



An Analysis of Conceptual Metaphor in Western Commercial Advertisements

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Abstract

This thesis makes a deep analysis of conceptual metaphor in western commercial advertisements and aims to deepen the understanding of the nature and manifestations of metaphor, to make it clear how conceptual metaphor works effectively in advertising for the purpose of persuading the audience into buying the products advertised, and to help Chinese advertisers realize the important roles of conceptual metaphors in advertising designs and originalities.

Keywords: Western commercial advertisements, Conceptual metaphor

1. Introduction

Two beer bottles snuggling up together, Cars shown as one's lovers, and a piece of soap presented as a packet of cigarettes—these are a few vivid and innovative examples of conceptual metaphor applied in western commercial advertisements. To attract viewers' attention, convey product information and promote their products, advertisers have increasingly used conceptual metaphor. Indeed, conceptual metaphor plays an important role in advertising, as Kövecses points out, “Part of the selling power of an advertisement depends on how well-chosen the conceptual metaphor is that the picture and/or the words used in the advertisement attempt to evoke in people. An appropriately selected metaphor may work wonders in promoting the sale of an item” (Kövecses, 2002:59).

The application of metaphor in advertising has aroused close attention paid by a few scholars and postgraduates home and abroad. In terms of research content, some scholars have only paid attention to verbal metaphor(e.g. Keiko Tanaka,1996), some have only emphasized pictorial metaphor(e.g. Charles Forceville,1996), but few people have studied both of them together; as for theoretical framework, some studies have dealt with single theoretical framework and there exist some defects in them. For instance, some studies have only proved that there certainly exist conceptual metaphors in advertising, but they have not revealed how conceptual metaphors work effectively in advertising for the purpose of persuading the audience into buying the products advertised(e.g. Lars Hermerén,1999; Fan Yingxia,2008), some researches have applied relevance theory to analyze metaphors in advertising, but they have interpreted metaphor as deriving strong and weak implicatures, and have not regarded it as mappings across conceptual domains (e.g. Wu Xiuming,2007). Therefore, this thesis tries to answer the following questions: how does the advertiser devise their advertisement under the guidance of conceptual metaphor? How does the audience read and interpret the conceptual metaphors in advertising? How does the advertiser guarantee to convey appropriate information to the audience when he designs advertisements?

2. Theoretical Framework

Two research frames provide the theoretical background for the thesis, namely 1) the nature, manifestations and working mechanism of metaphor, 2) relevance theory and metaphor in advertising

2.1 The Nature, Manifestations and working mechanism of Metaphor

Metaphor was traditionally viewed as a figure of speech characteristic of language alone. Linguists had massively studied this persuasive rhetoric in its verbal manifestations. With the increasing interest of cognitive scientists in the subject, however, metaphor has been redefined as a cognitive system that structures our thoughts and behavior rather than merely a language phenomenon. A new view of metaphor that challenged the powerful traditional view in a coherent and systematic way was first developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson who have put forward the well-known conceptual metaphor theory--CMT. In the book *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson held that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language, but in thought and action and the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). In the book *The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor*, Lakoff claimed that metaphor is fundamentally conceptual, not linguistic, in nature, metaphorical language is a surface manifestation of conceptual metaphor and there are a great many ways in which conceptual metaphors can be made real." (Lakoff 1993). Lakoff and Johnson's results of study are considerably significant, since they not just indicate that metaphor is a cognitive means and a mode of thought, but also show if metaphors are fundamentally conceptual in nature, then they must manifest themselves in nonlinguistic areas other than linguistic area. In his book *Metaphor: A practical introduction*, Kövecses offered twelve cases where conceptual metaphors manifest themselves or are realized, such as movies and acting, cartoons, drawings, sculptures, buildings, advertisements, symbols, myths, and so on, but a good case in point is advertising, as "a major manifestation of conceptual metaphors are advertisements" (Kövecses 2002:59). Generally, advertisements are divided into verbal advertisements, pictorial advertisements, radio advertisements, television advertisements, etc. In this thesis, attention is only focused on verbal advertisements and pictorial advertisements, therefore, a manifestation of conceptual metaphors in verbal and pictorial advertisements are verbal metaphors and pictorial metaphors.

How does metaphor work? or what is working mechanism of metaphor, this is a controversial issue. In practice, the comparison theory, the substitution theory and the interaction theory all aim at interpreting the productive process of metaphorical meanings, namely, working mechanism of metaphor. These theories from different sides reveal some characteristics of working mechanism of metaphor (Shu Ding fang, 2002). According to Lakoff (1993), metaphors are mappings across conceptual domains, and each mapping is a fixed set of ontological correspondences between entities in a source domain and entities in a target domain.

2.2 Relevance theory and metaphor in advertising

In 1986, Sperber and Wilson co-authored a book *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Ever since the publication of the book, pragmatics in particular and other disciplines such as linguistics in general, philosophy, literature and psychology have been under the profound influence of relevance theory. Relevance theory is a theory of communication in general. Advertising is a form of communication which conveys effective information about products or services between the advertisers and the audience. Since advertising is a kind of communication between the advertiser and the prospective consumer, the relevance theory should in principle work for advertising as well. Sperber and Wilson hold that every act of communication is an ostensive-inferential process, therefore, advertising is also an ostensive-inferential process. For the advertiser, he should adopt various media as ostensive stimuli to make mutually manifest to the audience the informative intention about products advertised. For the audience, based on cognitive context, he should infer the informative intention conveyed by the advertiser. Advertising is a kind of communication which aims to persuade the addressee (the potential consumer) to buy the products or services advertised by the communicator (the advertiser) or to adopt the ideas advocated by the advertisement. In order to achieve this purpose, the advertiser surely has the intention to make manifest or more manifest to the potential consumer a set of assumptions which are related to the products or services or ideas he promotes. But only informative intention itself cannot fulfill the advertiser's goal for if only he has this informative intention but does not make it mutually manifest, this informative intention will never be perceived by the addressee. So when producing an advertisement, the advertiser invariably has a communicative intention. From this discussion we can see that the communication involved in advertising is ostensive—inferential communication in nature.

In order to persuade the audience into buying products advertised, the advertiser frequently deploys a variety of media. In verbal advertisements, phrases or sentences are used as ostensive stimuli; in pictorial advertisements, pictures are used as ostensive stimuli, and in Tv advertisements, music, colors, can be used as ostensive stimuli. Except for words, music, and pictures, figurative language can be also employed as ostensive stimuli, such as simile, exaggeration, metaphor, personification, and so on, for instance, a Chinese fertilizer company called Shandong Kingenta Ecological Engineering Co, Ltd. personifies its controlled release fertilizer as an expert. On account of the important roles of metaphor in advertising, it is unsurprising that the advertisers apply metaphor to advertising. Sperber and Wilson (2001: 153) view that attracting the audience's attention and directing the audience's attention to the communicator's informative intentions are two prerequisites for an ostensive stimulus. According to Sperber and Wilson, metaphors (and other forms of figurative language) are interpreted according to the same principles as literal utterances; they are

relevance-driven in nature and provide a richer set of inferences than literal utterances (Vyvyan Evans & Melanie Green 2006:459). By means of metaphors in advertising, the audience can obtain strong and weak implicatures about products advertised. In this way, metaphors reward the hearer's extra processing cost with a richer set of contextual effects than a literal utterance: 'the wider the range of potential implicatures and the greater the hearer's responsibility for constructing them, the more poetic the effect, the more creative the metaphor' (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 236).

In relevance theory, context is a considerably important concept that has to be mentioned in this thesis to make an analysis of conceptual metaphor in advertising. According to the traditional view, context is nearly an all-inclusive category which ranges from linguistic knowledge, knowledge about the world, social and cultural background where communication occurs to such situational elements as the time and place of communication, and the mode of communication. Traditionally, pragmatics regards the above-mentioned concrete situations as important basis for pragmatic inference, and views pragmatic inference as a comprehensive inferential process based on one's knowledge elements and concrete contextual elements. However, context based on the traditional view is not much helpful to the interpretation of the actual process of pragmatic inference, because it can not objectively reflect the psychological states of interlocutors when language is used. Pragmatic inference does not necessarily rely on concrete context because concrete context has been internalized and cognized by interlocutors based on experience or thought. The consequence of the internalization and cognization of pragmatic elements is cognitive context. Sperber and Wilson (2001:15) indicate that a context is a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer's assumptions about the world, or rather, the set of premises used in interpreting that utterance, and they also hold that cognitive context is a dynamic process and is chosen, not given.

According to the two theoretical frameworks, the following points of view are put forward in this thesis: Although conceptual metaphor theory is of great importance, there are a few defects in it. One of them is that it overlooks the restriction of cognitive context on the understanding of metaphor, therefore has no ideas to determine which mappings are selected and does not effectively bring into full play the specific persuasive roles of conceptual metaphors in advertising, while relevance interprets metaphor as deriving strong and weak implicatures and does not regard it as mappings across conceptual domains. Therefore, we can see relevance theory is complementary to conceptual metaphor theory, especially when conceptual metaphor is applied in advertising.

3. An Analysis of Conceptual Metaphor in West Commercial Advertisements

In terms of conceptual metaphor theory, this thesis presents some examples of cases where conceptual metaphor is used in western commercial advertisements: verbal advertisements and pictorial advertisements to make a deep analysis of conceptual metaphor, taking into account relevance theory being complementary to conceptual metaphor theory.

Example 1: OVER 200 YEARS OF CARERUL BREEDING PRODUCED THIS CHAMPION

------(Zhao Jing,1992)

Example 1 is the caption of a verbal advertisement for Hine X.O. At first sight, this caption will get the audience's attention because they are curious about what kind of champion that needs careful breeding for such a long time, namely over 200 years. Then the curiosity of the audience will be aroused so that they are likely to read the body of the advertisement to get further information. The body of the advertisement is as follows:

Every once in a while, a truly great horse. A horse destined to become a supreme champion on the racecourse and to pass into legend. A Ninjinsky or an Aride, a Red Rum or a Shirgar – superb animals who remain unchallenged in their lifetimes.

But perfection does not come about by chance. Such a horse is the result of the careful breeding of the bluest of bloodlines that can be traced for generations. And from the day of its birth, the young horse will be lovingly nurtured and cared for, meticulously shaped into a champion.

So it is with Hine X.O., the champion of fine cognacs, the choice of connoisseurs.

Established in heart of the Cognac region of France in 1763, the house of Hine has remained unswervingly faithful to the standards of quality set down by its founder, Thomas Hine.

Since the eighteenth century, every drop of Hine cognac has been lovingly matured under the watchful eye of one man, the cellarmaster, whose senses are his birthright and whose extraordinary talents can be traced back through six generations of the Hine family.

Hine X. O. – a thorough bred champion of maturity, delicacy and finesse. A cognac of incomparable quality, to be savoured with respect and infinite pleasure.

HINE leaves nothing to be desired.

After reading the body of the verbal advertisement, the audience get to know that the advertiser intends to say that Hine X.O is a superb horse like a Ninjinsky, an Aride, a Red Rum or a Shirgar, and he or she will get a structural metaphor:

HINE X.O IS A SUPERB HORSE, in which the target domain “HINE X.O” is partially structured, understood, performed, and talked about in terms of the source domain. In the case of the source domain, there are many features or assumptions, and what features or assumptions are mapped onto the target domain? Then some of the assumptions or mappings in the encyclopedic entry “a superb horse” will be highly activated based on contextual information. For example, a superb horse is a superb animal like a Ninjinsky, an Aride, a Red Rum or a Shirgar; a superb horse is a supreme champion on the racecourse and remains unchallenged in its lifetime; a great horse will be lovingly nurtured and cared for. All these assumptions are what we call implicated premises which should be provided by the reader. And then processing Example 1 in this extended context can make the audience get a couple of implicatures which are strongly expected by the advertiser:

- (1) a. Hine X.O has the best quality of fine cognacs.
- b. Hine X.O remains incomparable in fierce competitions.
- c. Hine X.O is produced by elaborate procedures .

However, the advertiser could not have intended (1) alone for the reason that if that is the case, he can save the reader’s while and effort by just saying it directly, thus increasing the relevance of his advertisement to the audience. So, the audience will definitely think that the advertiser intends more things rather than (1) by using this verbal metaphor as an ostensive stimulus. Then the audience may supply other implicated premises which are activated although not so highly activated as the implicated premises from which they get the strong implicatures in (1) such as “riding a superb horse can give you a feeling of maturity, dignity and delicacy,” “riding a great horse can give you infinite pleasure,” etc. The application of Example 1 in this enlarged context will make the audience get the access to deriving the implicated conclusions in (2).

- (2) a. Drinking Hine X.O can give you a feeling of maturity, dignity and delicacy.
- b. Drinking Hine X.O can give you indefinite pleasure.

These weak implicatures are activated by the advertiser, but the audience must take a large share of responsibility in deriving them. It is possible for different readers to get different weak implicatures to offset their extra processing effort and thus achieve optimal relevance. But the implicatures in (1) will be obtained by everyone who reads this advertisement, for they are strongly backed by the advertiser, and without the recovery of these implicatures, the communication would be a total failure. The derivation of the implicatures in (1) and (2) makes it possible for the audience to get the implicit meaning of this advertisement.

It is generally believed that different people possess different cognitive environments and processing abilities, and why the advertiser and we are so sure about that by reading the above example, the reader will not supply the following assumptions as the implicated premises:

- (3) a. Sometimes, a superb horse fails in a race.
- b. Riding a super horse can give you a possibility of being injured and in turn he gets the following implicated conclusions:
- (4) a. Sometimes, the quality of Hine X.O is somewhat lowered.
- b. Drinking too much Hine X.O does harm to your health.

can also be explained in the relevance theory. The cognitive principle of relevance states that human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance. The human cognitive system is structured in the way that it only picks out and processes the information which has the greatest positive cognitive effects for the smallest processing effort. What’s more, we have stated that it is mutually manifest to the advertiser and the audience that the advertiser is trying to persuade the audience to buy the promoted product or service, so the most relevant and processing worthwhile assumptions in this context will be the positive things related to a superb horse, not the negative things.

Example 2: Treat your lips with Estee Lander's new perfect lipstick. The secret is in our inclusive new Hydra moist Complex. It puts a true skin care-formula with a weightless “web” of lasting color. Laboratory tests show that the longer you wear it, the longer your lips stay moist, soft and comfortable. The most sensational place to wear satin on your lips.

------(Hu Wen hui, 2005)

This is an advertisement of promoting the sale of Estee Lander lipstick. In this advertisement, the advertiser means to advertise Estee Lander lipstick, impress consumers and persuade them into purchasing the product advertised. With a structural metaphor ESTEE LANDER LIPSTICK IS SATIN in his or her mind, the advertiser designed the verbal advertisement mentioned in Example 2 as a manifestation of the conceptual metaphor. According to the Relevance Theory account, the verbal advertisement is uttered by the advertiser as an ostensive stimulus, and consumers are licensed to assume that the advertiser is aiming for optimal relevance in uttering Example 2. Because the utterance is literally false (satin can not be literally worn on your lip), the literal interpretation is uninformative and therefore

irrelevant. Consumers therefore assume that the advertiser intends some other interpretation and draws upon encyclopaedic knowledge and contextual knowledge in order to construct an inference. According to the contextual information (Laboratory tests show that the longer you wear it, the longer your lips stay moist, soft and comfortable.), then the audience can further get the following assumptions:

- (1) a. Estee Lander lipstick makes your lip feel soft.
- b. Estee Lander lipstick makes your lip comfortable.

These implicatures are strongly backed by the advertiser for the reason that these are the first things which come to the audience's mind and are consistent with the principle of relevance, and if the advertiser does not intend these assumptions to be derived, he should have rephrased his utterance to eliminate them.

However, the audience's processing of the caption will not end here. They most probably will think that the communicator must have intended to convey something more than (1) if the relative indirectness of the utterance is to be justified. For the sake of finding more contextual effects to balance his effort in the processing of the metaphor, the audience are therefore encouraged to search for more implicatures: the advertiser wants to show that Estee Lander lipstick is colorful; Estee Lander lipstick is exquisite and so on. The audience will stop this kind of search until he thinks that his effort in processing this metaphor is fully rewarded.

Example 3: A pictorial advertisement about Lipton Ice Tea

Insert Figure 1 Here

This is an advertisement for Lipton Ice Tea. In the picture, there are two tall buildings, in front of which there stands a fireplug with the trademark of Lipton Ice Tea on it and there are some words at the bottom of the picture. From this, it is not difficult for the audience to get a structural metaphor: LIPTON ICE TEA IS A FIREPLUG

However, if judged only by this picture, the audience is still not sure of what the advertiser wants to say about Lipton Ice Tea, for "fireplug" can provide a wide range of assumptions, and without any further information, no specific assumption can become salient in the audience's cognitive environment, and thus the audience cannot achieve optimal relevance. So this metaphor should be put into some contexts if it wants to achieve optimal relevance. Then in order to draw the audience's attention to the main point the advertisement is driving at, the advertiser produces some words at the bottom of the picture: "Lipton Ice Tea. Puts out thirsty". Based on encyclopaedic knowledge, a fireplug is a tool used by firefighters to put out a fire, so "put out" is supposed to belong to the domain of FIREPLUG. To explain this point, a sentence is cited here from ADVANCED LEARNERS'S English-Chinese Dictionary (the 6th edition): *Firefighters soon put the fire out.* (Page 1401). However, in this ad, the phrase "put out" is used to structure the domain LIPTON ICE TEA: *Lipton Ice Tea puts out thirst.* In the above context, the audience can get the following strong implicature:

- (1) Lipton Ice Tea can quench your thirst.

We argued in the first part of this chapter that the pictorial metaphor is used as the ostensive stimulus, and if a phenomenon is to be an ostensive stimulus, it must achieve two points: it must be relevant enough to be worth the addressee's effort to process it; it is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences.

However this implicature (1) will not suffice the addressee's effort in processing the picture and it is not the most relevant one the communicator can produce. So the addressee will not be satisfied by recovering (1) alone. Since the addressee believes that the communicator is rational, there should be other things the advertiser intends to convey by using this pictorial metaphor. Then the addressee will continue to search in his encyclopedic entry for the assumptions related to the concept "fireplug" which can be successfully combined into another contextual information in the picture: Nobody is out because of blistering weather. He may get other implicatures:

- (2) a. Lipton Ice Tea must be a necessity wherever you go, especially in hot days.

With the recovering of these weak implicatures, the addressee's extra processing effort is awarded by the more contextual effects he achieves, and thus the ostensive stimulus successfully directs the addressee to optimal relevance.

Example 4: A pictorial advertisement about a car, Reddiamond

Insert Figure 2 Here

In Figure 2, the picture is dominated by the silhouettes of two people, a man and a woman, a ring, on the top of which there is a red car, a trademark, Reddiamond, and a verbal element. The position of a red car on a ring and the car's trademark, Reddiamond suffice to cue a structural metaphor CAR IS DIAMOND.

This picture will attract the audience's attention at first sight, for it goes against people's general knowledge. It is our common sense that a diamond is always attached to a ring, however, in this picture a red car is situated on the place where a diamond should ordinarily be expected. The consumers eagerly want to know why the red car is put on the

place of a diamond. Since this is a carefully designed ad, it is impossible for the advertiser to make a mistake by putting a red car there. If consumers look at the picture carefully, reading the verbal elements in the ad, they will see this is an ad about a car, Reddiamond. Then the audience can draw the conclusion that in this pictorial metaphor, the missing part is the secondary subject, a diamond. And thus the audience will find that the metaphor intended by the advertiser can be verbalized as "a car is a diamond"

This metaphor is rather creative, for we usually do not associate cars with diamonds. To ordinary people, cars and diamonds are totally two different things. But here, the audience will be forced by the communicator to see the resemblances between these two things since they believe by producing this metaphor the communicator is trying to make it optimally relevant to them. Then searching in their encyclopedic entries, the audience may find that a diamond is usually a symbol of beauty, nobleness and costliness. So the audience can get the strong implicature:

(1) Reddiamond are beautiful, noble and costly.

But (1) alone cannot compensate the effort the audience have spent in processing this metaphorical picture. The audience might still go on to search for more implicatures. After a careful observation, the audience will find the background of the picture has the lighting or just completely black, and both of them work very well, each giving a slightly different feel to the ad. The black tends to accentuate the ring more, while the lighting gives a more romantic, real feeling to the ad. The silhouette of the "couple" gives a sense of intimacy and romance, while strengthening the idea that this ad is directed towards couples. and the words, "Give her what she really wants this year" add an intimate element to the ad. This enlarged context will make the reader get the access to deriving the implicated conclusions in (2).

(1) Reddiamond gives a sense of intimacy and romance.

In this pictorial advertisement, the source domain DIAMOND possesses a number of features which vary from person to person. In order to make the audience understand what the advertisement really means, the advertiser provides a full context to help the audience to derive the advertiser's informative intention.

In this part, a deep analysis of conceptual metaphor has been made in two verbal advertisements and three pictorial advertisements to deepen the understanding of the nature and manifestations of metaphor, to make it clear how conceptual metaphor works effectively in advertising for the purpose of persuading the audience into buying the products advertised, and to help Chinese advertisers realize the important roles of conceptual metaphors in advertising designs and originalities.

4. Conclusion

Through the deep analysis of conceptual metaphors, this thesis has arrived at a conclusion that conceptual metaphor theory, combined with relevance theory being complementary to conceptual metaphor theory is able to interpret the specific persuasive roles of conceptual metaphors in commercial advertising.

First, the easily activated mappings between the two domains within metaphor provide a necessary bridge for pragmatic inference. The cognitive principle and communicative principle raised by relevance theory constrain the activated mappings within metaphor, deciding which mappings are activated in a given context.

Second, relevance theory holds that metaphor is interpreted as deriving strong and weak implicatures within it, neglecting a fact: metaphor, as a cognitive means and a mode of thought human beings employ frequently, differs from other figurative phenomena.

Third, the communication which occurs in advertising is ostensive-inferential in nature between advertisers and their audience. As a cognitive means, conceptual metaphors are applied by advertisers to design and produce advertisements. As manifestations of conceptual metaphors, verbal and pictorial metaphor are used as ostensive stimuli to attract and hold the audience's attention to the advertiser's informative intention. In advertising communication, the mapping process across conceptual domains within conceptual metaphor is the process of the audience's searching for optimal relevance in dynamic cognitive context and deriving the advertiser's communicative intension.

This thesis is only confined to verbal advertisements and pictorial advertisements in which conceptual metaphors play a very important role, but there exist some other forms of advertisements, such as radio advertisements, Tv advertisements, internet advertisements, etc. where conceptual metaphors are still an inseparable part. How do conceptual metaphors work in these advertisements deserves an insightful study in much broader fields of study.

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Figure 1.



Figure 2.