden social factor in the advertisements. Zhou (1998) talked about the language rhetoric devices in English AD, including the vagueness usage and fraud in the advertisement. Huang (2001) viewed the advertisement as a kind of text and analyzed it by

using the systemic functional grammar. Fan (2006) considered the implicature in the Ads through the Cooperative Principle. Zeng (2004) used Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle to interpret how the merchant to promote the goods.

## 2.2. Previous Pragmatic Presupposition Studies on Advertisement

The presupposition has a long development in the history. There are different schools of presupposition, including philosophy, semantics and pragmatics. In pragmatic view, Sellars is the first to notice the presupposition. He made a classical example which stated that the king of France is bald to show that if speakers and hearers admit the statement, they admit that there is a king in France. Vesterguard and Schroder (1985), argued that the use of pragmatic presupposition is unavoidable for the seller always want to show a good image. Chen (1998) did research on the pragmatic presupposition in Chinese advertisements from social linguistics and made a classical classification on the pragmatic presupposition on advertisement: factual presupposition, belief supposition, state presupposition and behavior presupposition. Zhao (2008) gave research that the vague expressions violating the Cooperative Principle in the advertisement could make them more attractive to achieve the selling goal. Because the vague expressions can lead to different understanding of the advertising, the consumers can be misled.

In summary, many people have studied the pragmatic presupposition in the advertisements, however, many studies of presupposition in the commercial advertisement ignores the critical pragmatics. Chen Xinren is the first people who study the pragmatic presupposition in advertisement in China. Compared with his research, this paper will give some new classification on the pragmatic presupposition on the Apple's advertisement.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

In the previous chapter, the author discusses the former studies on the commercial advertisement. And in this part, the more detailed analysis process will be presented, including the subcategories and the features of the presupposition in the advertisement of Apple Incorporation.

### 3.1. The Theory of Pragmatic Presupposition

Compared with the semantic presupposition, the pragmatic presupposition focuses the pragmatic features including the language use, context, belief and knowledge of hearer and listener. Stalnaker (1973), argued that presupposition essentially is a pragmatic phenomenon. It is part of the set of assumptions made by participants in a conversation. Sperber and Wilson (1986), argued that presupposition is not an independent phenomenon but one of a series of effects is produced when the speaker employs syntactic structure and intention to show the hearer how the current sentence fits into the previous background.

From the different criteria, scholars give different classification of pragmatic presupposition. Yule (1996), divided pragmatic presupposition into six parts. They are existential, factive, non-factive, lexical, structural and counterfactual. In China, Chen (1998) divided it into four categories: factual presupposition, belief presupposition, state presupposition, and behavior presupposition.

Based on the previous classification, the pragmatic presupposition can be classified into these categories by some modification: factual presupposition, belief presupposition, state presupposition, behavior presupposition and identity presupposition.

The factual presupposition is to state the fact by using the language. It is an effective way to change people's attitudes toward something. It can be triggered by some particular words, such as try, again, know. For example, if someone said John cried again. It means that John had cried before. Besides, these so-called facts cannot be proved to be true or false at once, so the use of it advertisement is quite common. The belief presupposition refers to the presupposition on the customer's belief towards the life and world. The merchants will try their best to alter the customer's belief which has shaped customer's value, life and world in order that the customer's will be willing to buy their product. The state presupposition is to presuppose the customer's state of feeling or emotion. There are two different kinds of state presupposition. One presupposes that the awful conditions before buying their products, and the other indicates the ideal state that is brought by their product. The behavior presupposition is to presuppose the customer's behavior that they had before or they will have in the future. To be more specific, there are three kinds of behavior presupposition. The first kind is to presuppose the customer's past behavior and the merchant use this type to tell customer the past is uncomfortable. So the second one will presuppose the potential needs for customers, and the third type will promise that in the future the needs will be satisfied by the products. The last one is identity presupposition. And this type is to presuppose the user's or customer's identity in order to reinforce the certain incorporation's group identity. And the implementation approach of this type is to construct the user's identity byusing the previous four categories.

### 3.2. The Critical Pragmatic Theory

The Frankfurt and Neo-Frankfurt proposed and developed the critical social theory. Since then, many researchers have begun to pay attention to the critical view which relates social factor with language. Fairclough (1989), published his book Language and Power, and the critical discourse analysis came out. And the critical pragmatics has the similar background. At home, Chen (2007) argued that critical pragmatic is a new way to study the pragmatic phenomenon in the public discourse. And the object of critical pragmatic analysis can be positive or negative. And Chen (2013) also proposed a framework on critical pragmatics. There are four main steps. The first step is to find and observe the sensitive discourse. Second, the contextual factors in the sensitive discourse can be

investigated through the analysis of contents, linguistic characteristics and implications. The third step is to give criticism and comment on these implicit ideology or intentions. The last step is to provide some suggestion based on the criticism and comment.

## 4. Research Design

In this chapter, the author will introduce the research questions, data collection and data analysis.

### 4.1. Research Questions

As the advertisement has become indispensable in our daily life, the merchant will try their best to use them to attract the consumers. So, in this paper the author will mainly focus on these questions

1. What identity are constructed through the Apple incorporation by pragmatic identity presupposition?
2. How dose Apple realize pragmatic identity in its advertisement?

### 4.2 Data Collection

Nowadays, the internet is the main information media in people's life. In this paper the author collects the data from a mainstream video platform Bilibili. And the selected data is the advertisement for its product in Apple 2020 10 Special Event. The Apple Special Event is an online virtual event which aims to introduce and release new products. Because form is a video without subtitles, so its analysis is based on the transcription. The URL of the video is <https://www.bilibili.com/video/BV1Zf4y1F7iS>.

### 4.3. Data Analysis

After collecting the data, the author will analyze these data from the critical pragmatic view to explore the identity constructed by the Apple advertisement. And the analysis framework will be guided by the Chen's theories.

## 5. Analysis and Discussion

### 5.1. The Identity of Environmentalist

In 2020, with the publishing of iPhone 12, Apple incorporation claimed that they will cancel the charging adapters which were given with the smartphone before. This behavior was criticized by many consumers and netizen; however, the sale of iPhone 12 is still booming.

In the 2020 Apple Special Event, a woman stood on the roof one Apple Park said "Every Apple device sold from material collection, component manufacture, assembly, transport, customer use, charging all the way through recycling and material recovery will be 100% carbon neutral." Through this expression, a factual presupposition will be constructed that Apple is an incorporation who cares for the environmental protection. And then she said "Customers already have over 700 million lightening headphones. And many customers have moved to wireless experience with Air pod Beats, and other wireless headphones. And there are also over 2 billion Apple power adapters out in the world. So we are moving these items from Apple boxes." This is a kind of behavior presupposition. She presupposed that up to now, there are thousands of old devices in the Apple consumers. Looking back to the previous sentences, since Apple is an Environmental-Friendly incorporation, there is no need to provides these "already have" devices. In a word, these sentences have rationalized the removing of some items from Apple box in the name of environment protection. "Taking all together the changes we make for iPhone 12 cut over 2 million metric tons of carbon emission annually" This is also a behavior presupposition which tell the consumer that by removing the 'unnecessary' item will make great contributions to the environment. Besides, it also presupposes the consumers' identity, if you buy the new iPhone, you will do contribute to the good environment. Step by step, the cancellation of adapters and other items become a commendable behavior instead of a ungenerous action.

### 5.2. The Identity of Movie Professionals

Apple has invited some famous directors to shoot micro movies to improve their reputation in the before. At in this Special Event, it also wants to construct a identity of movie professionals.

"Year after year, iPhone provides the highest quality of video on the smartphones. Pros use iPhones to shoot TV shows, news report even movies. This's never been more important as our home have become our studio" a middle-aged man who looks like a scholar said. This is also a factual presupposition indicated that many movie professionals are using iPhones to shoot various videos. What's more, he even showed some examples to reinforce the authenticity. He invited a photographer to tell a story. "When I started shooting movies, you have to tent expensive camera, buy film, and pay for the developing, special equipment for editing. Now you can really go out with one of these devices and make the movie. The iPhone Pro will allow film makers all around the world to make films." This is a typical state presupposition that shows the difficulties many movie photographers had met in the life, and then tell the consumers or audience that these difficulties will be solved by the new iPhone. In addition, he continued "I think the next great film photographer or the next great film director is already making films with these devices (iPhones)." This is a belief supposition which want to indoctrinate customers the idea that professional movie photographer has begun to use iPhones to shoot instead of the expensive equipment. As a user, if you use the new iPhones, you can also become an expert in movie shooting. It is so tempting. Through these steps, the consumer's professionals identity are presupposed.

### 5.3. The Identity of Trendsetters

“Ever since it launched, iPhone 11 has become the most popular smartphones in the world. People love their iPhones. Every year, the iPhone’s user satisfaction ranks first in the industry” Tim Cook, the Apple incorporation CEO said proudly at the conference. This factual presupposition is to show that the iPhone is the trend of smart phones, even; it is the leader of smartphone. “The A13 Bionic is still the fastest chip on smartphones. That’s until now. A14 Bionic the fastest chip ever in the smartphone. First smartphone chip built on 5 nm process technology” “Later this year, one of the best games all the time is going to iPhone. Most popular, most played and most viewed game in the world--League of Legend”. These two factual presuppositions showed that Apple not only has the best hardware (chip), but also has the most popular games. This attracts the consumer’s interests, because if you buy the Apple, you can tell the others what you use is the best smartphone in the world, besides you can play the most popular games like other people do. All in all, if you use the new iPhone, you are the pioneers in the smartphones users.

### 5.4. Critical Pragmatic Views on Apple Advertisement

Through the analysis of Apple advertisement in this chapter, we can find that by cleverly using the pragmatic presupposition to presuppose the consumer’s identity. And the presupposition identities comply with the need of consumer’s psychological needs. That is an important reason for the success of Apple incorporation. However, from the critical pragmatic view, the merchant use these to satisfy the consumer’s psychological needs in order to mislead and control the consumer’s ideology. This is worth vigilance. As consumer, we should be aware that the presupposition identity may not be true all the time. For example, the removing of power adapter is really good for the environment? In fact, if you use the old adapter the charging time will be much longer; however, if you want to experience the fast charging, you must buy a new one. It is absurd to say it can reduce the carbon emission because the new one must spend extra package and transport. In addition, if iPhone can really replace the professional camera, why there are still many camera incorporations like Sony, Canon and Leica? Besides, not everyone has the need to shoot a “highest quality” short video through smartphones. But, through the false presupposition in advertisement, these become “true”. As for the “most popular smart phone”, it is also not so convincing. According to the research survey in 2021, the global market share of Apple in 2020 is the second 15%, which is a little lower than Samsung. In short, as customer, we should have a critical thinking on these ads.

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper, the author studies the construction of presupposition identity in the advertisement of Apple 2020 Special Event. The author explores what are these identities and how they are constructed by using the critical pragmatic framework proposed by the Chen Xinren, and find that there are three identities in the Apple 2020 Special Event and they are constructed through the factual, state, belief and behavior presupposition. The Apple incorporation presupposes their customers with the environmentalist, movie professionals, and trendsetters. These presuppositions satisfy customers’ psychological needs and promote their product implicitly.

However, as consumer, we should be aware that sometimes merchant’s presupposition is a kind of trap or fabrication. There is no need to pay for the product with unnecessary even fabricated functions.

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