

Textual Meta-function of a Public Service Advertisement—A Systemic Functional Approach

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Abstract: *The three meta-functions of Systemic Functional Linguistics have occupied the mainstream for a long time in the field of linguistics and have been widely applied in various disciplinary fields. This paper focuses its attention on theme and cohesion to make a detailed analysis of textual meta-function on a public service advertisement to arouse readers' attention on poverty, thus proving that the systemic functional linguistics can be an effective way to guide analysis of public service advertisements.*

Keywords: Textual Metafunction; Public Service Advertisement; Cohesion

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 About the Advertisement

Many scholars have long focused on the study of commercial advertising. Unlike commercial advertising, researches on public service advertising has been increasingly recognized and valued in recent years, especially lack of researches from the perspective of systemic functional linguistics. As a significant part of the cause of the public good, public service advertisement refers to the advertisement that serves the interests of the public, does not profit-oriented but rather aims to raise public awareness of ethics and changing public attitudes towards social issues, so as to promote social development.

With the aim of getting people rid of poverty to arouse the readers' enthusiasm and initiative of participating in the work of eliminating world poverty, this advertisement provides the potential readers with information on significant worldwide problem of poverty.

1.2 Significance of the Research

The significant importance of advertisements lays a solid foundation for this study to figure out how the textual meta-function realize in public service advertisements through providing good examples.

Theoretically, this study can enhance readers' understanding of public service advertising from a new perspective, and enrich the application of systemic functional linguistics, as well.

Practically, this study exerts a certain influence on achieving the objectives of the advertisers by giving the analysis on thematic structure and cohesive devices, which means how advertisers organize their messages in a way that makes them fit smoothly.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Textual Function is to organize written or spoken texts in such a manner that they are coherent within themselves and fit the particular situation in which they are used (Dai Weidong, 2013). Compared with the Experiential Meta-function along with the Interpersonal Meta-function, textual function connects the interior and exterior of the language, so as to reflect the semantics (Halliday, 2015). It is suggested that the basic unit of language application is discourse or text. Hence, textual function refers to the function of linking language to the context and constructing a text that is commensurate with the situational context (Hu Zhuanglin, et al, 2017).

Textual Meta-function is mainly realized by thematic structure and cohesion. According to Halliday (1994), theme is the starting point of the message and of each clause complex. Thematic structure is the classification of choices of theme while themes can also be classified into marked and unmarked themes. If a thematic component is also the subject of the clause, the theme is unmarked; if not, it is marked. For instance, in declarative sentences, if the subject and the theme consist of the same word, or if they are "mixed together", then the theme in these declarative sentences is unmarked (Thompson, 2008: 149). A text is cohesive when the elements are tied together and considered meaningful to the reader. As the semantic relation between one element and another in a text, cohesion occurs when the interpretation of one item depends on the other (Halliday& Hasan, 1976: 4). To be more specific, cohesion is classified into three categories: reference, substitution and ellipsis in grammatical level, repetition, synonymy and collocation in lexical cohesion, and cohesion.

3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Unmarked Themes

3.1.1 Simple Theme (Only the experiential elements)

There are plenty of Simple Themes in declarative clauses in the text and the examples in which the Simple Themes is underlined are as follows:

It kills a child every three seconds.
This waste is no longer justifiable.

However, a nominal group acting as Subject will include a long Post-modifier, that is, and in such a situation it is the whole nominal group or ‘**Heavy**’ Subject that is Theme. For example, Millions of people, having been denied the education and the means to have useful, fulfilled lives, can now face a different prospect. From which we can see that the advertiser makes comparisons between the past situation (millions of people was once denied the education and the means to have useful and fulfilled lives) and the current situation (now they are able to face a different prospect), which aims to inform the reader of the feasibility of taking actions to help over 1.2 billion people get rid of poverty and to build up the reader’s confidence and enthusiasm of joining them. Moreover, a special thematic structure--‘**thematic equative**’ is applied in the declarative clause what is required is a new commitment. The advertiser takes a WH-clause as Theme, the starting point of the message, signaling in the Theme that the Rheme (a new commitment) will answer the question which might be asked by the reader in the text. From which it is obvious that the reader will find it easier to process the Theme and the Rheme separately. More importantly, we can also find that **the pronoun ‘you’ occurs as unmarked theme**, the point of departure of the message in the text (e.g. You will have restored the basic value of equity and human dignity to over 1.2 billion people, offering them a healthy, fulfilled existence). Therefore, we can make a conclusion that such kinds of thematic choice are aimed to conform to Readers-oriented principle, that is, making explicit the interactive consideration of the audience or the reader with a moderate tone.

3.1.2 Multiple Theme

1) Conjunction as part of Theme

Conjunctions like “**And**” in the clause And you are fundamental to their success come in first position and constitute a natural point of departure, helping the reader or the general public to fit this clause in its appropriate context, which is used in a way that is more typical of informal speech than of formal writing to narrow the distance on both sides of the conversation.

2) Textual, interpersonal and experiential as the typical ordering of elements in Multiple Theme.

For example, there is a clause And exactly how will this happen? including the textual element “and” which expresses primarily textual meaning and has the function of ‘placing’ the content, the interpersonal element “exactly” which expresses interpersonal meaning and has the function of signaling how valid the content is being presented as in terms of relatively high-value probability along with the experiential element “how”, the ‘topical Theme’, which is the constituent playing a role as circumstance in transitivity.

3.1.3 Theme in clause complexes

For instance, thematic choices in the clause If we re-apply that energy and acumen, problems of extreme poverty will be resolved forever. can be analyzed as follows.

- 1) If we re-apply that energy and acumen, problems of extreme poverty will be resolved forever.
- 2) If we (Theme¹) re-apply that energy and acumen, problems of extreme poverty (Theme²) will be resolved forever.

We can clearly see that the different analyses of the dependent clause If we re-apply that energy and acumen capture different aspects of what is going on while the dependent clause in initial position taken as the point of departure for the whole clause complex is generally preferable. The thematic choice used belongs to Radial thematic progression pattern, aimed to put more emphasis on the nominal group “energy and acumen” to inform the reader of the feasibility as well as benefits of reapplying energy and acumen to resolve the problems of extreme poverty.

3.2 Marked Themes

The Marked Theme is used in the imperative clause To find out how you can help, connect to: www.TeamsToEndPoverty.org. to put emphasis on the adverbial of cause, which will give an explanation about why the command should be carried out and remind the readers of the first step to solve the extreme poverty. benefits of reapplying energy and acumen to resolve the problems of extreme poverty.

3.3 Cohesion

As Halliday puts it (Halliday & Hasan, 1976: 4), the concept of cohesion is a semantic one which refers to relations of meaning that exist within the text and define it as a text.

3.3.1 Grammatical cohesion--Reference

1) Anaphoric (pointing backwards)

In the clause *This waste is no longer justifiable*, the demonstrative “this” with a noun “waste” which encapsulates the content of what has been mentioned plays an important role in organizing text, that is, it is used to refer back to a whole stretch of text (“the fact that the extreme poverty makes it impossible for people to utilize their talents and fulfil their potential” in this text.) Besides, it is used to provide the reader with the negative influence and current situation caused by the extreme poverty.

2) Cataphoric (pointing forwards)

In the first six declarative clauses of the first paragraph, the third-person personal pronoun “it” is used to signal that the meaning of the reference item will not be specified until further on in the text, which will set up suspense, arouse the reader’s interests and get them involved in the topic of the advertisement—extreme poverty to go on reading.

3.3.2 Grammatical cohesion—Substitution

1) Nominal substitution

In the clause *One which allows them to be energetic, creative, even prosperous members of human race*, the substitute form “one” is used to replace the head noun “prospect” and create a constant chain of tight links from one utterance to the next, which will deepen the reader’s impression on the word “prospect-- the chance of being successful” and motivate the readers to take practical actions against poverty.

3.3.3 Grammatical cohesion—Ellipsis proper

1) Verbal ellipsis

In the clause *UN secretary General Kofi Annan would like you to be too*, we can easily see that by using the expression “would like to”, the advertiser expresses not only the sincerity of the organization—UN secretary General Kofi Annan but also the advertiser’s sincerity to invite the reader—the general public to participate in the work of eliminating world poverty with them. In addition, the elliptical form applied here should be reworded as *“UN secretary General Kofi Annan would like you to be (committed to making a difference) too.”*, which aims to reflect the negotiation and cooperation that is explicit feature of face-to-face interaction and help narrow the distance on both sides of the conversation.

3.3.4 Lexical cohesion—Reiteration

1) Lexical repetition

Reading the text through, we can clearly see that there is the repetition of the same lexical item “extreme poverty” in the following clauses.

This frighteningly powerful phenomenon is extreme poverty.

The United Nations, in its wisdom, has concluded that you, along with many others like you, are capable of ending extreme poverty over the next ten years.

If we re-apply that energy and acumen, problems of extreme poverty will be resolved forever.

The lexical repetition used here is to emphasize or highlight the topic of the advertisement “extreme poverty” and deepen the reader’s impression on such a topic that the readers will recognize such kind of significant worldwide problem and then will be motivated to take practical actions against extreme poverty.

2) synonyms or near-synonyms

There are also a great number of terms which are synonymous or near-synonymous with the term “eliminate” in the following clauses.

The United Nations, in its wisdom, has concluded that you, along with many others like you, are capable of ending extreme poverty over the next ten years.

If we re-apply that energy and acumen, problems of extreme poverty will be resolved forever.

That in turn will make the world a safer place, rid of the insecurity and anger that breeds in poverty.

Together, we will put an end to poverty.

The synonymous or near-synonymous terms used here are to signal the determination or fulfilled confidence of the whole society to lift over 1.2 billion people out of extreme poverty and motivate the readers to participate in the work of taking practical actions against poverty with the organization--UNDP. To a certain degree, it is the application of the synonyms as well as the near-synonyms that plays a role as a well-functioning cohesive link of the text.

4. CONCLUSION

Within the framework of Halliday's textual functional grammar, this paper investigates the public service advertisement through the fulfillment of thematic structure and cohesion.

In the aspect of thematic structure, it was found that all themes are unmarked except a Marked Theme in the imperative clause *To find out how you can help, connect to: www. TeamsToEndPoverty.org*. Unmarked Themes and marked Themes account for 96.77% and 3.23% of the total number of Themes respectively. The phenomenon can be attributed to the reason that Unmarked Themes are easy to read, so as to arouse reader's attention and get advertiser's needs realized.

In terms of cohesion, there appear reference, substitution, conjunction and ellipsis in grammatical level, and repetition and synonymy in lexical level, among which reference is the most frequent used, followed by conjunction. Through using reference and conjunction, the advertisement can be space-saving, more concise, logical and fluent.

In a nutshell, the wholeness of the meaning can be achieved through the fulfillment of textual meta-function. Though this paper is a tentative study in this field of systemic functional linguistics, it is hoped that it will not only help readers create a deeper understanding of the public advertisement, but also provide a new research perspective for scholars as well as researchers in the related fields to conduct studies on the public advertisements.

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