

# *The Application of Lexical Ambiguity in Advertising English*

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**Abstract:** This paper discusses the connotation and characteristics of lexical ambiguity, and discusses the role of lexical ambiguity in advertising English with relevant cases. It is not only negative, but also brings some “the finishing touch to a painting”. This paper will discuss the application of lexical ambiguity from three aspects: meaning, expression and application meaning.

## 1. Introduction

With the continuous development of the times, the research on lexical ambiguity is gradually deepening. People no longer regard lexical ambiguity as a negative linguistic phenomenon, but try to apply it creatively.

## 2. The Meaning of English Lexical Ambiguity

Lexical ambiguity means that the same expression can have different understanding and analysis. In other words, the meaning of a sentence or a word is ambiguous, and there are two or more interpretations. For example, “These pretty girl’s dresses.” is a typical sentence with ambiguity. Because the speakers don’t know whether they are talking about beautiful little girls or their clothes. When people use similar sentences to communicate, the listener will have different understanding, even misunderstanding or confusion, and will not know the real intention of the speaker. However, all languages have ambiguity. The complex combination of limited phonemes will form a rich and colorful speech stream. Homonyms and homonym phrases must be abundant. A limited number of written symbols can give rise to a variety of meanings and a variety of meanings. These phenomena combine and match together to spell many words. Due to the ambiguity of some sentence structures or the expression of words, it is inevitable to have multiple interpretations and ambiguities in a sentence. Qian Gechuan mentioned in “basic knowledge of translation” that “English is originally an obscure language.” [1] It is precisely because of obscurity that it is easy to derive the possibility of multiple interpretations.

Although ambiguity may bring some troubles to readers or listeners because of its various ways of understanding, it can sometimes play an unexpected effect and achieve a variety of expressions and different rhetorical effects if used properly. It will increase the sense of irony and humor in communication and is often used in advertisements. However, when accurate information must be transmitted (such as government documents, laws and regulations, business letters, scientific papers,

etc.), ambiguity is not allowed. Many linguists have discovered, studied and analyzed this unique linguistic phenomenon. However, most of the studies are limited to summarizing the types of ambiguity and the description of ambiguity phenomenon, and lack of discussion in practical communication and practical education. The following is a detailed discussion on the application of lexical ambiguity in advertising English, which makes up for the lack of current research to a certain extent. [2]

### **3. The Forms of Lexical Ambiguity in Advertising English**

Most of the words or languages in circulation in the world are closely related to English, and advertising is no exception. Therefore, it is of great significance to study the application of lexical ambiguity in advertising English. The application of lexical ambiguity in advertising English has certain linguistic and cultural value.

#### **3.1 Application of Homophones**

Homophones are words with the same pronunciation, but they have different meanings or letters. This way of expressing ambiguity usually appears in telephone advertisements. We take the generalization of Make Your as a classic example to analyze. Every telemarketing is a skillfully designed advertisement, which uses the same or similar pronunciation to attract customers' attention and promote customers' products. One of the food ads is: "I'll bear gem with so many carrot." "I'm a very good muffin. [3] I ate too many carrots. Because carrots and carats have the same pronunciation, carrots are more important than muffins. One ambiguity of the advertisement is: "there are many carats, this is a very good gem." On the one hand, it expresses that carrots are as good as jewelry, with high-quality ingredients and rich nutrition. On the other hand, it also increases the sense of humor of the whole advertisement in this way, which can better attract the attention of the audience and help them quickly remember the content of the advertisement.

#### **3.2 Application of Polysemy**

A word has many meanings, which is a very common phenomenon in English. Even some words may have more than 10 different types of meanings. Relatively speaking, the meaning of professional words is more specific, and there is less ambiguity; while the more common words used in daily life, the more the meaning of words, in many cases there can be a variety of ways of understanding.

We take a bank advertisement as an example. "But it blossom." "our branch is made by British Bank of Lloyd." Two meanings of "branch" are cleverly used here. Its literal meaning is branch, and a further extension or conventional meaning is each branch of the bank. The real meaning of the advertisement is: as long as the money is deposited in Lloyd's Bank. [4] Customers' money will blossom and bear fruit. In other words, the money stored in Lloyd's bank can make customers get a huge return on investment.

#### **3.3 Ambiguity between British English and American English**

In American English and British English, the meaning of the same word may also cause ambiguity. American English and British English use almost the same way, but there are subtle differences in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary. Even the same sentence or word may have ambiguity in different semantic environments. We take the advertisement of a school as an example to analyze. "Welcome to our public school" is the expression in a magazine that included Eaton

School's admissions ads. But in different countries, this “public school” has different meanings. In Britain, the real meaning of a public school is actually a private school, which leads to an ambiguity. Therefore, for Eaton School's enrollment advertisement, the British people understand it as an advertisement allowing students to enter private schools, while the Americans understand it as an advertisement allowing students to enter public schools.

## 4. The Application of Lexical Ambiguity in Advertising English

### 4.1 Interest

In order to increase the audience's interest in advertising itself, and help people quickly remember the content of advertising, to achieve better communication purposes, we can achieve the effect of humor through the appropriate use of ambiguous words in advertising English. We use the famous beverage advertisement as an example to analyze. “Seven days without 7-ups make one weak.” in the advertisement, “weak” and “week” are homophones, while “7 days” is synonymous with “7-ups”. Among them, “7days” just means a week, and “one” can be used as the number of “a week” and the indefinite pronoun of “a person”. Taking a cup of “Heady” every day will bring vitality to consumers for a week; if you don't drink “Heady” every day of the week, you will feel very weak.

### 4.2 Artistry

A good advertisement should have certain artistic beauty as well as certain dissemination and interest. In order to stimulate consumers' desire to buy after reading or listening to advertisements, it is necessary to use words and images reasonably and creatively to convey the most convincing advertising language in the shortest time, so as to achieve the ultimate goal of using advertising English. Positive lexical ambiguity can produce this effect, so it is widely used in advertising.

We use a classic advertisement “We lead others copy.” of RICOH copier as an example. Among them, the word “copy” can be understood as “replication”, can also be understood as “imitation”, and can even be understood as a “copier” for copying various photographic materials. We can translate the advertisement into “we will move on, others will follow”. RICOH copier is more advanced than other copiers. These advertisements are artistic in words, which not only express the meaning of advertisements well, but also leave a certain imagination space for the audience, which is easier to leave a deep impression on people. [5]

### 4.3 Stimulation of Consumption

The ultimate goal of advertising is to stimulate consumer demand and promote products and services. Therefore, good advertising information should have strong temptation to improve the commercial value of products. On the other hand, due to the high cost of advertising, most of the advertising costs are calculated by the number of seconds, so advertisers must repeatedly consider the efficiency of sentences and the impact on consumers when choosing advertising words, so as to maximize the advertising benefits with the minimum cost. This is one of the reasons why advertisers prefer to use ambiguous English words. For example, “More sun and air for your son.” is a travel agency advertising slogans, designed to attract tourists to this consumption for vacation. This advertisement uses two different meanings of homonyms. “Air” means “air/heir”. This can construct subtle concepts and strong appeal. It is easy for potential tourists and consumers to get interested when they hear or see this advertisement.

## 5. Conclusion

Reasonable use of lexical ambiguity in advertising English can bring many unexpected good results. However, excessive pursuit of ambiguity or the use of some inappropriate jokes in lexical ambiguity will cause confusion or disgust of the audience to advertising language, and achieve the opposite advertising effect. Therefore, it is very practical to study the application of lexical ambiguity in advertising English, and can also better guide the rational use of lexical ambiguity.

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