



## A Rhetoric-Based Analysis of Chinese Public Slogans

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### Abstract

The slogan is a special means to spread languages. It employs brief and short words to inspire, appeal or stop people to perform things. In the long history of China, the public slogan once played a significant role under a given historical background. It can be counted as an important approach of propaganda, involving the areas of politics, economy, culture and society, in the modern and contemporary China. Chinese slogans have strong characteristics of the Chinese language. In nearly a decade relevant studies about the type, translation, rhetoric and language features of Chinese public slogans emerge in an endless stream. Unfortunately, most of such studies are performed by scholars in the Chinese linguistic circle; the research which is based on English rhetoric or related theories of stylistics is quite rare. Therefore, in this thesis the author will analyze the stylistic features of Chinese public slogans from the perspective of English semantic features. Through the collected 50 slogans, we can find: (a) syntactically, these slogans are composed of simple words and symmetrical sentences; (b) semantically, these slogans are easy to understand and vary in their language styles; (c) rhetorically, these slogans mainly employ figures of speech, such as parallelism, personification, antithesis, etc..

**Key words:** Slogans; Chinese public slogans; Rhetoric; Stylistics; Semantic features

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### INTRODUCTION

In the long history of China, there is a kind of special culture which develops under a specific historical background and continues to this day. It is written on the highway of cities, the electric pole of suburbs and the dilapidated walls of rural areas. Actually it is the Chinese public slogan.

#### A. Object of the Study

The slogan is a special form of language expression and it is a programmatic as well as evocative sentence which is used to post or publicize. Slogans can be described as an important approach of propaganda in the modern and contemporary Chinese history. They reflect the basic time characteristics at different stages of history and vividly summarize the routes of these historical periods. In this thesis, the author will analyze Chinese public slogans like “Commit to speed, efficiency and quality” (“求速度 讲效率 保质量”) and “We need to protect the forest, because it is the lung of the earth” (“森林是地球的肺 我们要保护森林”). Their basic language characteristics are conciseness and motivation.

#### B. Significance of the Study

In this article, the author will analyze the characteristics of Chinese public slogans from the perspective of English semantic features, which cannot only reveal political, economical and cultural policies of our country in different historical periods, but also reflect the constant improvement of the pragmatic civilization. For instance, in order to make the population growth in coordination with social development, resource utilization and environmental protection, China began to carry out Family Planning Policy in 1970s. Accordingly, the relevant slogans sprung up like mushrooms at the historic moment, such as “If mountain people want to be rich, they must have fewer kids and plant more trees” (“山区人民要想富 少生孩子多种树”) and “We would rather shed blood like water than have more one baby” (“宁

可血流成河 不准超生一个”)。However, these slogans are indifferent in their contents and tough in their tones, lacking humanistic care as well as people-oriented ideas. With the progress of society and economy, gradually, it is not difficult to find that slogans about the Family Planning Policy are added with scientific and environmental factors; meanwhile, their tone of voices become more and more gentle, such as “We need set up the per capita consciousness as well as love the sky and the land” (“爱护天空和大地 人均意识要树立”), “Mother Earth has been overwhelmed” (“地球妈妈太累了 再也擎不起太多的孩子”), “Humans have only one earth, so please leave a piece of space for the future generations” (“人类只有一个地球 为了子孙后代 请留下一片发展空间”), etc..

What is more, for China, a country with abundant slogan culture, the systemic study on slogans is not enough, especially on the aspect of rhetoric and grammar. Out of personal interests, the author starts to pay attention to Chinese slogans and consciously analyzes some relevant materials from the rhetorical angle. Actually, our life is filled with all sorts of language materials, among which the format and the expressing means of languages are also varied. In the specific use of language, therefore, there is an issue about what material we should choose and what technique we should adopt to achieve the best expressing effect. What we have referred above is the rhetorical issue. Rhetoric is a discipline that used to study how to improve methods and techniques of the effect of language expression. It mainly focuses on the function as well as researches what kind of effect can be reflected through various language elements that experienced a comprehensive using. In other words, rhetorical studies of language from the practical point of view.

The writer select common public slogans from our life as objects of the study and analyze the language phenomenon of slogans from the perspective of English rhetoric, expecting to express the semantic features of slogans' language.

### C. Data Collection

The corpus of this thesis is mainly from the following two aspects:

a) A part of corpus is gathered by the writer. Those public slogans are collected in Zhengdong Road, Xuefu Road, a construction site of Zhenjiang, and the campus of Jiangsu University of Zhenjiang.

b) The author also gains some public slogans from the internet mainly on several large websites, such as Sina, Sohu and Baidu.

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## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

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### 1.1 The Definition of Rhetoric

The word “rhetoric” has been defined variably. Following definitions are given by some celebrating scholars. Aristotle, in his *Rhetoric*, gives one of the most

exhausting and definitive introduction and explanation on rhetoric. According to Aristotle (1954), rhetoric is “the ability, in each particular case, to see the available means of persuasion”. He once said that rhetoric is to find out the available means of persuasion in each case. In Francis Bacon's opinion, rhetoric is “a technique making it possible to apply reason to imagination, for the better moving of the will.” In Burke's *A Rhetoric of Motives*, he defines the rhetoric as “the use of language to form attitudes and influence action.” Burke's definition of rhetoric is similar to the traditional definition, but the difference is that he just introduces other features of rhetoric that widen his definition beyond the traditional one. And Scottish rhetorician George Campbell believes that rhetoric is a way of enlightening the understanding; pleasing the imagination; moving the passions or influencing the will.

Apparently, people who live in different times and study different subjects are not so much defining rhetoric as offering their definitions of the angle from which they regard and expressing their respective understanding of it. Their views vary so greatly that it is difficult to give a satisfactory definition of it. Therefore, we should understand rhetoric comprehensively and flexibly.

### 1.2 The Previous Relevant Studies on Slogans

Previous research on slogans falls into two major categories: functional approach and the historical approach. These two approaches will be examined in sequence in this section.

#### 1.2.1 Functional Approach

The slogan is a kind of cultural phenomenon in the world, but it performs prosperously in China. Slogans are enduring, mainly because they play necessary social functions.

As far as the functions of language are concerned, there are seven practical functions according to Linguistics: A Course Book (Hu, 2001). The functions are: informative, interpersonal, performance, emotive, phatic, recreational and multilingual function respectively. As slogans are one form of languages, they also perform the same functions; there are mainly four functions which are informance function, interpersonal function, performative function and emotive function performed by slogan (Wang, 2009). The author of *A Probe into Chinese-English Slogan Translation from the perspective of Variation*, similarly, tries to classify slogans into three text-categories according to their different language functions (Tang, 2007). They are respectively the expressive slogan, the informative slogan as well as the vocative slogan.

However, a scholar concludes slogans' three functions at the political level which is goal-oriented functions, social education functions and incentive functions (Han, 2008). In his opinion, the main function of Chinese political slogans is to attract the attention of social groups, to inspire the emotion of the public and to guide people

to specific goals. In 2012, a published thesis researches those slogans which are in the period of the Long March. The author believes that catchphrases of that historical period greatly inspire the fighting and revolutionary spirits of the Red army, but also constitute a powerful attack of public voice and physical impact on those enemies (Tian, 2012). While, in the modern time, Chinese slogans are endowed with functions of carrying forward spirits, enlightening thought, standardizing management, releasing emotions, etc.. (Wang, 2010) In his book, he conducts a deep, systemic and comprehensive research on Chinese slogans.

### 1.2.2 Historical Approach

Slogans have a long history. In China, they can be traced back to the ancient Xia dynasty and develop to their peak at the period of Cultural Revolution. With the development of the time, the slogan, accordingly, can be given era characteristics. Therefore, it offers an opportunity for a great number of scholars who can research slogans from the perspective of historical development.

The historical study of slogans, for one thing, is to collect and collate famous slogans in the history of China with classification; for another, is to analyze classical slogans in the history according to the historical and social background at that time (Xiang, 2008). He points out that every slogan is the microfilm of the history and the era. Similarly, some scholars also conduct a historical study of slogans, for example, slogans can witness the development of histories (Zhou, 2003). Originally, slogans have been employed in political fields; since reform and opening up, the theme of slogans has turned to economical areas; with the progress of times and the diversity of social life, the contents of slogans have involved politics, economy, social culture, physical areas and many other fields. Being different with the above results, slogans are the important carrier and presentation of our Chinese Communist Party's history and culture (Wang, 2013).

## 2. ANALYSIS OF THE SEMANTIC FEATURES OF CHINESE PUBLIC SLOGANS

### 2.1 Analogy

Analogy is one of the commonest figures of speech in English. Its main function is to draw sharp pictures in the mind through comparisons, to give deeper insight into things, persons and ideas through suggestive association, or to explain abstract, complicated ideas in simple, concrete imagery. Generally, analogy can be divided into three types which are respectively simile, metaphor and metonymy.

Metaphor and metonymy are mostly employed in Chinese slogans.

### 2.1.1 Metaphor

The word "metaphor" comes from the Greek word "metaphora", which means "transference, carrying over". It is a very common figure of speech in English. Metaphor uses words to indicate something different from their literal meaning—one thing is described in terms of another so as to suggest a likeness or analogy between them. Usually, metaphor uses words like "be", "become", "equal" to connect its noumenon and vehicle. Let us analyze the following slogans.

(1) "The safety helmet is the protective treasure which we need to wear well before working"

(“安全帽是护身宝 上班之前要戴好”)

(2) "Time is money, efficiency is life"

(“时间就是金钱 效率就是生命”)

Try to analyze the first example, in which the noumenon is "safety helmet"("安全帽"), the vehicle is respectively "protective treasure"("护身宝") and the figurative word is "is"("是"). This slogan compares the helmet to the treasure that can protect us, which underlines the importance of the helmet to our life and safety. Meanwhile, this metaphor performs an important function in reminding workers to wear their helmets before operating. It can arouse people's safety awareness.

In the second example, the noumenons are "time"("时间"), "efficiency"("效率"), the metaphorical objects are "money"("金钱"), "life"("生命") and the figurative word is "is"("是"). In 1982 people of Shenzhen firstly put forward this catchword displaying the fast pace of social life with the development of commodity economy.

### 2.1.2 Metonymy

The word "metonymy" derives from the Greek word "metonymia", which means "change of name". As a figure of speech, metonymy is very common in everyday language. Like metaphor, it is a figurative use of language, involving the substitution of the name of one thing for that of another. Unlike metaphor, the ground of the substitution in metonymy is not similarity but association, in other words, the two unlike things do not have common quality but are closely associated. When we speak of one, the other will come up to our mind. The following is some of the examples in common use.

(3) "No matter white cats or black cats which can catch mice are good ones"

(“不管白猫黑猫 捉住老鼠就是好猫”)

(4) "Market regulation and government regulation are both important"

(“两手抓 两手都要硬”)

Taking the third slogan as an example, in this slogan, the metaphorical object is "white cats and black cats"("白猫黑猫"). In 1960s, the national economy was in the period of adjustment. As to how to develop the economy, there were lots of views and practices. In some places

people carried out the people's commune ownership, while in other places people regarded the production brigade as the economic accounting unit. According to different regions with distinct patterns of economic development, Deng Xiaoping came up with "Theory of a Cat" where he compared "white cats and black cats" ("白猫黑猫") into various forms of production, which vividly illustrated that we should not be constrained by production form, but we should develop productivity with multiple production form.

This figure of speech—metonymy applied in this slogan makes the abstract and complicated thing become vivid and simple to be understood.

## 2.2 Personification

Personification is a figure of speech which attributes human characteristics to impersonal things, such as animals, inanimate objects, or abstractions. Public slogans often use personification. For example,

(5) "The grass is sleeping, please do not disturb it"

(“小草正睡觉 请您勿打扰”)

(6) "The equipment is very angry and the consequence is quite serious."

(“设备很‘生气’ 后果很严重”)

Personification is usually employed to add vividness to expression. The authors of these slogans endow life to the equipment and the grassland. Although these expressions seem to be illogical, it is quite fantastic just because of its anti-logic. Such slogans persuade or remind with a friendly tone, which replaces the previous simple warning signs with humanized persuasion and communication. The tone of voice is kind and civilized making the public accept exhortation in sensibly in a good mood.

## 2.3 Parody

The word "parody" derives from the Greek word "parodia", meaning "counter-song". It is regarded as a kind of imitation which borrows the style and techniques of a text or writer's idiolect and fits new subject matter to it. It is often used for humorous or satirical purpose. Parody can be divided into word-phrase parody, sentence parody, poem parody and tone parody. In the following part I will discuss the sentence parodies that are utilized in Chinese slogans. For example,

(7) "I hate driving without licenses, which has no technical content"

(“我最讨厌无证驾驶 一点技术含量都没有”)

(8) "Everybody is responsible for environmental protection"

(“环境保护 人人有责”)

Example (7) appeared on a billboard in the Shenyang youth Avenue street. As far as we see this slogan, we may know immediately that it imitated the classical lines in the movie *A World without Thieves* directed by

Feng Xiaogang—"I hate robbery which has no technical content" ("我最讨厌打劫, 一点技术含量都没有") This slogan not only sounds fashionable as well as easy to be remembered and accepted, but also carries with the element of humor.

Example (8) imitates "Everybody is responsible for national rise and fall" ("国家兴亡 匹夫有责"). The slogan of such structure—"Everybody is responsible for XXX" ("XXX 人人有责") once can be seen everywhere, such as "Everybody is responsible for compulsory education" ("义务教育 人人有责"), "Everybody is responsible for Family planning" ("计划生育 人人有责"), "Everybody is responsible for taxation" ("依法纳税 人人有责") and so forth.

With parody, the imitation is not very strict. It resembles its source just in part. It adopts the form of the source and fills into it with new meaning by changing some original words. Parody can be used for various purposes: For mocking, satire, humor and comic, which make it impressive; therefore, it is widely used in conversation, literature, newspaper, and slogan.

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## CONCLUSION

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The public slogan represents the image of a city, an area, or even a whole country. It is a kind of typical social language phenomenon which involves every aspect of the social life and reflects the politics, economy and cultural life of our society as well as the spirit of a city. Studying these typical social terms not only advances the science of language, but also promotes the development of social practice.

In this thesis, we analyze the collected corpus from the angle of rhetoric, mainly focusing on the analysis of semantic features of Chinese public slogans in order to explore and analyze the use of figures of speech in these slogans as well as master the degree of contemporary China's language civilization.

From these analyses, we can find that a great number of slogans in daily life employ the English rhetoric, which makes those slogans give full play to the features and advantages of the Chinese language. Semantically, those public slogans which apply metaphor, personification, parody are vivid and humorous; meanwhile, they are easy to understand and vary in their language styles. For instance, the most common sign on the lawn "The grass is sleeping, please do not disturb it" ("小草正睡觉 请您勿打扰") endow life to the grassland through the expression that the grass is sleeping. Actually, it wants to remind people not to trample on the lawn with a friendly tone.

This study offers a reference for the new slogans' drafting. The basic characteristic of slogans is concise and motivational. To reach the conciseness of language, we must pay attention to the choice of words, sentence

patterns and rhetorical devices. This research analyzes the syntactic and semantic features of Chinese slogans from the perspective of English rhetoric, which supports a direction for the writing of slogans in applying rhetoric.

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