

Analysis of Cultural Differences in Chinese and English Food Advertising Language

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Abstract: This research explores the cultural differences in Chinese and English advertising languages, with a particular focus on food advertisements. In the context of globalization, understanding how cultural values shape advertising strategies is crucial for effective cross-cultural communication. Advertisements not only reflect the product being promoted but also embody the cultural norms and consumer expectations of their target audience. The study aims to investigate the linguistic features, cultural values, and persuasive strategies embedded in food advertisements, comparing the differences between Chinese and English contexts. The research employs a content analysis method, examining a total of 100 food advertisements, with 50 from Chinese markets and 50 from English-speaking markets. Both linguistic and semiotic elements, including persuasive language, imagery, and cultural symbols, are analyzed. Functionalist translation theory serves as the main analytical framework, as it emphasizes the role of cultural context in shaping meaning and the communicative purpose of the advertisements. The results reveal significant differences in the use of persuasive language, cultural symbols, and rhetorical devices. For instance, Chinese advertisements often emphasize collective values and tradition, while English advertisements lean towards individualism and innovation. These findings suggest that advertisers and translators need to adopt tailored approaches when targeting different cultural markets. By recognizing and adapting to cultural norms, advertisers can create more resonant and effective campaigns in cross-cultural environments.

Keywords: Cultural differences, Food advertisements, Chinese-English comparison, Advertising language, Functionalist translation theory.

1. Introduction

Advertising has become a globalized form of communication, significantly influencing consumer behavior and cultural exchange. As globalization intensifies, understanding how different cultures use language in advertising becomes more important, especially in industries like food, where cultural preferences and consumption habits differ greatly.

Advertising language has drawn increasing attention within the broader field of cross-cultural communication. Scholars have focused on the impact of culture on persuasive language, particularly in food advertisements, which carry cultural solid connotations and play a vital role in shaping consumer preferences [1,2].

Previous studies have identified clear distinctions between Western and Eastern advertising styles. For example, English advertisements tend to emphasize individualism and direct appeals, while Chinese advertisements often focus on collectivism and indirect persuasion [1-3]. However, few studies have systematically compared food advertisements in these two languages through a linguistic and cultural lens.

This research addresses the gap by analyzing food advertisements in both Chinese and English using a comparative approach. The novelty lies in applying functionalist translation theory to examine how cultural values shape language use in food advertising. This perspective allows for a deeper understanding of the interplay between language and culture in a globalized marketplace.

The key research questions are: (1) What are the linguistic and cultural differences in Chinese and English food advertisements? (2) How do these differences reflect the underlying cultural values? This study employs content analysis, focusing on linguistic features such as tone, rhetorical devices, and cultural references in 100 food advertisements (50 Chinese and 50 English).

This study contributes to the growing body of research on cross-cultural advertising by providing empirical data on how cultural values are embedded in advertising language [4,5]. The findings will help advertisers and translators better understand cultural nuances, thus enhancing their effectiveness in global markets.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Research on the Characteristics of Food Advertising

As a special type of advertisement, the characteristics of food advertisement mainly include emotional appeal, cultural symbols, concise language and visual impact. Emotional appeals trigger the emotional resonance of consumers by creating a warm family atmosphere [1]. Cultural symbols enhance identity through specific ingredients and cooking methods [2]. Regarding language, food advertising often uses concise and easy to understand expressions to highlight the uniqueness of products [5]. Visually, advertisements focus on bright colors and well-composed images to attract consumers' attention [6]. Brand image is often closely related to consumers' lifestyle, enhancing the overall persuasive power of advertising [7].

2.2. Research on Cross-cultural Advertising Language

With the expansion of the global market, the study of cross-cultural advertising language has gradually become a hot topic. The theories of high-context culture and low-context culture proposed by Hall provide a theoretical framework for the research on the communication of advertising language under different cultural backgrounds [3]. In high-context cultures, such as China, advertising language is often implicit and indirect, relying on cultural connotation and metaphor. However, in low-context cultures, such as the United States advertising language is direct and clear, focusing on the information transmission function of language itself. Kotler and Keller further point out that differences in cultural values are the main challenge advertising language faces in cross-cultural communication [5]. The effectiveness of advertising in different cultural contexts depends on its compatibility with the values of the target culture. For example, American ads often emphasize individualism, innovation, and instant gratification, while Chinese ads tend to be more collectivist and traditional and long-term planning [1,3,5].

2.3. Research on the Relationship Between Advertising Language and Culture

Advertising language is not only a tool to disseminate product information but also an important carrier of cultural expression. Many studies have shown that advertising language reflects the cultural

values and social norms of the place where the advertisement is published [1,3,4]. In the context of globalization, cross-cultural advertising has gained increasing attention, making the relationship between advertising language and culture a key topic in both advertising and cultural studies. Researchers have explored how advertising language reflects and reshapes cultural values through symbols, metaphors, narrative structures, for example, further influencing consumer cognition and behavior [1,6,8]. However, these studies tend to focus on the European and American markets and lack in-depth discussions on the Asian market, especially the Chinese market [9,10,11].

Although the existing research has provided us with many valuable insights into Chinese and English advertising language, there are still some shortcomings. Firstly, existing studies have not sufficiently addressed the differences between symbols in food advertising across different cultural backgrounds [12]. In particular, research on the cross-cultural comparison of Chinese and English food advertising remains fragmented, with no systematic theoretical framework having been established [9,11,13].

Secondly, most studies focus on the advertising language of specific product categories, such as luxury goods, electronic products, while there are relatively few studies on food advertising, a daily consumer product. Food advertising is the most closely related to the daily life of consumers, its linguistic features and cultural connotations have important research value [12,14].

3. Research Design

Based on the shortcomings of the previous research, this study selected 50 food advertisements in both Chinese and English, including 15 advertisements in the fast-food industry, 15 advertisements in the beverage industry and 20 advertisements in the snack industry. Chinese AD samples are from Chinese TV ads, online video platforms (e.g. Youku, Bilibili), and social media (e.g. Wechat, Weibo); English AD samples are mainly from TV ads in the United States, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram platforms.

Through corpus analysis and analysis of high-frequency words, keywords and co-occurrence of 100 sentences of food advertisements, this study will reveal the similarities and differences in expression modes, cultural values and other aspects of Chinese and English advertisements, and on this basis, put forward suggestions to improve cross-cultural advertising strategies.

4. Research Results

4.1. Comparative Analysis of High-frequency Words

Table 1: A Comparative Analysis of High-frequency Words in Chinese and English Advertisements (Top 20)

Ranking	Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency
1	good	4	Medicinal herb	4
2	eat	3	Pig Feet	3
3	one	3	One cup	3
4	tea	3	Big White Rabbit	3
5	fresh	2	Milk Candy	3
6	pizza	2	Rainbow	3
7	hut	2	Giggle	2
8	dunkin	2	Nutrition	2
9	popeyes	2	Meet	2
10	box	2	Maternal uncle	2
11	make	2	Bones	2

Table 1: (continued).

12	always	2	Nanking	2
13	open	2	Big Brand	2
14	dew	2	Taste	2
15	red	2	Quanjude	2
16	bull	2	Moment	2
17	nestlé	2	Tongqing	2
18	iced	2	Honey Snow	2
19	best	2	Ice City	2
20	fanta	2	Better	2

Table 1 shows that there are significant differences in linguistic features and cultural focus of Chinese and English advertising language. Chinese advertising language tends to directly emphasize specific product names, such as “Xiancao”, “White Rabbit milk candy”, and local characteristics, such as “Nanjing”, “Quanjude”, reflecting the Chinese consumer market’s emphasis on cultural identity and regional characteristics. This strategy enhances advertising effectiveness by evoking cultural resonance and emotional connection with consumers. In contrast, English slogans use more generic descriptive words, such as “good”, “fresh” and “best”, emphasizing the general quality of the product and the consumer experience. This approach aims to create a broadly applicable brand image while remaining flexible enough to adapt to different market segments.

4.2. Keyword Analysis

Table 2: Keywords Analysis of English Advertising Slogans (Top 20)

Ranking	Keyword	Keyness value
1	good	9.64
2	eat	5.75
3	one	5.75
4	tea	5.75

Table 3: Chinese Advertising Keywords Analysis (Top 20)

Ranking	Keyword	Keyness value
1	Medicinal herb	9.64
2	Pig Feet	5.75
3	One cup	5.75
4	Big White Rabbit	5.75
5	Milk Candy	5.75
6	Rainbow	5.75

Keyword analysis further reveals the differences in advertising strategies between the two languages. Table 3 shows Chinese keywords focus on specific food names and brands, highlighting products’ uniqueness and cultural characteristics. Table 2 shows that English keywords to concentrate more on the description of the quality and consumer behaviour, such as “eat” and “fresh”, which reflects that Western advertising pays more attention to shaping the overall brand image and lifestyle. This difference reflects the difference between Eastern and Western consumption cultures. Chinese

consumers pay more attention to the specific attributes and cultural connotations of products, while Western consumers pay more attention to how products integrate into and improve their lifestyles.

4.3. Co-occurrence Analysis

Table 4: A co-occurrence of the core English word “good”

Ranking	Co-occurrence word	Frequency	MI value
1	beast	2	8.64
2	nestlé	2	8.64
3	coffee	2	8.64
4	food	2	8.64
5	good	2	8.64
6	life	2	8.64
7	starbucks	2	8.64
8	inspire	2	8.64
9	im	1	7.64
10	lovin	1	7.64
11	kfc	1	7.64
12	finger	1	7.64
13	lickin	1	7.64
14	burger	1	7.64
15	king	1	7.64
16	way	1	7.64
17	subway	1	7.64
18	eat	1	7.64
19	energy	1	7.64
20	unleash	1	7.64

Table 5: Chinese core word “health” co-occurrence word

Ranking	Co-occurrence word	Frequency	MI value
1	Monkey Mushroom	2	8.64
2	Cookies	2	8.64
3	Good products	2	8.64
4	Store	2	8.64
5	Jiangzhong	1	7.64
6	Delicious	1	7.64

Co-occurrence analysis provides more in-depth analysis, especially when mutual information (MI) values are considered. Table 5 shows that in Chinese advertisements, the word “health” is highly associated with specific products and brands, such as “monkey mushroom cookie” and “good food shop”, with MI scores of more than 8, indicating that Chinese advertisements tend to link health concepts directly to specific products. This reflects Chinese consumers’ immediate demand for healthy food and how brands are positioning themselves to take advantage of this demand. In contrast, table 4 shows the co-occurrences of “good” in English ads are more diverse, including brand names, like “Nestle”, “Starbucks”; product categories, like “coffee”, “food” and emotional appeals, like “inspire”, “life”, with similarly high MI scores. This diverse application demonstrates how English advertising can create a comprehensive brand image by building a broad network of positive concepts

that not only describe the product itself but also extend to quality of life and emotional experiences. This difference in strategy reveals the different emphases of Chinese and Western advertising communication. Chinese advertising is more direct and specific, while English advertising focuses more on creating an overall brand atmosphere and life concept.

5. Conclusion

This study reveals the significant differences between Chinese and English advertising slogans through a comparative analysis of the linguistic features and cultural focus of Chinese and English food slogans. It was found that Chinese advertisements tend to emphasize specific product names and local characteristics directly, and are more likely to link health concepts directly with specific products, reflecting the importance of cultural identity and regional characteristics in the Chinese consumer market. This strategy enhances the effectiveness of advertising by evoking cultural resonance and emotional connection with consumers. English slogans, on the other hand, use more generic descriptive words and focus on creating a universally applicable brand image and overall consumption experience to maintain flexibility and adaptability in a diversified market. This study also provides a reference for future cross-cultural advertising design. Multinational brands should fully consider the target market's cultural background when designing future advertisements. For example, in the Chinese market, brands can attract consumers by strengthening local characteristics and cultural identity. In the Western market, advertising can put more emphasis on the integration and improvement of products and consumers' lifestyles.

Future studies can further explore the effect differences of different advertising forms in Chinese and Western cultural backgrounds. In addition, with the development of digital marketing, the analysis of advertising slogans on social media platforms is also worth further research to understand the characteristics of cultural communication in emerging advertising channels and provide more references for food advertising.

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