

# On the Pun in English Advertisement

## DU MOT A DOUBLE SENS DANS LA PUBLICITE ANGLAISE

Xiang Ling<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The use of puns in advertisements is a common way for the advertisers to attract the consumers and persuade them to buy the advertised products. In the paper, many examples are presented in order to make the puns clear to the readers. First, the paper narrates the definition of a pun and then gives a detailed classification of English puns. Last, from the angle of language function the paper analyzes the typical functions of the puns in English advertisements.

**Key words:** puns, English advertisements, vocative function, aesthetic function

**Résumé:** L'utilisation des mots à double sens dans la publicité anglaise est très répandue. Les publicitaires ont souvent besoin de recourir à cette figure de rhétorique pour attirer les consommateurs et les persuader d'acheter leurs produits. A travers bon nombre d'exemples, cet essai précise d'abord la définition du mot à double sens, puis donne une interprétation détaillée sur la classification des mots à double sens, et analyse enfin, sous l'angle de la fonction langagière, les fonctions principales du mot à double sens dans la publicité anglaise, à savoir celle d'impulsion et celle d'esthétique.

**Mots-Clés:** mot à double sens, publicité anglaise, fonction d'impulsion, fonction d'esthétique.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

English pun is an important rhetoric form in English language. Since more than 2,000 years ago, the founder of rhetoric, Aristotle, declared that the use of puns was acceptable in certain styles, numerous puns were created through the creative writers of both English and Chinese. Advertisement, as a significant way to make the products known to the consumers and persuade them to buy, has largely applied rhetoric language. While the puns, with its brevity and rich meaning have earned the love of the advertisers and also become an important way to impress the readers and urge them to consume.

### 2. DEFINITION OF ENGLISH PUNS

What is English pun? Different forms of definitions are given by different dictionaries. But they convey the same message just as The Oxford English Dictionary defines---the use of word in such a way as to suggest two or more meanings or different associations, or the use of two or more words of the same or nearly the same sound with different meanings, so as to produce a humorous effect. From the detailed definition, the creation of English puns derives from two ways, one is from the pronunciation of the given words and the other is from the meaning of the given words. One exact

example for the former case of pun is "Make your every hello a real *good-buy*.(A Telephone Advertisement)"(Example 1) In the sentence the word "good-buy" and good-bye has the same pronunciation, thus provokes the association of good-bye to the consumers. The accurate example for the latter case of English pun is "Money does not grow on trees. But it blossoms at our *branches*. (an ad of Lloyd Bank)"(Example 2) The last word "branch" is a pun and has two meanings--- one is correlated to trees in the first sentence meaning "the arm like division of a tree" , while the other is "division and subdivision of a bank". The consumers are informed the message "Their money will increase if they save their money in Lloyd Bank. "

### 3. THE CLASSIFICATION OF ENGLISH PUNS IN ADVERTISEMENTS

As Xu Zhongbing once states in "The Varieties and Translation of English Puns", puns can be roughly divided into two parts. They are named paronomasia and antaclarisis. Paronomasia is the use of two words, which are similar or the same in pronunciation but different in meaning. (see example 1)As for antaclarisis, it refers to a word used twice or more, but each time with a different meaning. (see example 2) If we put its category in detail into discussion, strictly speaking, there are four types of English puns, according to English Writing and Rhetoric written by Professor Wen

<sup>1</sup> School of Foreign language studies, Zhongnan University of Economics and Law. China

\*Received 21 October 2005 ; accepted 5 May 2006

Jun. Prof. Wen believes in paronomasia there are Homophonic Pun(see example 1) and Paronomasia. A typical example of paronomasia is---Drunk drivers often put the **quart** before the **hearse**. (example 3) Here “quart” sounds similar to cart while hearse sounds like “horse”. Quart is a measure for alcohol and hearse is a special vehicle, which is used to carry dead bodies. The double punny senses are conveyed to satirize the drunk drivers who are risking their own lives in drunk driving and remind readers of the importance of driving safely. Prof. Wen also believes there are antaclaclasis and sylleptic puns in Antaclaclasia. Antaclaclasia refers to a word used twice with different meanings.

For example: A **mild** way

Make it a **Mild** Smoke.

Smooth, rich, rewarding.

---Mild (cigarette)

Here “mild” has two meanings with the first meaning “soft, gentle” and the second one is the brand name of a cigarette. A Sylleptic pun is the word used as a pun occurs only once with two or more meanings. ( see example 2)

#### 4. THE FUNCTIONS OF ENGLISH PUNS IN ADVERTISEMENTS

According to English translation theorist Peter Newmark, language has six functions. There are expressive function, informative function, vocative function, aesthetic function, phatic function and metalingual function. While in the advertisements the most distinctive functions are its aesthetic function and vocative function.

##### 4.1 Vocative effect

Vocative function refers to the language function that the readers may take actions to do as the text expects. Advertisements, notices, pronouncements, persuasive articles and even some popular novels have vocative function.

Pun is a witticism involving the playful use of a word in different senses or of words which differ in meanings but sound the same or alike. For advertisements, it's crucial

for them to attract the attention of the consumers and persuade the consumers to buy. While the puns in the ads can have this unique function different from the puns in other literary books. For example:

Ask for **More**. ---More cigarettes

Here, the pun rests on the double meanings of the word “more”. More can be understood as a brand name of cigarettes. It can also refer to more cigarettes of this brand name. The playful use of “more” makes the

advertisement very effective and impressive, so the consumers can be pushed to buy the product.

Another example: Coke refreshes you like no other **can**. ---Coca-Cola

The word can be taken in meaning literally in American English as the aluminum tin used to contain liquid, especially drinks, while it also functions as the modal verb in its homograph. Thus, this advertisement can be interpreted in two ways:

Coke refreshes you like no other can. (can refresh you)

Coke refreshes you like no other (drinks) can (refresh you).

Certainly, advertisements in this way can impress the consumers and persuade them to buy it.

Another example: **Spoil** yourself and not your figure.---diet icecream

Here “spoil” has double meanings. The first spoil means enjoying oneself to heart's content while the second means destroying one's body figure. Anyone who has a good taste but is afraid of getting fat may be happy to eat it.

##### 4.2 Aesthetic function

Aesthetic function refers to the language function that can create a sense of beauty among the readers. The rhythm and tune of the poems, onomatopoeic words and color words, figures of comparison and hyperbole can make the language more vivid and more beautiful, thus the readers can have a pleasant feeling.

The puns in the advertisements can create a sense of beauty in the readers like the other rhetoric language form. Since the puns can create the double images from the aspects of the meaning or the sound, so the readers can enjoy some kind of sensual pleasure and imagination. For example:

Catch the **Raincheetah** and cheat the rain. ---Raincheatah Raincoat

Here, Raincheatah is the brand name for a raincoat with the same pronunciation as raincheater, while raincheater is coined from “windcheater”(wind-proof raincoat ). The readers can imagine they wear Raincheatah and play with the rain. What a beautiful scene!

Another example:

Give your hair a touch of **spring**. ---a kind of Shampoo

Here is an advertisement for a kind of Shampoo with the wonderful picture that after the wash the hair is just like a waterfall, and here spring has another meaning---of elastic quality. Who may want to miss such a good quality of hair?

Another example:

Try our sweet corn, you'll smile from *ear* to *ear*.  
---an ad for a kind of sweet corn

Ear here has double meanings: one is organ of hearing while the other is seed-bearing part of a cereal. Hence, "from ear to ear" means smiling brightly or eating one corn after another. Who can miss the chance

of tasting the corn?

Besides such two main functions of the puns in English advertisements, the puns are popular among the advertisers because of its brief language and rich meanings conveyed as seen from the above examples. Therefore, it's easy to impress the readers and attract their attention to the advertised product.

### REFERENCES

- Fang Fang. 'On Pragmatic and Aesthetic Strategies of the Pun in Advertisement'. *Journal of Jing Gangshan Normal School*, 2004(12).
- Lin Hua. 'The Understanding and Translation Skills of the English Pun in Advertisement[J]'. *Journal of Jiangnan University*, 2004(2).
- Nie Ke. *On Puns and Its Translation*. Postgraduate Thesis of Huazhong Normal school, 2002.
- Wen Jun. *The Dictionary of English Rhetoric[M]*. Chongqing University Press, 1992.
- Xu Zhongbin. 'The Category and Translation of the English Pun[J]'. *Journal of Shanghai Foreign Language Studies University*, 1988(6).
- Xue bin, etc. 'The Pragmatic and Aesthetic Functions of the Pun in Advertisement[J]'. *Foreign Language and Foreign Language Education*, 2000(6).
- Yao Jun. 'A Cognitive Approach to the Pun in Advertising[J]'. *Journal of Sichuan International Studies University*, 2004(5).
- Zhou Hong. 'The Pragmatic Function and the Applying Skill of English Pun in Advertisement[J]'. *Journal of university of Internatioal Relations*, 2005(1).

### THE AUTHOR

**Xiang Ling**, School of Foreign Languages, Zhongnan University of Economics and Law, Wuhan, Hubei, 430074, China