A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF PUNS
IN ADVERTISEMENTS IN HONG KONG

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Abstract

The use of puns has been studied by many scholars but there is not much analysis carried out from the linguistic points of view. The aim of this study is to find out the linguistic features of the puns in advertisements in Hong Kong so that language users can understand why puns are possible in advertisements.

Puns are usually found in the headline or slogan of the advertisements because one of the functions of puns is to get attention from readers. It works when readers find out there is an association between the two meanings of a pun.

Results show that similar sound features is a must for the use of puns. Of all the puns examined in this study, 88% of them are homophones, polysemous words and homonyms. 5% of them are bilingual homophones. Only 7% are what we call “semi-homophones”, which usually differ in only one phonological feature of one sound segment in the syllable.

Phonetic features are important in the use of puns but not the syntactic categories. Many simple words in Chinese are also monosyllabic morphemes which may combine freely with other morphemes to produce new compounds. A component morpheme in a commonly-used compound can always be replaced by a homophone or a semi-homophone to create the effect of double meanings. The replacing homophone or semi-homophone may cause a change in the syntactic category of the compound.
摘要

同音詞的應用是不少學者的研究題材，但從語言學角度出發的研究卻不多。本文旨在從語言學角度，探究香港廣告中同音詞的語言特性，以使語言應用者能了解同音詞在何時何處可適用在廣告當中。此外，本文亦會分析這些同音詞的其他特色。

因爲同音詞應用的其中一個目的是要吸引讀者的注意力，因此它們大多出現於廣告的標題或口號中。只要讀者留意到同音詞擁有兩個詞義，同音詞的應用便會達到預期的目標。

研究結果顯示，語音相近是同音詞應用的一個重要條件。在本次研究的眾多同音詞樣本中，88%是異形同音詞，多義詞或同形同音異義詞，而5%是雙語同音詞。當中只有7%是「半同音詞」，即它們是語音相近詞，只是在音節上有些發音特徵有所不同。

相對於語音，詞性在同音詞的應用上顯得並不重要。漢語中很多詞彙其實是單音節語素，它們能自由地與其他語素組合成新的複詞或改變既有的句子結構。在常用的複詞中，我們可用同音詞或半同音詞把那些組合語素取代，去創造出兩個詞義。在語素取代的過程中，詞彙的詞性可能因而改變。
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