

Pragmatic Presuppositions in Chinese Skin-Whitening Advertisements

Wang Min

Department of English Language and Communication, Faculty of Social Sciences and Liberal arts, UCSI University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Mansour Amini*

Department of English Language and Communication, Faculty of Social Sciences and Liberal arts, UCSI University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Abstract

Advertisements are used as a tool to build the communication bridge between producers and consumers, utilising cultural values and traditions. Applying presuppositions in advertisements helps to convey a message in a short and memorable way. While several pragmatic studies explored English advertisements and pragmatic presuppositions and triggers have been studied in countries like U.S.A, Malaysia, and Indonesia, no study addressed the presuppositions and triggers in skin-whitening advertisements in China. Thus, this study employed a mixed method, quantitative and qualitative designs, to investigate the pragmatic presuppositions and pragmatic presupposition triggers, and to identify the advertisers' preference of pragmatic presupposition(s) and trigger(s) in the advertisements. The corpus was 34 print skin-whitening advertisements from Ray Li magazine, published in China from January to December 2017. After data collection, the advertisements were translated by an official translation agency in China. Yule's (1996) six types of pragmatic presuppositions and Valeika and Verikaite's (2010) ten types of triggers were used as data analysis framework. The findings revealed that all six types of pragmatic presuppositions, and only seven types of triggers were used in the advertisements. 'Factive' pragmatic presupposition, and 'referring phrases' of triggers were the most preferred types. The findings of this study may benefit advertisers to produce more language-effective advertisements in the very competitive Chinese market of women's products. English language instructors and students could use this study to teach/learn about effective persuasive speech strategies in the advertisements. This study could raise awareness among consumers in analyzing the information about products. Future researchers are recommended to conduct similar studies on beauty advertisements in other languages and among other Asian countries, such as Korea and Japan, which have high consumption of beauty products.

Keywords: Pragmatic presuppositions; Skin-whitening advertisements; China; Presupposition triggers.



CC BY: [Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

1. Introduction

Advertisement is an important source to transmit information and to persuade the consumers to purchase a product or service (Ayu, 2010). It is the bridge that connects consumers and sellers, and the descriptions of products or services provide consumers with suggestions and guidance (Xie and Zhang, 2013). Thus, advertisers utilise different strategies to attract consumers by raising their interests through creative advertisements. It was stated that the language of advertisement is of great value to be analysed from the linguistic, and linguists give rise to the analysis of advertising language because of the working process of different languages in advertising (Bhatia, 2014).

One of the strategies used in creating interesting advertisements is using cultural features and elements. Culture, as a group of shared meanings, presented through language to express personal ideas, feelings, and attitudes, is a tool that works as a representational system (Piller, 2003). Cultural and traditional values are presented through respecting the past, customs and conventions, as well as venerating the quality of being historical, time-honored, and legendary in comparison to modern values (Zhang and Shavitt, 2003).

Culture is also reflected in advertisements as they function as economic tools in the society which carry cultural messages. The cultural background of a community affects the information conveyed by public media (Griswold, 2012).

One of the significant values in Chinese culture is having white and fair skin. In fact, having fair skin is desirable in many Asian countries, including China. This phenomenon, particularly among East Asians, could be because of the underlying cultural belief of white superiority. Analyzing Chinese fashion and beauty magazines, Pan (Pan, 2013) studied how globalisation has influenced the East and West hybridisation of whiteness practices, and the way face and body whitening product advertisements align with the local and historical context in East Asia by renegotiation of the common symbols and conventionally signified meanings.

Advertisers in China often use Caucasian models to ratify their products, portraying the darker-skin females in despair and willing to whiten their skin for happiness and contentment (Goon and Craven, 2003).

Advertising is a tool to build a bridge of communication with the target readers and then trigger them to buy products. In advertising industry, the most effective advertisements are those with best expressing values and

traditions of culture. Therefore, advertisers try to make the advertisements consistent with culture of the target consumers (Landa, 2016).

One of the ways to explain the cultural elements in language is through pragmatics. According to Yule (1996) rule (Khaleel, 2010); pragmatics could establish the relationship between human intention and linguistic form. Hence, pragmatics facilitates readers or receivers' understanding of speakers or senders' intentional meanings, assumptions, implied purposes, as well as requests and apologies. Likewise, presupposition can serve for advertisements and be applied to the advertising language as advertisers make indirect propositions through applying presuppositions (Tonhauser, 2015). Pointed that 'advertising messages are often aimed and ambushed towards women telling them to either change or enhance their appearance' (p. 840). Hence, if the problems of females that are visually presented in skin-whitening advertisements are not provoking enough for women to purchase products, therefore, the skin-whitening advertisements are not considered effective.

Moreover, pragmatic presupposition triggers are used in advertisements to reflect the advertisers' imagination/intention of the advertisements (Landa, 2016). Presuppositions triggers are the 'constructions or items that signal the existence of presuppositions (Tonhauser, 2015). There is a gap in literature on the extent to which pragmatic presupposition triggers are used in skin-whitening advertisements in China (SWAC).

Thus, as the purpose of advertisements is to promote selling goods, services, or ideas through sales messages, the linguistic analysis in this study focused on presuppositions in skin-whitening advertisements (SWA).

2. Literature Review

Presupposition and the employment of presupposition in advertising discourse have been explored from several perspectives.

2.1. Advertising and Culture

Advertising reflects cultural values and traditions as a form of social communication. Lam (2009), investigated the functions of pragmatic presupposition in advertising and the ways in which cultural aspects were reflected in advertising by examining how the Kong Kong's culture was reflected in food advertisements. Applying Pollay and Gallagher (1990) relationship between advertising and culture theory, Lam concluded that advertising reflected cultural elements, and understanding of cultural differences was essential in producing a successful advertisement.

Qi (2009), explored pragmatic presupposition and pragmatic presupposition triggers in Chinese TV advertisements slogans by collecting 100 Chinese TV advertisement fragments. The findings showed that pragmatic presuppositions are common in advertising and are used to persuade consumers effectively. It was also concluded that the use of pragmatic presuppositions by advertisers may depend on the mindset and attitude of the consumers.

Using a descriptive qualitative method and Yule's (1996) framework, Analysed types of pragmatic presuppositions in slogan in outdoor advertisements. Only three types of pragmatic presuppositions were found in this study.

Cui (2011) analysed two levels of pragmatic presuppositions and semantic presuppositions to explain why some texts have higher memorability rate in advertisement translation. Two types of strategies were identified as ways to enhance audiences' memorisation of the advertisements.

The findings revealed that all of Yule's (1996); Khaleel (2010) presuppositions appeared in the selected hair-care advertisements. In addition, the researcher recommended investigation and application of pragmatic presuppositions on hair-care advertisements

2.2. Advertising in China

Advertisers often utilize cultural backgrounds in commercial advertising as a reinforcement to link to products and display to the consumers who see the advertisements. In China, cultural traditions are effective in women's purchasing behaviors, as having a white skin has been traditionally regarded as having a higher social status and wealth, mainly because higher class women do not need to work outside (Lam, 2009). Therefore, modern Chinese women are concerned with getting white. Because of Caucasian features used as attractive virtue in Asian countries, most of SWAC often employ darker-skin females to imply that those women are in despair firstly, but later find happiness and contentment after lightening their skin by buying the products claimed to have skin whitening effects, even though in some contexts advertising in the twentieth century has become independent of the culture on which it operates (Landa, 2016).

2.3. Presupposition

Presupposition refers to something that the speaker assumes to be the case prior to making an utterance (Khaleel, 2010) The term presupposition indicates those assumptions which appear to be built into the linguistic structure of texts, and which relate to the linguistic structure to extra-linguistic context in terms of the inferences expected to be made about the context (Levinson, 2013). In other words, presuppositions indicate speakers' intentions or thoughts based on the information the speakers and hearers share in communication. Speakers continuously produce their linguistic messages based on assumptions about what their listener is aware of. 'What a speaker assume is true or is known by the hearer can be described as a presupposition' Khaleel (2010) A presupposition is something the speaker assumes to be the case prior to making an utterance. In the sentences below, C and D are the presuppositions assumed from sentences A and B.

A. *Where is my laptop?*

- B. *I have looked for my laptop, but have not found it yet.*
- C. *Tom's dog is a golden retriever.*
- D. *Tom has a golden retriever.*

Cui (2011), explains presupposition as 'what is taken for granted about the target context and the information conveyed yet not asserted' in a context. There are two levels of presupposition in in Cui (2011) research; the first level is 'assumption about how the target audience may expect or receive'; the second level is the claims that are implied in the context 'which are expected to guide consumers to make certain inferences'. However, Blakemore (Valeika and Verikaite's, 2010) mentions there are more than truth conditions in sentences.

2.3.1. Types of Pragmatic Presuppositions

With the development of pragmatics, scholars studied advertising language from a pragmatic perspective Yule (Khaleel, 2010) stated that speakers' beliefs, attitudes, intentions with sensitivity are included in pragmatic presuppositions. He divided pragmatic presupposition into six types; existential, factive, non-factive, lexical, structural and counter-factual.

2.3.2. Pragmatic Presupposition triggers

Pragmatic reasoning or sensitivity with context, i.e. presupposition triggers. Presuppositions 'seem to be tied to particular words – or aspects of surface structure in general as presupposition triggers (Levinson, 2013). Laimutis Valeika and Daiva Verkaite Valeika and Verikaite's (2010) described presupposition triggers as the certain linguistic structures used by the speaker that 'set off or activate the presuppositions in producing a sentence'. They proposed that presupposition triggers help the addressee understand a particular meaning of the sentence, and the understanding of that meaning develops into the process of communication. Valeika and Verikaite's (2010) categorised pragmatic presupposition triggers into ten types: referring phrases, factive verbs, non-factive verbs, phasal verbs, expression of repetition, expressions of temporal relations, cleft clauses, comparative structures, counterfactual conditions and questions Referring phrases relate to existential presupposition, the definite phrase triggers the existence of entities in an utterance. For instance, '*The Queen of England is very popular*', the definite phrase '*The Queen of England*' triggers the existential presupposition '*There is a Queen of England*'. Factive verbs presuppose facts. For instance, '*John realised that he was in debt*', the verb '*realised*' presupposes the fact that '*John is in debt*'. Some other factive verbs and verb phrases may include '*know*', '*be aware*', '*regret*', '*be odd*', '*be sorry*', '*be proud*', '*be indifferent*', '*be sad*', '*be happy*', etc. Non-factive verbs presuppose non-facts and the triggers are subjunctive mood forms. For instance, '*I dreamed that I was a millionaire*', the verb '*dreamed*' presupposes '*I am not a millionaire*'. Such non-factive verbs also include '*imagine*', '*pretend*', '*think*', etc. Phasal verbs express different phases of the process of propositions: the beginning, continuation and discontinuation. For instance, '*She continued to work*', the verb '*continued*' triggers the presupposition '*She had been working before*'. Expression of repetition is usually expressed by the verbs and adverbial phrases, such as '*return*', '*restore*', '*repeat*', '*another time*', '*once more*', '*any more*', etc. For instance, '*He returned to power*', the verb '*returned*' triggers the presupposition '*He held the power before*'; '*You cannot get it any more*', the adverbial phrase '*any more*' triggers the presupposition '*You once could get it*'. Expressions of temporal relations presuppose the addressee's particular behavior triggered by conjunctions, such as '*when*', '*while*', '*after*', '*before*', '*during*', '*since*', etc. For instance, '*While Mary was cooking an evening meal, John, her husband, was watching TV*', the conjunction '*while*' triggers the presupposition '*Mary was cooking an evening meal*'. Cleft clauses are when clauses with copula are preceded by '*it*' and followed by a noun phrase and a relative clause. For instance, '*It was Henry who won the lottery*', this clause triggers the presupposition '*Someone won the lottery*', which in the surface of this cleft clause structure is actualised as '*(It was) Henry who won the lottery*'. Comparative structures presuppose the addressee's fact by comparing with one another. For instance, '*Jane is a better cook than Ann*', which triggers the presupposition '*Ann is a cook*'. Counter-factual conditions presuppose implied proposition counters to the assumption of an utterance. For instance, '*If he were rich he would find a wife*', which triggers the presupposition '*He is not rich*'. Questions are a type of pragmatic presuppositions which presuppose certain fact of the addressee through wh- question that the speaker does not clear at present. For instance, '*When did you go there?*', which triggers the presupposition '*You went there at some time in the past*' (Valeika and Verikaite's, 2010).

3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed method, with the qualitative being the main design of the study. Creswell and Creswell (2017), suggested that the use of mixed method is to broaden understanding by incorporating both qualitative and quantitative research or to use one approach to better understand, explain or build on the results from the other approach. The analysis of classifications of pragmatic presupposition and pragmatic presupposition triggers is processed based on the target corpus, reporting the frequency of the pragmatic presuppositions and pragmatic presupposition triggers.

3.1. Data Collection

Skin-whitening product advertisements are easy to be seen everywhere, especially on female magazines. However, the data in this study consists of thirty-four skin-whitening product advertisements from twenty-seven brands collected between January 2017 to December 2017 from the Chinese female fashion magazine of Ray Li

Ray Li, founded in 1995 in Beijing, is published monthly in China. The magazine was chosen for the purpose of this study because it is known as a ‘popular women magazine with a large-scale circulation’ and is becoming one of the most influential fashionable media company in China (Ayu, 2010). Catering to affluent urban women from their twenties to thirties and serving the audiences especially from middle to upper class women.

Only the slogans of each brand advertisements were selected because slogans is a recognition tool which consist of a concise phrase that depicts the features or advantages of a product in advertising strategies, and consumers usually prefer to look at the slogans when they take a glance at the advertisements.

As the scope of this study was only skin-whitening products, other skin-care products, such as anti-aging and acne-treatment product advertisements were not analysed. In addition, considering the limitation of access to the magazine, and the researchers’ geographical distance from China, the electronic versions of the magazine were purchased. All the skin-whitening advertisements in Ray Li were then sorted and printed for analysis. The original slogans in simplified Chinese language were sent to a professional and official translation company; YIJIALIN, a member of Translation Association of China (TAC) to ensure a high validity of the content to be analysed. Basically, there were three procedures in the analysis; first identifying the types of pragmatic presupposition of each skin-whitening advertisement, and then identifying the pragmatic presupposition triggers used in the collected slogans. The third procedure consisted of exploring the advertisers’ preferences in using the types of pragmatic presupposition(s) and pragmatic presupposition trigger(s) in SWAC and interpreting how such choices impact the consumers’ perceptions.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Types of Pragmatic Presuppositions in Skin-whitening Advertisements

All skin-whitening advertisements in this study were identified and categorised according to Yule’s (1996) (Khaleel, 2010) six classifications of pragmatic presuppositions: existential, factive, non-factive, lexical, structural, and counter-factual pragmatic presuppositions.

There were four existential pragmatic presuppositions in CHANDO, INNOAGE, DERMINA and Avène advertisements. fifteen factive pragmatic presuppositions in 古草堂(Gu Caotang), Sisley, KIEHL’S, Banila, IOPE, LA MER, CPB, CHANDO, LANEIGE, CLINIQUE, VICHY, SKINFOOD and L’OCCITANE advertisements, two non-factive pragmatic presuppositions in CPB and Mamonde advertisements, eight lexical pragmatic presuppositions in Aga, su:m 37 °, CHANEL, Dior, SHISEIDO, YSL, OLAY, SOFINA advertisements, four structural pragmatic presuppositions in SHISEIDO, CHANEL, DR. WU and OLAY advertisements, and one counter-factual pragmatic presupposition in ISEUL advertisement. Thus, the frequency of each type of pragmatic presuppositions were as follows in Figure 1.

Figure-1. Frequency of the Types of Pragmatic Presuppositions in Skin whitening Advertisement

<u>Pragmatic Presuppositions</u>	<u>Numbers</u>	<u>Numbers of Total Slogans</u>	<u>Percentages of Frequencies (Round-to-even)</u>
Existential Pragmatic Presupposition	4	34	12%
Factive Pragmatic Presupposition	15	34	44%
Non-factive Pragmatic Presupposition	2	34	6%
Lexical Pragmatic Presupposition	8	34	24%
Structural Pragmatic Presupposition	4	34	12%
Counter-factual Pragmatic Presupposition		34	3%

4.2. Types of Pragmatic Presupposition Triggers in Skin-whitening Advertisements

Pragmatic presupposition triggers were analysed according to Valeika and Verikaite’s (2010) classification; referring phrases, factive verbs, phasal verbs, expression of temporal relations, cleft clauses, comparative structures, and counter-factual conditions. Seven types of pragmatic presupposition triggers were identified in skin-whitening advertisements slogans. Fourteen referring phrases of pragmatic presupposition triggers were found in CHANDO, KIEHL’S, Banila, IOPE, LANEIGE, Dior, CPB, ISEL, VICHY, DERMINA, SKINFOOD, Avène and SOFINA advertisements, five factive verbs from 古草堂(Gu Caotang), Sisley, CLINIQUE, LANEIGE and Mamonde advertisements, two phasal verbs in Aga and su:m 37 ° advertisements, two expression of temporal relations in

SHISEIDO and CHANEL advertisements, nine cleft clauses in LA MER, CPB, CHANEL, INNOAGE, DR. WU, SHISEIDO, YSL and OLAY advertisements, and only one comparative structure from OLAY advertisement. There was one counter-factual condition in L'OCCITANE advertisement as shown in Figure 2

Figure-2. Frequencies of the type of pragmatic Presuppositions Triggers in Skin whitening Advertisements

<u>Pragmatic Presupposition Triggers</u>	<u>Numbers</u>	<u>Numbers of Total Slogans</u>	<u>Percentages of Frequencies (Round-to-even)</u>
Referring Phrases	14	34	41%
Factive Verbs	5	34	15%
Phasal Verbs	2	34	6%
Expression of Temporal Relations	2	34	6%
Cleft Clauses	9	34	27%
Comparative Structures	1	34	3%
Counter-factual Conditions	1	34	3%

4.3. Summary of Findings

Yule's (1996), six categories of pragmatic presuppositions were all used by the advertisers in Chinese skin-whitening advertisements. However, only seven types of pragmatic presupposition triggers were identified based on the analysis of the slogans according to Valeika and Verikaite's (2010) ten categories of pragmatic presupposition triggers. Thus, two main findings can be summarised as follows.

Pragmatic presuppositions are extensively used in skin-whitening advertisements. Factive presuppositions was the most common in skin-whitening advertisements (44%), followed by lexical presuppositions (24%), existential and structural presuppositions (each 12%), Non-factive (6%), and counter-factual pragmatic presuppositions (3%).

Pragmatic presupposition triggers were mostly used in collected skin-whitening advertisements' slogans, and only three types were not used by the advertisers. There were totally seven types of pragmatic presupposition triggers in the slogans. The most frequently used type was referring phrases (41%) followed by cleft clauses (27%), factive verbs (15%), phasal verbs and expression of temporal relations (each 6%), comparative structures and counter-factual conditions (each 3%).

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study from the analysis of Chinese skin-whitening advertisements are entirely aligned with Yule's (1996) classifications of pragmatic presuppositions. However, based on Valeika and Verikaite's (2010) typology, only referring phrases, cleft clauses, factive verbs, phasal verbs, expression of temporal relations, comparative structures and counter-factual conditions pragmatic presupposition triggers were identified.

Factive presupposition was the most frequently used type of pragmatic presupposition, as the advertisers utilised the common knowledge of skin whitening effect, or the scientific statement of white skin to convince the consumers to purchase the products. Counter-factual pragmatic presupposition was the least used type of pragmatic presuppositions as it was utilised to state the contrary conditions of the skin that consumers may not want to face and let them feel threatened or forced to purchase the products. All collected skin-whitening advertisements' slogans used pragmatic presuppositions, while 15 slogans used factive presuppositions. Only one slogan used counter-factual presupposition.

The findings of this study did not support the previous studies in that the 'state presupposition' are the most frequent presupposition in Chinese print advertisements

The findings of research question two are in line with (Blakemore, 2002; Qi, 2009) in that triggers are crucial in the realisation of presuppositions and are easy to attract consumers' attention by a striking feeling. Based on the findings, referring phrases were the most frequently used type of presupposition triggers, utilised to catch the advertisement readers' attention. However, comparative structures and counter-factual conditions were the least used types of presupposition triggers and they were utilised to state a contrary condition, or a comparative condition that requires consumers to imagine rather than directly striking them. All advertisements used presupposition triggers, while seven out of 10 types of pragmatic presupposition triggers were identified in this study. Fourteen slogans used referring phrases presupposition trigger, whereas only one slogan used comparative structures and counter-factual conditions in each.

This study aimed to explore pragmatic presuppositions in SWAC. In order to find the effects of pragmatic presuppositions in skin-whitening advertisements' slogans, the researcher applied Yule's (Khaleel, 2010) six types

of pragmatic presuppositions and Valeika and Verikaite's (2010) ten types of pragmatic presupposition triggers into the analysis of the data and discussed them. It was found that pragmatic presuppositions are crucial in skin-whitening advertisements. Future researchers could conduct more studies with wider scope and larger data to validate the findings of this study and take a further step in filling in the gap between research and practice in the scope of Chinese skin-whitening advertisements and pragmatic presuppositions

References

- Ayu, S. L. (2010). Meridians fem. *Race, Transnationalism*, 10(2010): 15.
- Bhatia, V. K. (2014). *Analysing genre, Language use in professional settings*. Routledge.
- Blakemore, D. (2002). *Relevance and meaning*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Creswell, J. W. and Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design, Qualitative, Quantitative, And mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.
- Cui, Y. (2011). *Memorability in the translation of advertising texts, Analysis from the perspective of presupposition. Doctoral dissertation*. City University of Hong Kong: Hong Kong, China.
- Goon, P. and Craven, A. (2003). Whose debt? Globalisation and white facing in Asia? *Intersect. Gender, Hist. Cult. Asian Context*, 9(2003): Available: <http://www.she.murdoch.edu.au/intersect/> ?
- Griswold, W. (2012). *Cultures and societies in a changing world*. Sage:
- Khaleel, L. M. (2010). *J. Coll. Educ. Women*, 21(2010): 523.
- Lam, C. K. Y. (2009). LCOM Pap. 2(2009): 45.
- Landa, R. (2016). *Advertising by design, Generating and designing creative ideas across media*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Levinson, S. (2013). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Pan, E. (2013).
- Piller, I. (2003). Advertising as a site of language contact. *Annu. Rev. Appl. Linguist*, 23(2003): 170-83.
- Pollay, R. W. and Gallagher, K. (1990). Advertising and cultural values, Reflections in the distorted mirror. *Int. J. Advert.*, 9(1990): 359-72.
- Qi, Y. (2009). *An analysis of pragmatic presupposition in Chinese tv advertising language. Master dissertation*. Northeast Normal University: Ji Lin, China.
- Tonhauser, J. (2015). Are 'informative presuppositions' presuppositions? *Lang. Linguist. Compass*, 9(2015): 77-101.
- Valeika and Verikaite's (2010). *An introductory course in linguistic pragmatics*. VPU: Vilnius.
- Xie, Q. and Zhang, M. (2013). White or tan? A cross-cultural analysis of skin beauty advertisements between China and the United States. *Asian J. Commun.*, 23(5): 538-54.
- Yule (1996). *The study of language*. Cambridge University Press. 294.
- Yule's (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.
- Zhang, J. and Shavitt, S. (2003). Cultural values in advertisements to the chinese x-generation. *J. Advert.*, 32(1): 21-31.