

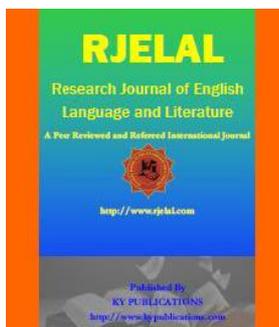


INTERPERSONAL INTERPRETATION OF PERSONAL PRONOUNS IN MARRIAGE ADVERTISING

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ABSTRACT

Interpersonal function is one of the three meta-functions in linguistics. It mainly serves to establish and maintain relations with the speaker and the hearer. Based on fifty pieces of collected data, the present paper aims to explore the interpersonal function in marriage advertising texts, one popular type of advertising nowadays. This paper lays its attention on the personal pronouns used in the data, and describes the interpersonal meaning manifested by personal pronouns. By both quantitative and qualitative studies, the paper finds that personal pronouns are largely used in marriage advertising texts and contribute to the realization of interpersonal meaning.

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, a newly-emerged type of advertising, marriage advertisement, has become prevalent and caused a lot of discussion. This prevalence is mainly due to the current urgent social phenomenon or problem that the number of unmarried boys and girls is getting larger and larger; meanwhile, they are more inclined to use the medium of advertising to find their future life partners. Marriage advertising has unique language style which deserves our attention.

It is safe to say that any kinds of language are used to express the speaker/writer's identity, status, attitude, judgment, motivation, etc., to interact and establish certain relationship with the

listener/reader, and to influence the listener/reader's attitude and behavior as well. Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides a theoretical foundation to study advertising language. According to Halliday, language is seen as a product of people's social interaction, and undertakes various language functions, namely, ideational, interpersonal and textual meta-function. Interpersonal function is regarded as the most important component of meta-functions by Halliday. This function mainly serves to describe the dynamic relationship between speakers and hearers (Halliday, 1994). So far, interpersonal function has been warmly discussed in linguistics field.

Advertising texts have been noticed and studied by people from various perspectives, e.g. from the perspectives of sociolinguistics, of cross-culture, and of stylistics and aesthetics, etc (Yang Yonghe, 2005). The study of advertising within the framework of SFL remains a potential prospect. In the present research, the author has conducted a wide and intensive range of reading and gained a deep understanding of the connection between marriage advertising and interpersonal function. This paper intends to analyze the language features in marriage advertising, which focuses on the use of personal pronouns, in the hope of discovering the interpersonal meanings of personal pronouns used in marriage advertisements.

II. Previous Studies on Marriage Advertising

The word “advertise” originated from the Latin word “advertere”, which meant to catch people’s attention and interest, to inform people of something, and to stimulate their actions. In the modern times, “advertising” refers to a series of dynamic activity relating to products or services promotion (Lin Yueteng, 2009).

Generally speaking, advertising is categorized into two types: commercial advertising and noncommercial advertising. Based on different purposes and contents, noncommercial advertising can be divided into certain subtypes of texts, such as political advertising, public service advertising (Vestergaard, T & Schroder, K., 1985). Marriage advertising belongs to noncommercial advertising texts, which aims to satisfy certain purposes and the interest of a single person or a particular group through the public media. This type of advertising has become very prevalent in recent days, which meet the need of unmarried boys and girls who are more inclined to seek their life partners through media, like newspapers or T.V. programs.

Marriage advertisements are a special type of discourse, and its language features have attracted a great deal of attention and interest from linguists. For example, Lin (2009) analyzed some English mate-seeking advertisements from the English cultural context, discussing the mutual interaction between culture and language as well as the relevant cultural influence on advertising language. Similarly, Wen (2010) and Shi (2008) also discussed

cultural factors in their studies, and both of them conducted comparative studies on cultural values reflected in Chinese and English advertisements respectively. Xin (2008) gave the research from the perspective of social behavior of spouse-seeking advertising, in which she mainly analyzed the value and influence of the advertising discourse, the relationship between the advertiser and the readers. In her paper, Feng (2007) applied Register Theory to analyze the language features in marriage advertisements from several aspects, like the selection of words, grammar, syntax structures and the methods of cohesion. Moreover, Cai’s (2004) and Yang’s (2005) research were conducted from genre-based and stylistic perspective.

The prevalence of marriage advertising reflects certain social and cultural phenomena, and also indicates people’s current thinking, values and pursuit in respect of marriage. It is worthy of our attention and research.

III. Previous Studies on Interpersonal Function

Interpersonal function is one of meta-functions in linguistics, recognized by Halliday and regarded as the most prevalent and general categories of the functional orientation of language.

Interpersonal function is when “we use language to interact with other people, to establish and maintain relations with them, to influence their behavior, to express our own viewpoint on things in the world, and to elicit or change theirs” (Thompson, 2000: 28). It is through this function that the speaker introduces him/herself into the context of situation and expresses his/her identity, status, attitudes, motivation and judgments. In this way they can even influence or change the hearers’ attitudes and behavior to build up and maintain a certain relationship with the participants involved (Halliday, 1987). Halliday (1987) emphasized that interpersonal function is concerned with both the exchange of information in a communication event and the dynamic social relations among participants.

According to Zhu (2005), the interpersonal function consists of two parts: the interactional function and the affective function. The interactional part expresses “the speech-defined role relationship” and the affective component

describes “the speaker’s emotions, judgment and attitudes”.

The analysis of interpersonal function started a long time ago. Jakobson (1970) identified six functions of language. Of these the emotive function and the phatic function are mainly interpreted interpersonally. Through the emotive function, language is used to express the speaker’s attitudes, feelings, and emotions towards what he/she is talking about. And it is by the phatic function that people can start or stop a communication, attract the hearer’s attention, or build up and maintain social relationships with others. Even though Jakobson did not categorize these two functions as interpersonal function directly, it is safe to say that they share common characteristics and are basically the same only with different terms.

Sperber & Wilson (1995) in Relevance Theory mentioned that the amount of information people get is relevant to the degree of their effort in understanding others’ intended meaning. In respect of interactive relations of participants, they emphasized the efficiency principle or law of least effort to explain the interpersonal meaning in communication.

The studies on interpersonal function in China are also prolific, and many scholars have brought new ideas to this theory and enriched its scope. Li has made great contributions to the theory of interpersonal function. In her book (2002) *The Analysis of the Interpersonal Meaning of Discourse*, she presented a detailed explanation of interpersonal meaning through various resources from micro-linguistic and macro-linguistic levels. She put forward her statement of the two-layer model and the three basic elements of interpersonal function. At the same time, Zhu (2005) mentioned that besides mood and modality, the pronoun system, different address forms, and attitudinal lexis (n. adj. adv.) are all potentially contribute to the realization of interpersonal function. Hu and al. (2011) made a great step forward in their analysis of interpersonal meaning of language. They did not confine their research to the English language alone; instead, they took Chinese into consideration and stimulated a great deal of other studies, which have

greatly enlightened the study of the Chinese language.

All mentioned above are just parts of the great achievements in the study of interpersonal function. However, here in this paper, we mainly apply Halliday’s meta-function theory as the theoretical foundation to interpret the interpersonal meaning of language resources, esp., personal pronouns in our marriage advertising texts.

IV. Data Studies

4.1 Objective

In this section, the author describes the interpersonal meaning of the personal pronouns used in marriage advertising, and intends to prove that the use of personal pronouns contributes to the realization of interpersonal function in marriage advertising.

4.2 Methodology and Data Collection

The present research is a both quantitative and qualitative study based on a corpus of marriage advertisements, mainly about Western people (Americans and Europeans), which are mainly collected from the websites, http://www.24luv.com/find_Petapa_marriage-personal-ads.html 2011. 8.6 and https://www.asiandating.com/en/registration/show_step1 2011.2.12, including advertising about men seeking women as well as ones about women seeking men. Altogether, fifty pieces of marriage personal advertisements are used for data studies. These advertising texts are chosen carefully as the representatives in this field of mate-seeking advertising.

The study lays emphasis on the language features of advertising texts in written form, and thus other factors, such as related illustrations, pictures, personal photos, images and sound are not considered.

4.3 Data Analysis

Personal pronoun system, in traditional grammar, usually consists of three pronouns both in pronoun form and in possessive form: I (we, us, me, my, our, mine, ours), you (you, your, yours), he/she/it (they, them, him, her, his, hers, it, its) in English. Each personal pronoun refers to a specific individual or group, either speaking, spoken to, or spoken of (Cai Cuiyun, 2004) or, to be exact, the first

person pronoun *I/we* refer(s) to the person speaking; the pronoun *you* means the person spoken to and the third person pronoun *she/they/it* indicates person(s) or something spoken of.

According to Halliday (1994), the pronoun system is one of the major resources with interpersonal meaning, which is represented by both pronouns and possessives, since the person system has the effect of efficiently involving the listener into the current situation, directly appealing to his/her interests and emotions, knowledge, even in monologue contexts like advertising texts (Hu Shuzhong, 2005). Thus by proper using of personal

pronouns, the writer can shorten the distance with the readers and create a close relationship with the readers.

4.3.1 Distribution of Personal Pronouns

With the aid of the computer, the author calculated the frequency of personal pronouns in the collected data and found that personal pronouns are widely applied in marriage advertisements. They are scattered in the texts and used together sometimes. The following is the distribution of personal pronouns in marriage advertisements.

Table 1 Distribution of Personal Pronouns

Personal system	Example	Frequency	Proportion
The first person pronouns	I/ME/MY/MINE	89	58.2%
	WE/US/OUR	11	7.2%
The second person pronouns	YOU/ YOUR	43	28.1%
The third person pronouns	SHE/ HE	10	6.5%
Total		153	100%

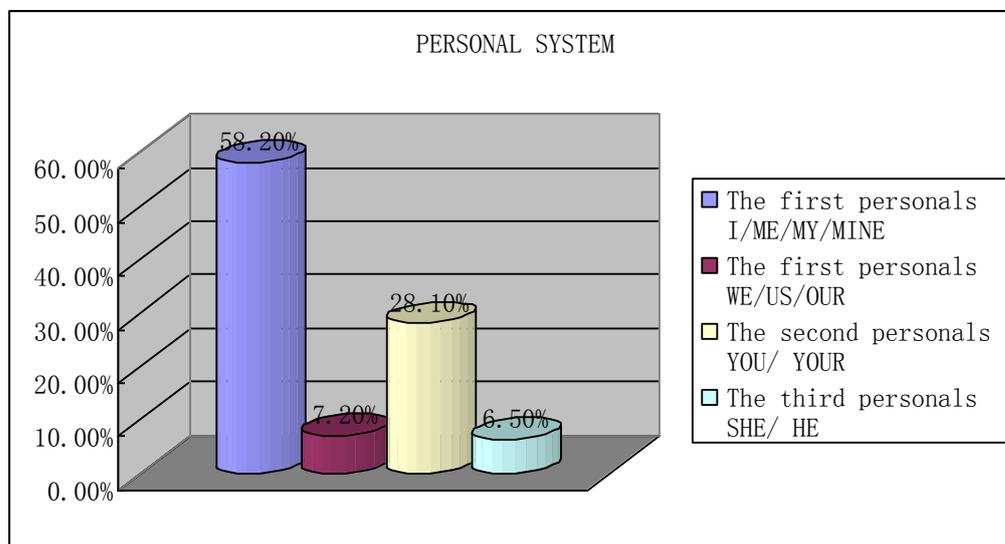


Figure 1 Distribution of Personal Pronouns

From Table 1 and Figure 1, we see that there are two kinds of major personals in the present data: the first and second type, accounting for more than 65% and 28% respectively, while the third personals are sparsely applied with only 10 items available in our collected data. More specifically, *I* and *you* have taken the larger part of the proportion

and are the representatives among all the personal pronouns.

4.3.2 Samples' Analysis

This section mainly analyzes the first and second personal expressions, *I*, *we* and *you* in particular to explore how they establish the interpersonal relationship between the advertiser and the readers

or the potential customers in order to achieve active and successful interaction between them.

4.3.2.1 The First Personal Pronouns ---I, We

Usually, the first personals refer to *I, we*, corresponding to *me, my, us, our*, etc. They can be used to mean either advertisers/writers, or customers, or both advertisers and customers together. While, different from other texts, the first personals in our advertising texts are mainly represented by “*I*” and “*me*”, simply indicating the advertiser him/herself. For example:

1. Mature, loving, caring, honest person, is ready for a fresh, unprecedented, and everlasting relationship. *I* love traveling all over the world to do something important to *my* country. *I* expect *my* perfect match to look good, mature, having great enthusiasm to flourish *our* love life. *We* will have one common interest in this world. *I* want someone that will also care for *me* and someone that *I* can spend the rest of *my* life with. *I* want the real woman of *my* life.
2. What do *I* say? *I*'m kind, caring, easy going, open minded, honest, loyal understanding. What *I*'m looking for is a gracious lady that likes dancing, comedy club, picnics, bicycle riding, cuddling. More information will be added later on if *we* get contact with.

In these two examples, the first pronoun *I/me/my* refers to the advertiser alone. Through the use of first personals, the advertisers can freely and directly describe themselves and express their thinking, emotions, wishes, etc. from their own standpoint. So the information they provide is much more precise and much closer to what they really are and what kind of person they are really seeking. It is beneficial for the readers to know them well and decide whether they'd like to have contact with the advertiser or not. In addition, with the first personals, the advertisers directly express their willingness or eagerness to communicate with their readers, which can help shorten the social and psychological distance between the advertiser and the readers, and help

establish a harmonious relationship between them.

Moreover, there are some other examples of using plural forms of the first personals: *we/our* in mate-seeking advertisements. They usually refer to the combination of the advertiser and the readers in those special texts. Even though they are not often used in our data, still they exert a great influence on the interpersonal meaning of advertisements.

3. Pretty, vivacious entrepreneur, 43 ISO smart, stable (bordering dull), active D/SWM in San Francisco who likes humor. If you visit S.F. often, could **we** enjoy the city and the nature? Live in S.F. OK, too.
4. An handsome author/TV producer----DWM, aged 42, athletic, emotionally/financially secure, nonsmoker, diverse interests, including sailing, beach...Let's test the chemistry.
5. Hi Dear, Compliments to you and I hope you are doing great...Can **we** be friends?...

The personals *we/us* above refer to both the advertiser and the reader. When reading these advertisements, the reader immediately feels a sense of belonging; on the other hand, by utilizing those personals, the advertiser and the reader seem to have established a much more intimate relationship and are conducting a face-to-face conversation. And thus it is advantageous for the advertiser to reduce the distance between him/her and the reader, and also beneficial to create a friendly and comfortable atmosphere to carry on their interaction.

4.3.2.2 The Second Personal Pronouns – You (singular), You (plural)

In the advertisements we selected, the second pronoun *you* usually refer to the addressee, or the potential customer directly. It has the effect of creating dialogic atmosphere and activating the mode of oral communication, making the existence of the reader explicit, and getting the involvement of the addressee in the current situation immediately.

6. Hey cowboy----- Are **you** 40-55, divorced and new to the personals? Good.

Are **you** a lovely, down-to-earth guy with good looks, great body, a sense of humor and a taste for adventure? Great! A pretty, creative little DWF, cool, fit and old enough to know how, wants to meet **you**. Show me there's one fun grown-up guy in Washington. Send photo and note.

7. It's time for **you** to put **your** suits and briefcase in the closet, grab **your** tennis racquet, running shoes, passport. Very attractive DWF, well-educated, caring, classy, ISO man cherishing friendship, love for life partner.

The purpose of the advertisers is to convey information to the readers through, for example, leisure talk between two friends. The application of the second pronoun *you* helps create a comfortable environment for people to communicate and exert a powerful influence on the reader. We find that in our advertisements, the advertiser does not refer to someone specific, and anyone who is reading it could be the actual *you*, so this pronoun leaves greater chances of making contact with many more readers. On the one hand, the pronoun *you* is addressee-oriented, and it is efficient to make the readers unconsciously identify themselves as the *you* in the advertising texts, stimulate them willingly to cast their attention into the contents of the texts and get involved in the current situation. Thus a sense of familiarity will be elicited. On the other hand, it can help shorten the psychological distance between the advertiser and the reader, and promote the establishment of their harmonious relationship.

By the utilization of second personals, the advertiser successfully creates the communicative activity, in which the advertiser can have a face-to-face talk with the reader. This leaves the reader with a strong impression of intimacy, sincerity and friendliness on the part of the advertiser, which can make them even more willingly play an active role in the interactive activity.

4.3.2.3 The Third Personal Pronouns ---He/She

The third pronouns are not frequently used here, but they also contribute to the realization of interpersonal relationship between the advertiser and the reader.

8. A Californian bachelor needs a wife. **He** is nice looking, 5 feet 11 inches tall, and is in good shape. **He** is easy going, and **he** has a good job but no family. **He** wants a sweet, pretty, trim gal to share **his** home in the redwoods, which is near Pacific, under sunny skies. Please write to..., and your photo is appreciated.
9. I am sincere, good natured, supportive and want to be in a relationship that lasts. Seeking a woman who will be sincere, realistic and have no hidden agendas. **She** believes in being committed to the relationship.

In other advertising texts, the third personals usually refer to the products or services; while in marriage advertising texts, they may mean different referents, e.g. either the advertiser or the reader. For example, the third personals in example 8) refer to the advertiser himself; the ones in example 9) refer to the ideal life partner the advertiser is seeking.

Even if the use of the third person pronoun is not popular in this type of texts, still we can see the unexpected effect on the personal relationship. It seems that the advertiser is the third party to give the information or to make the comments. This way of expression creates an objective tone of describing, and thus it is more persuasive.

4.4 DISCUSSION

From the above analysis, we can see that the interpersonal meaning in marriage advertising texts is mainly realized through the first and second personal pronouns. The application of the first personal mainly results from this special type of advertisement, in which the advertiser is the particular product desired to be promoted, so accurate and detailed personal information is supposed to be provided by the advertisers themselves from the first person point of view. The second personals refer to the potential customer, with the effect of catching people's attention and

establishing a certain relationship between the advertiser and the potential customer. At the same time, the combined employment of the first and second personals has the function to change the one-way monologue text into a two-way communication, like the examples 3) and 5). This method enhances the convenience for message transmission and strengthens the power of reasoning which is much more persuasive to the readers' involvement. The third personals appear in a small number and however, they can create a much more objective effect on the text and exert a strong persuasive impact on the readers. In a word, the person system manifests the interpersonal feature of the advertising texts, and also conveys a strong sense of interaction and solidarity.

CONCLUSION

By examining the distribution of personal pronouns in marriage advertisements, it is found that personal pronouns are frequently used here. The person system is an important resource for the manifestation of interpersonal relations. By samples' analysis, we find that the first personal pronouns and second personal pronouns make up the majority in texts. The first personal pronouns provide information from the first person's point of view, making the personal information much more accurate and detailed; the second personal pronouns make the readers involved in the current situation, and identify themselves with the YOU in the texts. An intimate relationship between the advertiser and the reader is expected to establish. As for the third personal pronouns, although they are not popular here, they also play an important role in realizing interpersonal meaning. They help the advertisers set up an image of being objective and make the information or comments more convincing.

In conclusion, the personal system greatly influences the relation of the advertiser and the reader, and helps to achieve the interpersonal meaning in marriage advertisements.

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