A Cognitive Study on Slogans in Public Service Advertisements from the Perspective of Conceptual Blending Theory

Ran Wang, Xiuwen Li*

Institute of Foreign Languages, Changchun University of Technology, Changchun, Jilin, China
*Corresponding Author.

Abstract: As an important communication medium for conveying social values and guiding public behavior, public service advertisements play an active role today, and have a far-reaching impact on the dissemination of culture and the guidance of people's thoughts. Conceptual blending theory, as one of the important theories in the field of cognitive linguistics, has strong persuasive and explanatory power on cognitive activities. Therefore, this paper analyzes in-depth the meaning construction process of public service advertisements' slogans by taking the four network models of conceptual blending theory as the theoretical basis. The study aims to uncover how public service advertisements shape the audience's cognition and attitudes through the promotional language, offering valuable insights for future research and practices in the field of public service advertisements.

Keywords: Conceptual Blending Theory; Public Service Advertisements; Slogans

1. Introduction

Nowadays, advertisements have permeated every aspect of daily lives. From outdoor advertisements on the roadside to commercial advertisements on TV stations, advertisements can be found everywhere. However, according to the functions and purposes of advertisements, Robert Ellen Pearson divided them into commercial advertisements and public service advertisements [1]. Commercial advertisements serve the purpose of promoting products and services for commercial interests, primarily aiming to inform individuals about products and inspire them to make purchases [2]. Generally speaking, these advertisements often achieve their sales goals through various marketing strategies, including attention-grabbing visual effects, engaging storylines, and so on. Unlike commercial advertisements, public service advertisements focus on the positive impact on people and the world rather than not aiming to sell products or services [3]. The themes of public service advertisements usually involve social issues such as environmental protection, safety awareness, humanitarianism, and animal protection so on. In this form, public service advertisements target to guide people to adopt proper behavior and encourage them to participate and help others [4]. Overall, public service advertisements aim to raise awareness of social issues, hoping to steer people's attention towards improving the world [5].

With the development of society and improvement of material living standards, there is a growing inclination to pursue a rich spiritual life among individuals. As an integral component of societal public welfare, public service advertisements bear significant social responsibilities and play a crucial role in the construction of spiritual civilization. Conceptual blending theory provides us with a powerful theoretical tool, enabling a more comprehensive analysis of the cognitive processes in the slogans of public service advertisements [6]. Therefore, this paper utilizes four conceptual blending networks to thoroughly investigate the cognitive mechanisms and meaning construction processes, aiming to provide valuable insights for the future development of public service advertisements.

2. Conceptual Blending Theory

Fauconnier, an American linguist, proposed the concept of mental space. He suggested that understanding the meaning of language requires studying the cognitive domains, and those domains are formed by individuals during extended periods of conversation or listening [7]. Fauconnier and Turner further put forward conceptual blending theory, which provides a powerful explanation for human

innovative thinking and new concept domain [8]. The conceptual blending theory refers to a mental space network structured by the audience's background knowledge. According to Fauconnier and Turnner, a complete conceptual blending network consists of four mental spaces: Input I_1, Input I_2, and generic space and blend space [9]. The relationship of the four mental spaces is shown in Figure 1.
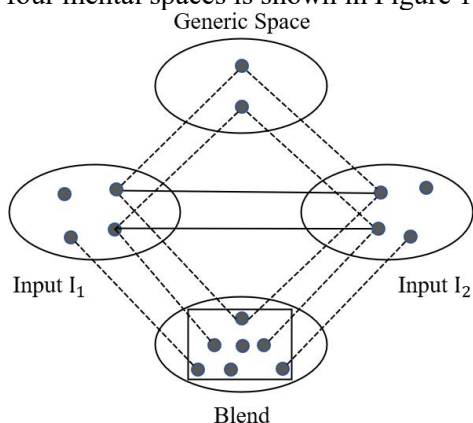

Figure 1. Conceptual Blending Network

The four circles in Figure1 represent the four mental spaces, the dots in the circles represent the elements in the mental spaces, the solid line represents the cross-space mapping between the two input spaces, and the dashed line represents the mapping relationship between the two input spaces, that is, the generic space and the blend space. The model aims to reveal the mapping process of natural language meaning construction and interconnection of mental spaces [10]. In conclusion, the conceptual blending theory not only emphasizes the role of context, but also reveals the dynamics of the meaning construction process from the basic spatial structure, which has a strong persuasive and explanatory power for the dynamic, random, and fuzzy thinking and cognitive activities.

Therefore, this paper conducts an in-depth analysis of the meaning construction process and cognitive mechanisms of public service advertisements' slogan based on conceptual blending theory. First, representative public service advertisements from the China Public Service Advertisements Network are selected as the subjects of the study. Then, four types of conceptual blending network models are conducted to analyze the construction and expression of public service advertisement

language, which provides valuable insights for effective communication with the audience.

3. Cognitive Study on Slogans in Public Service Advertisements from the Perspective of Conceptual Blending Theory

Conceptual blending networks play a crucial role in the context of public service advertisements' slogans. Therefore, in this section, four specific conceptual blending network models will serve as fundamental research tools for a comprehensive analysis of the inherent meaning's cognitive deduction process in public service advertising slogans.

3.1 Cognitive Interpretation in the Simplex Network and Public Service Advertising Slogans

The simplex network is the most straightforward form within the conceptual blending networks, which consists of Input I_1, Input I_2, and the blend space. Notably, Input I_1 encompasses specific frameworks and elements of the advertising slogan, while Input I_2 provides only elements for the blending process without the specific organizational frameworks. The connection between the two input spaces is facilitated through cross-space mapping, with elements from Input I_2 populating the specific frameworks of Input I_1. By engaging in composition, completion, and elaboration, conversational meanings emerge within the blend space.

Example 1: Speak Mandarin well and have close friends all over China.

This public service advertisement advocates for the widespread application of Mandarin. In this instance, Input I_1 serves to establish an organizational framework and introduces the commonly used term "friends", while Input I_2 functions as a specific element that fills this framework with the meaning of "understanding what is said". With the establishment of knowledge frameworks in two input spaces, information is introduced selectively into the blend space, thereby activating the entire conceptual blending network.

China, as a country with a diverse population of multiple ethnicities and languages, finds it necessary for people from various regions and ethnic groups to use collectively a common language. This measure is essential to facilitate

easier communication, strengthen national cohesion, and cultivate a sense of centripetal force and identity towards the country. Therefore, "friends" becomes a pivotal junction for merging information from both the input spaces in the blend space. Within the cognitive framework, the public's initial understanding of "friends" is contextualized culturally and cognitively, ultimately giving rise to the innovative meaning that mastering standard Mandarin enables normal communication with people from various places and ethnic groups in China. This proficiency allows individuals to comprehend each other's speech, achieving mutual understanding and conveying identical meanings. The conceptual blending process is illustrated in Figure 2 below.
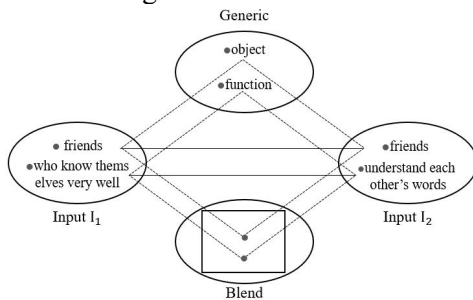

Figure 2. Simplex Network Analysis Chart

Through a thorough analysis of this public service advertisement, the study gains a clearer insight into how these advertisements influence audience's cognition and attitudes through the conceptual blending process. Particularly, in the context of promoting the widespread use of Mandarin, conceptual blending theory can guide people to form new perceptions of the importance of language. This further highlights the positive role of public service advertisements in societal and cultural communication.

3.2 Cognitive Interpretation in the Mirror Network and Public Service Advertising Slogans

In the mirror network, the generic space and the blend space share an identical organizational framework, outlining the nature of events, activities, and participants involved. It can be said that the two input spaces act as mirror images of each other while albeit potential differences at a more specific level. Within the blend space, the shared organizational framework incorporates a more elaborate structure exclusive to the blend space

itself. In the mirror network, the two input spaces do not conflict due to the shared organizational framework. However, conflicts may arise at more specific levels below the framework level. These conflicts can be addressed in two ways: by projecting only one conflicting element into the blend space, or by projecting all conflicting elements as independent entities into the blend space.

Example 2: A kiss is sweet, a kiss from a car is bitter.

In this traffic safety public service advertisement, the phrase "A kiss is sweet, a kiss from a car is bitter" demonstrates the distinctive features of a mirror network through a clever expression. The advertisement comprises two input spaces, where input I_1 conveys the first sentence "A kiss is sweet", and input I_2 conveys the second sentence "A kiss from a car is bitter". At first glance, these two sentences seem completely unrelated. One involves "kissing between individuals", while the other pertains to "collisions between vehicles". However, upon closer examination, it becomes apparent that the two input spaces share a common organizing framework: "someone's kisses evoke a sense of sweetness," and the other, "car's kisses evoke a sense of bitterness."

Primarily, the two input spaces leverage a shared organizing framework. Specifically, "what someone (or something) does (or changes) through someone (or something)", establishing a cross-space mapping. This mapping facilitates a connection between a kiss between people and a collision between cars. Despite their surface-level dissimilarity, the core cross-space mapping is delineated in the generic space, serving as a common ground that links the two seemingly unrelated concepts. This similarity forms a bridge for the connection of the two input spaces and lays the foundation for the blending process, as illustrated in Figure 3.
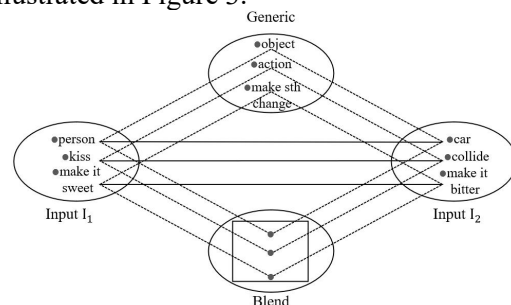

Figure 3. Mirror Network Analysis Chart

Based on the preceding analysis, it can be deduced that the public service advertisement has effectively embodied the characteristics of a mirror network. This is achieved through the incorporation of a common organizational framework, cross-space mapping, and a shared syntax. These elements not only prompt profound reflections for the viewers, but also establish a robust foundation for network integration.

3.3 Cognitive Interpretation in the Single-scope Network and Public Service Advertising Slogans

The two input spaces possess distinct organizational frameworks. Yet in the blend space, only one of these frameworks is projected as the organizing frame, while the other serves as the focal point for interpretation. The input space contributing the organizational framework to the blend space is termed the "source domain", whereas the input space that is the primary focus of interpretation is referred to as the "target domain". The defining attribute lies in extending the organizational framework of the blend space, rather than extending from another input space. Consequently, one of the most conspicuous characteristics of single-scope network is the uneven operation of their conceptual blending.

Example 3: Blood, the source of life and the bridge of friendship.

In this public service advertisement advocating blood donation, the significance of blood is succinctly and profoundly conveyed, likening it to a source of life and a bridge of friendship. While the advertisement may not be complex to comprehend, the public's cognitive process engages in constant activation and integration of concepts as it reflects on its meaning.

Initially, the advertisement incorporates two input spaces: the event frame of "blood donation" and the role frame of "source" and "bridge." Within these input spaces, information is selectively projected into the blend space for integration. It's noteworthy that the organizational structure of Input I_2, specifically the structure of "things in action" (e.g., bridges connecting two places), becomes the operational framework in the blend space. However, other aspects of "blood donation," such as its benefits, precautions, and rights, are not cross-space mapped and remain absent in the blend space.

Furthermore, the blend space assimilates the incoming information at the initial level, refining it within the audience's cultural background framework knowledge. It triggers the synthesis mode of the integration network, ultimately expanding the content of "continuous synthesis" through meticulous processing. This process yields new meanings in accordance with the audience's evolving logic: blood is the essence of human life, and blood donation serves as a bridge between two cities. The analogy of blood donation to a bridge implies interconnection and facilitates specific communication between strangers, as illustrated in Figure 4.
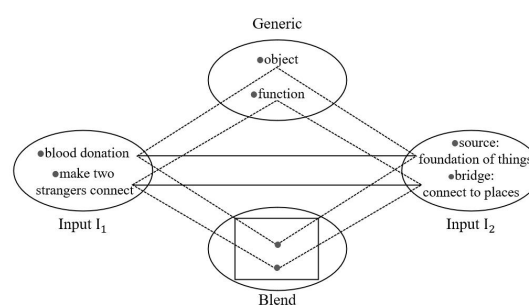

Figure 4. Single-scope Network Analysis Chart

Based on the analysis above, it can be concluded that the slogan of this public service advertisement belongs to the single-scope network model. While both the input spaces have their respective frames, the abstract frame that enters the final blend space is exclusively the frame of "the role of things." The element of "blood donation behavior" is extracted from the two input spaces and placed into this frame, resulting in the generation of innovative meaning. This design is not only concise and profound but also imparts a profound understanding of blood donation to the viewer.

3.4 Cognitive Interpretation of Double-scope Network and Public Service Advertising Slogans

In a double-scope network, the organizational frameworks of the two input spaces differ, and both are projected into the blend space. In which, the organizational frameworks of both the input spaces actively contribute to the blend space. The significant differences between these frameworks present the potential for rich conflicts, offering challenges to the imagination and fostering highly creative fusions. Unlike a single-scope

network, the organizational frameworks of the input spaces in dual-scope network are distinct, and the blended space is an extension of both input spaces.

Example 4: Greed is like a balloon, there is only one way to end up with extreme inflation—self-destruction.

This public service advertisement employing the design of a double-scope network to delves into profound social concepts. In which, "balloon expansion" and "unlimited greed" represent two distinct input spaces, and each space encapsulates a unique organizational framework, reflecting elements of their respective developmental processes. In the blend space, "balloon expansion" and "insatiable greed" are interpreted as two actions, extracting their common components such as "action occurrence", "the sender of the action", "the object of the action" and "the result of the action." These elements are then projected into the generic space, forming a cross-space mapping. Consequently, the actions of "corruption" and "blowing up the balloon" establish a corresponding relationship with the event through the cross-space mapping, and the results of these events also demonstrate a correlated connection. The specific integration process is illustrated in Figure 5.
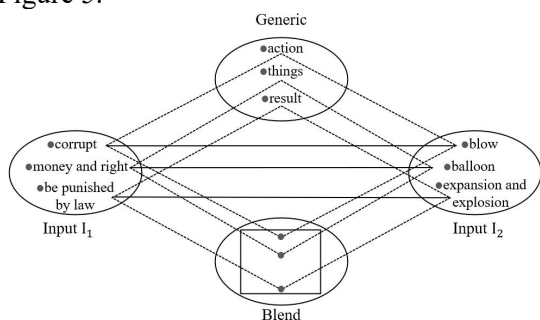

Figure 5. Double-scope Network Analysis Chart

Based on the above analysis, the deduction is that a conflicting causal relationship exists between the two organizational frameworks. In the process of "blowing up the balloon" the balloon undergoes inflation by the introduction of air, eventually leading to its rupture and explosion. This parallel corresponds to human greed, wherein individuals, despite knowing the illegality of corruption and bribery, persist in unrepentant and repeated mistakes, ultimately facing legal consequences. Through this analogy, the advertisement conveys the notion that the perpetual expansion of greed can only culminate in self-destruction and inevitable demise, reinforcing the message of the campaign.

However, it is crucial to underscore that while individuals' mistakes should be met with consequences, but it does not necessarily inherently guarantee their downfall unless their wrongdoings are egregious. This nuance is evident in the advertisement, offering viewers a profound space for contemplation. The self-destructive potential of greed is presented not as an inevitable fate but as a possibility that can be mitigated through proper guidance. Therefore, the advertisement can trigger a profound reflection among the audience on societal morals and values through in-depth analysis and guidance.

4. Conclusions

This paper delves into a comprehensive cognitive analysis of public service advertisement language by employing the four network models of conceptual blending theory. Conceptual blending theory serves as a robust theoretical foundation, offering effective support for the dynamic construction of meaning in linguistic vocabulary due to its strong explanatory and persuasive capabilities. In this theoretical framework, the diverse and innovative nature of public service announcements is thoroughly examined, shedding light on how they influence audience perceptions and attitudes through language.

Currently, both domestic and international scholars are increasingly involved in diverse research and exploration on conceptual integration theory. The incorporation of conceptual blending theory not only enhances the approaches in linguistic research, but also significantly contributes to the ongoing advancement of linguistics. The widespread adoption of this theory presents a potent tool for in-depth comprehension and analysis of linguistic phenomena, offering valuable insights for research and practical applications within the realm of conceptual blending theory.

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