

Chinese Anti-epidemic Slogan: The Relationship with CP and PP and the Influence from Culture

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Abstract: As a common means of political propaganda in China, slogans effectively convey information in a short and eye-catching form. Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2019, slogans have played a major role in alleviating influence of the epidemic. This paper will explore the language characteristics of China's "anti-epidemic slogan" with the theory of Cooperation Principle and Politeness Principle. At the same time, combined with the current situation of Chinese society, it will analyze the "hardcore slogan", a controversial topic, and comprehensively and objectively state why this is necessary. Therefore, it will be able to emphasize the importance of the Chinese traditional core of culture and grass-root culture to language used in propaganda, while helping the outside world to view China's "hardcore slogan" more objectively.

1. Introduction

At the end of 2019, the unexpected outbreak of Corona Virus Disease 2019 made the whole world alarmed and bewildered. With the biggest population, China was faced with the urgent assignment of raising people's awareness of this disease and making sure people's self-protection. To achieve this aim, a large number of anti-epidemic slogans emerged in China, which largely gained people's positive responses and alleviated the serious pandemic. Among them, most slogans revealed China's traditional culture and grass-root culture with specially chosen images. However, some "hardcore slogans", slogans with serious and deterrent words, had become a hot spot on the internet, which aroused a controversy on global social media and provoked some foreign scholars' criticism.

This paper is targeted at analyzing anti-epidemic slogans' abidance and disobedience of Cooperative Principle raised by H.P.Grice and Politeness Principle proposed by Leech. And it proves the necessity of "hardcore slogans" through the analysis of Chinese current social condition. Finally, by examples of the specific images used in slogans, it researches the dominance of Chinese traditional culture-national characteristics of gentleness and refinement- and grass-root culture- Chinese superstition (approving) and customs from the soil- and the harmonious coexistence of both cultures.

With the fulfillment of all above questions, this paper can once again emphasize the importance of traditional Chinese culture and grass-root culture to Chinese people and show the world advantages and exclusive features of Chinese culture for greater international communication capacity. At the same time, it makes a response to scholars' query and negative comments about "hardcore slogans".

2. Review of Literature

Recent publications are mainly concerned about the classification, grammar and social background of anti-epidemic slogans. Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle are two significant linguistic theories, providing reference for later various researches. Based on Politeness Principle, Zhang Yixuan(2020) sorted the pragmatic functions into instruction and warning. Wang Xin(2020.4) relied on Cooperative Principle raised by H.P.Grice to classify slogans' semantic function and divided it into natural meaning and unnatural meaning. They just use both principles directly as the standard of classification. However, some slogans actually violated these so-called principles, which lacks scholars' attention. For classification, different categories are proposed: Ding Yu (2021.3) divided slogans into two big categories of direct speech act and indirect speech act and then subdivided direct speech act into assertion, instruction, commitment, expression and declaration and indirect speech act into regulation and non-regulation. Guo Miao(2020.11) classified them into publicity of policy, educational persuasion and preventative regulation and philosophic stories. So it's trustworthy to say that scholars' researches are quiet abundant from different perspectives and also involve a lot of interdisciplinary knowledge. But none of them analyzed the specific images and objects used in anti-epidemic slogans and matched them with Chinese culture, which means that the core of culture has never been researched. In terms of social condition, Liu (2013) agreed the impact of social condition that "As a microcosm of social public opinion, slogans have corresponding implications, including economic, political, and cultural ones. They also constitute an important part of the social and cultural environment." [1] but he didn't detailedly describe how the society is. Han (2021) takes a pragmatic perspective to analyze the Chinese public's conflicting comments on the "blunt" anti-epidemic slogans, which feature the use of threats of death and disease, insults or negative evaluations, and harsh demands. Meanwhile, Zhou and Zhu (2022) suggest that in the era of the mobile Internet, it is necessary to update the way of grassroots social mobilization and resolve the dilemma of the official discourse. It is also necessary to explore new ways to improve the discourse production and dissemination channels of slogans in social governance. But no scholar pondered why "hardcore slogans" are necessary to some extent.

Based on these abundant researches all above, this paper will discuss the interaction between CP and PP and anti-epidemic slogans, make an objective description of "hardcore slogans" and make up for the lack of research on Chinese culture.

3. Theoretical Concepts

3.1 Slogan

Slogan is a kind of common language in social life, but also a way of political propaganda, which is written in phrases or sentences in a concise and eye-catching way so as to be accepted by the public (Nie and Song 2008). Slogans are generally written in extra-large fonts, made into banners to hang, or painted in large characters directly on both sides of roads and buildings. In the process of modernization and urbanization, the forms of slogans have increased, with new forms of slogans such as electronic slogans coming into being. According to Han (2008), slogans can serve three major functions. First, slogans have the goal-orienting function of guiding members of a society to understand, accept and strive to accomplish tasks designated by the government. Second, slogans have an educating function aimed at helping society members to become high-quality citizens of the country. Third, slogans have the stimulating function of helping society members to vent their emotions and express their will. China has long had a tradition of using slogans for propaganda, appeal and mobilization (Hu 2021). Whether in everyday or risky situations, slogans are prevalent in urban and rural spaces, forming a unique cultural landscape. Slogans have been so deeply integrated in Chinese culture that they are regarded as a crucial unifying force of Chinese society.

3.2 Hardcore slogans

Hardcore (Yinghe) is a recent network buzzword deriving from the English word “hardcore”. This type of slogans was first observed in small towns and villages in Henan, an agricultural province in China, right after the shutdown of Wuhan city. Owing to their effectiveness, the use of these slogans quickly spread to many other places across China.

3.3 Cooperative Principle

The Cooperative Principle describes how people achieve effective communication in everyday situations and aims to explain how and why conversations tend to succeed rather than fail. Grice expanded on his Cooperative Principle with his four Conversational Maxims- the Maxim of Quality, the Maxim of Quantity, the Maxim of Relevance, and the Maxim of Manner. Grice believed that anyone wishing to engage in meaningful communication must follow these four Maxims and assume that others will also be following them.

The Maxim of Quality

- You should only say things you believe to be true.
- You shouldn't say things that you can't back up with evidence.

The Maxim of Quantity

- You should make your contribution to the conversation as informative as necessary.
- You should not make your contribution more informative than necessary.

The Maxim of Relevance

- You should only say things that are relevant to the conversation.

The Maxim of Manner

- You should avoid obscurity or ambiguity.
- You should be brief and orderly.
- You should try and be as clear as possible.

3.4 Politeness Principle

To gain knowledge about a topic or to reach a variety of goals, the Politeness Principle, besides the Cooperative Principle, emerged. It covers 6 Maxims.

Tact maxim: minimize cost to other; [maximize benefit to other]

Generosity maxim: minimize benefit to self; [maximize cost to self]

Approbation maxim: minimize dispraise of other; [maximize praise of other]

Modesty maxim: minimize praise of self; [maximize dispraise of self]

Agreement maxim: minimize disagreement between self and other; [maximize agreement between self and other]

Sympathy maxim: minimize antipathy between self and other; [maximize sympathy between self and other]

3.5 Grass-root culture

Fei Xiaotong mentioned “in China, an ancient country in rapid development, tradition and modernity are blending, bronze and carbon fiber are colliding, and the host of moral is also interacting with institutions from afar.”[2] in *From the Soil*. He defined rural society as *Gemeinschaft* (society of ritual and custom), in which relations and conducts between people become customs for familiarity. Under this premise, rural culture covers historical evolution, folk customs, legends, relics of ancient buildings, celebrity biographies, village rules and conventions, family genealogy, traditional skills, ancient trees and many other aspects.

4. Data Collection and Methodology

The linguistic data used in this paper come from two resources: social media and private observation. I will do the qualitative analysis for studying CP and PP' interaction with anti-epidemic slogans and the comprehensive impact of "hardcore slogans". And I will measure the usage of Chinese cultural images in slogans.

5. Data Analysis

5.1 Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle

Cooperative Principle and Politeness Principle are two significant theories used to analyze conversational implicature. They share the same goal of achieving effective communication with anti-epidemic slogans, which means that there is an interactive relation between them. In the framework of both principles, these slogans reveal accordance and violation.

In cooperative principle, the maxim of quantity requires to make your contribution as informative as is required and do not make your contribution more informative than is required. However, it's quiet impossible to appear in reality for its complicity. What's more, there is no standard to define whether slogans are informative enough. For example, "The meals you are eating now are all banquets at Hongmen where treacheries are planned." involves a historical story. It's easy to understand that Hongmen Banquet is unrelated to pandemic prevention and provided unnecessary information, but as a well-known historical allusion, it can not only arouse people's interest but also add cultural factors in slogans. What's more, cooperative principle requires avoiding obscurity for the maxim of manner. Hardcore slogan like "if you risk not wearing masks, you are doomed to death." absolutely has no extra euphemism and explicitly expresses what it hopes to say. By contrast, some slogans that are elegant in style almost have no overlap with pandemic prevention. "Mountains and rivers on foreign land, wind and moon under the same sky" and "Though separated by a mountain, we'll share the same clouds and rain. The bright moon belongs not to a single town. Would literally not remind people of the pandemic, but what matters is the spirit of getting through difficulties together by helping each other. So not only following cooperative principle can achieve cooperation, cultural factors, shared emotion and spirit behind it can strengthen transmission capacity.

For politeness principle, it seems that anti-epidemic slogans are literally against all criteria in it, but actually they still share the same goal with the principle. Slogans like "If you visit people at home this year, they will be buried in graves next year." has no emphasis on "merits" of tact, generosity or sympathy, but they are quiet practical and concrete. "The results show that, although slogans cannot convey the latest information, they can make the public aware of the severity of the epidemic. Urban residents were found to give lower evaluations to slogans, although they acknowledged that slogans had the effect of rendering an anti-epidemic atmosphere, whereas rural residents were more accepting of rude and threatening slogans and control measures." [3]

5.2 Hardcore slogans

Hardcore means "very powerful", "sturdy", and "very rigid", and hardcore slogans are those blunt anti-epidemic slogans. They have become a buzzword on internet, provoking a wide controversy. Some claimed that "as one post on China's WeChat platform noted today, slogans should be artful enough to have the capacity to 'intimidate, seduce, threaten or coerce'" [4] but they should not be defined as final targets but means to achieve what publishers want to express. For instance, "he is as malicious as a weasel who, despite his infection with the virus, visits his mother-in-law in the Spring Festival" although "threatens" watchers to some extent, humorously reveals residents' banter with son-in-law because this is a must-to-do for many young men for showing reliability and filial affection. It implicitly says that no matter how important your visitors are, it's needed to avoid getting together.

Another scholar asserted that “it can be understood as seriously face-aggravating to those readers who have not complied with the government's suggestion” [5], which distorts government’s good intention and also the real meaning of face-saving culture in china. Most residents don’t find fault with these slogans by defining them as those who violate guidelines and are aware of the deep intention behind so-called blunt words. What’s more, in accordance with anti-epidemic policies at that time, the existence of these slogans are reasonable response to and enforcement of authority’s instruction. Therefore, “hardcore” slogans have received significantly more positive judgment than negative judgment, especially when they made their debut in rural areas in Henan, an agricultural province in China and it’s needed to notice that “the blunt slogans observed in rural areas differ significantly from other anti-epidemic slogans seen in large cities like Beijing and Guangzhou during the same period, which displayed courtesy and polite suggestions regarding preventive measures.”[9] China's rural residents maintain the traditional and conservative ideology, and they are hard-working, plain and content. For them, “wedding and funeral” occupies a very important place in life, and varied places have their own traditional customs that everyone follows. At the beginning of the pandemic, they have no idea about what coronavirus is and what’s the meaning of wearing a mask. Those documents of policy and so-called “courtesy” anti-epidemic publicity cannot make people realize the seriousness of the disease and take action to protect themselves, and only those eye-catching, simple slogans that they are familiar with can truly capture their attention. Such a way of publicity is not impolite or face-aggravating but down-to-earth and connective. “Although the incidences and transmission risk in rural areas are not high, once infected, the cluster outbreak is more serious.”[6-8] Rural residents lack the awareness of self-protection and the rural medical health capacity is not strong, and the number of personnel is inadequate. “Politeness, therefore, seems to be the most minor concern in communication in rural villages as long as the meaning is successfully conveyed” and “the fear and horror instilled at the heart of the public by the blunt slogans encouraged the public to follow the required actions that were deemed extremely important by both the government and the majority of the public.”

5.3 Chinese traditional culture and grass-root culture

China has two kinds of representative cultures: traditional culture-elegant with a long history- and grass-root culture-formed from the soil and linked closely with rural residents. This is the source of Chinese national characteristics and covers all aspects of life. Also anti-epidemic slogans can never exist without both cultures.

Based on these two cultures mentioned above, slogans can be divided as follow:

- Slogans with tradition
- Slogans with custom

Old custom

Modern custom (idiomatic expression)

For slogans with tradition, they are more likely to appear in big cities like Shanghai. Urban residents generally obtain an education and have a better understanding about Chinese historic stories and figures. For instance, "Now all the guests are invited to dine at Hongmen Banquet (where treacheries are planned.)". Hongmen Banquet is a typical, well-known and frequently used image appears in junior high school textbook. How can those middle-aged and elderly people who gave up learning in school at a young age dwelling in rural area understand what Hongmen Banquet means.

For slogans with custom, they can be subdivided into old custom and modern custom based on time difference. “Gathering together without masks results in your family’s crying over your death” involves a funeral ceremony that the dead would go back to his hometown after 7 days of death. Those urban young residents who have no exposure to old rural customs barely understand the implication behind it. With the development of internet, countless new hot words and customs emerged and became widely accepted. “Thousands of ways to save life, but wearing masks is prioritized. Without preparation of masks only results in tears for your death.” is adapted from lines

in the movie *The Wandering Earth*. “We have no Leishen mountain, no Huoshen mountain and no Zhong Nanshan (homophonic to mountain in Chinese). What we have is to lift you up to mountain to bury you.” In this slogan, “mountain” (in Chinese) is used for four times and acts as end rhyme for readability. Leishen mountain and Huoshen mountain are names of hospitals established for the pandemic and Zhong Nanshan is a famous and reliable doctor who is active on TV to disseminate anti-epidemic knowledge. In Chinese countryside, dead people are usually buried on the hillside of mountain, which needs cars or labors to lift coffin up to the place chosen, so it is implicitly a metaphor for death. Actually, some words related to death like “touqi” and “taishangshan” are joking without bad intention.

Either slogans with tradition or slogans with custom is equally important and accepted for Chinese people. The choice and usage of them depend on target audience’s habits and familiarity, so the preference of one kind is not discrimination or irony but understanding and catering.

6. Conclusion

All in all, whether anti-epidemic slogans are 100% following the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle does not matter and maintaining superficial courtesy and friendliness is meaningless. Besides these two principles, shared emotions and spirits influence people’s mind and behavior to a great extent. What matters most is to achieve the goal of words and maximize the effectiveness of transmission. Hardcore slogans, although, violate some language standard, they are a practical and concrete practice that is shaped by the specific target audience and the core is in accordance with CP and PP.

“Today, urbanization has become an unstoppable wave of China's development, but the countryside is still an important part of Chinese society. The affection for soil and countryside is a soft part that can never be erased in the hearts of Chinese people, including the nostalgia for the naturally familiar homeland and the identification of that kind of thinking logic, which is sensitive and untouchable.”[2] That is to say, without fully understanding of Chinese culture but relying on some rigid translation can only further distort people’s opinion about China, Chinese culture and Chinese people. These two kinds of cultures- elegant traditional culture and folk grass-root culture- are an unshakable foundation for Chinese culture, so anti-epidemic slogans could not exist solely without them.

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