

An Analysis of Pragmatic Presupposition in E-commerce Live Language

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Abstract: The increasing popularity of e-commerce live streaming has become a key part of the Internet industry, so the study of e-commerce live language is particularly important. As a pragmatic strategy, pragmatic presupposition is widely used in e-commerce live language. The appropriate use of pragmatic presupposition can attract more consumers and achieve sales goals more effectively. In the past, most of the analysis of pragmatic presupposition focused on advertising language, and there was a lack of research on e-commerce live language. This paper aims to analyze the types and functions of pragmatic presupposition in e-commerce live language. It is found that e-commerce live language mainly involves fact, state, belief and identity presupposition. And the use of pragmatic presupposition plays a role in enhancing persuasion, promoting consumer empathy. The research is of great significance for understanding the generation mechanism of pragmatic presupposition in e-commerce live language.

1. Introduction

E-commerce live broadcasting has become an increasingly important way of shopping. Similarly, e-commerce anchors, as an important part of connecting all links in live delivery, are a key factor in achieving sales targets. In order to succeed in doing this, e-commerce anchors not only need to master solid language skills, but also to use good pragmatic strategies to convince consumers to buy the products displayed. Presupposition as a common language phenomenon and pragmatic strategy, because of its own properties, is often used by e-commerce anchors to enhance the persuasive effect of e-commerce live language.

A brief review of relevant studies shows that the current research on the application of pragmatic presupposition mainly focuses on the study of advertising language. Goddard (1998) pointed out that presupposition plays an important role in English advertisements in his book *The Language of Advertising*^[1]. In *Pragmatics* Peccei (2000) indicated the significance of presupposition in advertising^[2]. At home, Chen Xinren (1998) has made great contributions to the study of pragmatic presuppositions in Chinese advertising^[7]. He has analyzed the characteristics and detailed classification of pragmatic presuppositions in the field of advertising. Zhang (2007) described the application of presupposition in advertising, and then analyzed the three functions of presupposition in advertising^[10]. Xiong (2008) discussed the roles of presupposition in advertising based on the basis of Yule's classification of presupposition^[8]. Li (2008) also discussed types of presupposition,

and explained how customers understand presupposition in advertising from the perspective of cognitive pragmatism, that is, relevance theory, which is a result of continuous interaction between speakers and listeners^[9]. Mai (2010) analyzed some characteristics of presupposition in advertising, such as unidirectivity, subjectivity, concealability, etc^[11]. Relatively, there are much fewer studies on the analysis of live broadcast language from the pragmatic perspective, let alone from the perspective of pragmatic presupposition. According to data from CNKI, only Sun (2017) took Taobao as an example to analyze the application of pragmatic presupposition in electricity marketing language and explained the distribution of pragmatic presupposition with specific data^[12].

E-commerce live broadcasting and advertising are essentially ways to persuade customers to buy products. Yet, there is little research on the application of pragmatic presupposition in e-commerce live language. Since e-commerce live broadcasting has gained prosperity and will keep on developing, it is important to analyze the e-commerce live language. Therefore, this article tries to analyze the use of pragmatic presupposition in e-commerce live language and to explore the functions of pragmatic presupposition in e-commerce live language.

2. Theoretical Framework

Keenan (1971) defined an independent and distinct class of pragmatic inferences called pragmatic presupposition, best described as a relation between a speaker and the appropriateness of a sentence in a context^[5]. Karttunen (1973) defined pragmatic presupposition as “to presuppose a sentence in the pragmatic sense is to take its truth for granted and to assume that the audience does the same”^[4]. Yule (2000) held that “A presupposition is something that the speaker assumes to be the case prior to making an utterance”^[6]. He proposed that pragmatic presuppositions were context-sensitive preconditions related to the beliefs, attitudes and intentions of the speaker^[3].

Contributions to the classification of pragmatic presupposition are accessible in previous studies. Researchers such as Chen (1998) and Yule (2000) have made contributions on the classification of presupposition. Chen (1998) has divided pragmatic presupposition into four categories: factive presupposition, belief presupposition, state presupposition, and identity presupposition^[7]. Among them, factive presupposition refers to presupposition with the nature of assertion that gives the listener a sense of fact, whether the statement itself is true or not. Belief presupposition refers to presupposition obeying the listener's belief, stimulating the listener's inner hidden emotions, attracting the listener's attention through the agreement and echo of the listener's belief, or putting forward new ideas to change the listener's belief. State presupposition refers to presupposition of the listener's states that are not ideal in the past or that are ideal after changes. Identity presupposition presupposes the listener's identity.

In this thesis, considering the social psychology related with consumption, the author adopts the classification of Chen (1998) and classifies pragmatic presuppositions into four types: factive presupposition, belief presupposition, identity presupposition and state presupposition^[7].

3. Pragmatic Presuppositions Categories in E-commerce Live Language

This part analyses types of pragmatic presupposition in e-commerce live language.

3.1 Factive Presupposition

Factive presupposition typically presupposes things that can be treated as a fact. It achieves the goal of influencing or changing the audience's attitude or behavior by stating a seeming fact.

Example 1: We know that the aloe content in Xunhui Aloe Gel is about 97%, whose origin is in Hunan and whose monthly sales are more than 100,000.

The factive verb *know* presupposes that the product is very high in aloe gel and that the product sells very well. Facts speak louder than words. A powerful way to change a group's attitude or behavior is to present a fact. The assertion statement here gives an air of truth. Whether or not the presuppositions are true, the assertion is important in context: Just see, the ingredients used are so good and so many people has bought our products, why wouldn't you, also as consumers, buy it?

Example 2: Girls! We have two national patents for this product. The first is the submicron pearl powder technology, which grinds the pearl powder very, very fine, and the second is the pearl polypeptide extraction technology, which separates the whitening ingredients from the pearl.

The two proper nouns presuppose that there exist such two national patents. And the non-restrictive attributive clauses presuppose the so-called techniques have very magical power and functions. By using such pragmatic presuppositions, the anchor highlights the professional technology of the product and sounds very convincing.

From the above examples, we can see that by using factive presuppositions E-commerce anchors focus on the price, technology, sales and other aspects of products, in order to highlight the excellent advantages of the product and to achieve their implicit sales target. Whether the factive presuppositions are true or not, the assertion statement gives the hearers a feeling of truth, which is enough to urge them to buy the products.

3.2 Belief Presupposition

Belief presupposition refers to consumers' belief, concept, emotion and attitude. The belief presupposition in e-commerce live discourse are reflected in the adaptation and change of consumers' beliefs. E-commerce live language can conform to consumers' beliefs, stimulate consumers' innermost hidden emotions, and attract consumers' attention. Through the agreement and echo of consumers' beliefs, e-commerce anchors smoothly transfer belief identification to product identification. On the other hand, e-commerce anchors try to shake people's deeply held beliefs by putting forward new or less heard ideas, thus turning their attention to products.

Example 3: Attention, ladies who love original design. Both my friends and I buy this shirt. It will look good on you. To tell you the truth, Chinese designers are great, and so are clothes designed by them.

Example 4: Men, actually, also need to take care of their skin. As for me, I usually use facial cleanser.

In example 3, the e-commerce anchor presupposes there exist such consumers who like original design and take them as target consumers by conforming to their belief. In the introduction to the clothing, the anchor increases the volume, at the same time slowing down the speed of speech and extending the length of the voice to emphasize the two features that such consumers care most about, namely original design and Chinese designers, which attract the attention of consumers, transfer their attention to original design to the clothing itself. Besides, the anchor enhances the pragmatic intimacy between each other. On the basis of conforming to consumers' beliefs, the anchor recommends products for them, which increases product sales rate. In example 4, the e-commerce anchor presupposes that men usually neglect skin care. The anchor uses the adverb of transition *actually* and the adverb of progression *also*, which emphasize the necessity of men's skin care. Trying to change the traditional concept of consumers that men do not need skin care, the anchor successfully puts forward a kind of new and novel idea which easily attracts consumers' attention.

3.3 State Presupposition

In e-commerce live language, state presupposition usually refers to the act of presupposing some

ideal or unsatisfactory situations, leading the hearers to take action to change their status quo. That is to say, the anchors presuppose less ideal states in past to urge consumers to buy their products or presuppose ideal states in future by using their products.

Example 5: Have you noticed that after 25 the wrinkles on your neck get deeper and deeper?

The factive verb notice presupposes that consumers have wrinkles on their neck and the problem is getting worse after 25. By doing so, the anchor tactfully presupposes a kind of less than ideal circumstance and hints to consumers that they should take action to change. Then, the anchor can smoothly persuade hearers into buying the corresponding product.

Example 6: Do you know its smell? After wearing the sensual perfume, not only yourselves but people around you will feel warm. The smell is very soft and rich fragrant.

The temporal clause presupposes consumers will wear the perfume and the anchor further presupposes the fragrance and efficacy of the perfume. By presupposing such an appealing effect, the anchor calls on people to buy the product.

3.4 Identity Presupposition

Identity presupposition presupposes the listener's identity. Human beings are complex organisms in society, and each serves multiple social roles with multiple identities. The psychological state and psychological needs of consumers under different identities are different. Identity presupposition is to make use of the psychological demands of consumers under different identities. The anchor skillfully uses the identity image described by pragmatic presupposition to meet the psychological needs of consumers, so as to achieve the goal of persuading mass consumers.

Example 7: Why is Mu Senlin always the choice of successful men?

The wh-question structure presupposes a group of successful men successful and that they always wear shoes of this brand. By using such structure, the anchor ably meet some men's hunger for success. It seems that as if you buy the shoes, you can become successful. Thus, the product becomes appealing to some target men.

Example 8: Intellectual and Elegant! Wear it and moms can be 18 again.

In example 8, the adverb again presupposes that moms were once girls. By using such a structure, the anchor presupposes a group of people, that is to say moms, who are no longer young because of dedication to their family and who still search for beauty. Thus, the anchor generates empathy and stimulates the desire to buy among relevant consumers.

4. Functions of Pragmatic Presuppositions in E-commerce Live Language

This part analyses functions of pragmatic presupposition in e-commerce live language.

4.1 Persuasive Function

The ultimate aim of e-commerce live broadcast is to persuade consumers into purchasing, thus anchors normally would make huge efforts in impressing consumers and arousing their buying desire. Thus, one of the functions of pragmatic presupposition is persuasive function. This function is especially evident in factive presupposition. As the old saying goes, facts speak louder than words. When there are some facts or seeming facts, consumers are very easy to accept the persuasion of the business. One type of Li Jiaqi's language patterns is why do so many people like xxx or why do so many people repurchase xxx. If we remove the question word why, the pragmatic presupposition here can be: Everyone likes xxx or many people repurchase xxx. And customers often accept this as fact because of the herd mentality, so it is easier for anchors to achieve the purpose of persuading customers. Another example: As we all know, Yili Milk is the only

designated milk in the Olympics. The example presupposes that athletes in the Olympics only drink milk of this brand. By treating this information as a presupposition, the anchor gives consumers the impression that it is a known or undisputed objective fact. In a live streaming environment, consumers often have little time or access to check whether what the anchor is saying is true. What people do know is the authority of the Olympics. In this case, the Milk for the Olympics must have good taste and quality. By using pragmatic presupposition, the anchor can persuade consumers into buying products.

4.2 Emphatic Function

As can be seen in types of pragmatic presupposition, state presupposition, identity presupposition and belief presupposition can be used to give rise to empathy among consumers.

Example 11: Are there many people, like me, who have dry mouths in the winter? Would you still be worried with this in hand?

The anchor presupposes that consumers were worried about their dry mouths in winter and by emphasizing the imperfect state in the past, the anchor easily generates empathy and urges consumers to get rid of the imperfect state by resorting to the product.

Example 12: The shampoo makes our hair darker, brighter and healthier.

The presupposition here is that consumers' hair is already good and healthy. It is a kind of invisible praise for consumers' hair, which undoubtedly captures the psychology of consumers' love for beauty. So the product is naturally welcomed by people.

Example 13: Pantene believes that each of you is the most special version of yourself, with unlimited beautiful potential.

Anchors sometimes pass on some beliefs or values, which can cause a strong resonance in the heart of consumers and move consumers from the spiritual level. If the e-commerce live language implies empathy and encouragement for women, it is more likely for the products to be trusted by customers. In example 12, the pragmatic presupposition of this sentence is: Others or yourselves do not believe that you are the most special. Many girls feel inferior because of their appearance. The main purpose of this sentence is to emphasize that girls should be confident and find their own shining points. By saying this, the anchor encourages every woman customer who is not confident enough to explore their unlimited potential as soon as possible. This is a strong belief presupposition which easily resonates among women consumers and stimulates their desires to buy.

5. Conclusions

The paper aims to discuss types of pragmatic presupposition and its functions in e-commerce live language. It is found that e-commerce anchors use factive, belief, state and identity presupposition. Besides, pragmatic presupposition in e-commerce live language has persuasive and emphatic function. That is to say, to persuade consumers into buying the products, to generate empathy among them.

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